

A matter for (P-plate) principal

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Published: June 6, 2013 - 3:00AM

Giuliana Lombardi can strike up a conversation with anyone, which helps when you are a principal with P plates, but she is also quite shy. "I'm going to do yard duty on the oval - that's going to be a challenge. I'm quite talkative, I like to laugh, which helps, but I'm not too 'out there'," she says.

Shyness is a trait Giuliana shares with the principal of Our Lady of the Nativity Primary, Anne Doherty, and one of the reasons the 11-year-old was selected to be "student principal for a day".

"In Giuliana's case, it will be a very good character-building exercise for her that will force her out of her comfort zone," Ms Doherty says. "I said to her: 'I'm shy too, you have to step out of your personality type'."

Giuliana won the position over 45 other year 6 students at the Catholic school in Aberfeldie, who were asked to address the topic "Why I should be principal for a day" in their applications.

Ms Doherty says Giuliana seemed to intuit the role; the need to be non-judgmental, organised, demonstrate leadership and being "ready for any situation".

"People say to me: 'What do you do?' You can plan, but you don't know how the day is going to pan out," Ms Doherty says.

Our Lady of the Nativity Primary is one of 100 schools to participate in the inaugural Student Principal for a Day on Thursday, which is aimed at highlighting the vital contribution made by principals and the skills required.

The campaign was initiated by the Principals Australia Institute amid concern over a looming shortage of principals after its 2011 survey of 1600 principals nationwide revealed 68 per cent wanted to leave within a decade. Equally concerning was that half of aspiring leaders did not see themselves remaining at schools beyond 10 years.

Principals Australia Institute acting CEO Jo Mason said one reason could be the health and wellbeing of principals. This was supported by the interim findings of the 2011 Australian Principal Health and Wellbeing Survey, by Monash University, which found principals were six times more likely than the general workforce to be physically assaulted.

Principals named the volume and growing complexity of their work and a lack of time to focus on teaching and learning as the two biggest causes of work-related stress.

Study author Philip Riley said the most shocking revelation was the amount of bullying principals suffered, generally at the hands of parents and students in primary schools and staff and students in secondary schools. Dr Riley said the past 10 to 15 years had seen a move from stand-alone principals in schools to leadership teams, which exposed more junior staff to what the role of principal entailed.

"There has been an 80 per cent decline in people applying for principalships because they see how tough the job is and are saying: 'No thanks'."

Giuliana says she noticed Ms Doherty showing people around Our Lady of the Nativity Primary and "giving an opinion and appreciating everybody else's". As she wrote in her application letter: "Principals such as you are exceedingly talented people."

This story was found at: <http://www.theage.com.au/national/education/a-matter-for-pplate-principal-20130605-2nqp0.html>