

Fergus builds bright future on return to former school



Building futures: Fergus Martin, 16, is working at his old school as part of a training scheme. Picture: DAVE TEASE

By EMMA SHAW

WHEN Fergus Martin left Bulli Public School five years ago, he didn't expect to return.

But thanks to construction work taking place as part of the Federal Government's Building the Education Revolution (BER), Fergus has gained a carpentry apprenticeship - and is learning his trade through work at his former school.

Fergus was one of five apprentices and nine site managers appointed by Edwards Construction to cope with the extra work created by the BER.

The Batemans Bay company was contracted to build a \$2 million hall and covered outdoor learning area at Bulli Public School, where work is now just five weeks away from completion.

For 16-year-old Fergus, the position is a dream come true.

"I always wanted to do something like this," he said.

"I've always been interested in physical stuff rather than office work. It just appealed to me. Watching everything go together - I like seeing the stuff that happens."

Fergus started with Edwards

Construction six months ago after leaving Bulli High School at the end of Year 10.

He admitted it felt a little strange to be back at his old primary school.

"I still know some of the teachers here. I know a lot of the kids too, because they're all local and I live close by," he said.

Edwards Construction manager Craig Davidsohn, who also went to Bulli Public School, said the BER work had affected business significantly.

"It was reasonably quiet before and it's certainly picked up in a big way," he said.

Rudd's \$436m plan for diabetics

By JULIAN DRAPE

THE Federal Government plans to radically overhaul the way people with chronic diseases are treated, unveiling a \$436 million plan to encourage diabetics to sign up with a "home" GP practice for ongoing care.

The practice would then be paid \$1200 per patient to create for them a "personalised care plan", co-ordinating access to other health providers such as dietitians and physiotherapists.

Clinics would also be eligible for around \$10,800 a year in performance payments if diabetics stayed healthy and out of hospital.

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd says the reform "marks the beginning of a new way of treating Australians with long-term illness".

It will reduce pressure on hospitals and eventually save money, he argues.

But the Australian Medical Association (AMA) fears patients could lose out.

The \$1200 block funding is expected to cover all their medical expenses - diabetes-related and otherwise.

"Patients are going to be encouraged to forgo their Medicare benefits and entitlements in return for signing up for care supplied out of a (home) practice," AMA president Andrew Pesce said.

"When the money runs out how are you going to get health care for services you need?"

Federal Labor says there'll be a "contingency fund" for treatment if the \$1200 grant is exhausted.

Patients would also be able to visit other practices - if they're on holiday, for example - on an ad-hoc basis and be covered by Medicare.

Diabetes Australia chief executive Greg Johnson says diabetics are "frequent flyers" in Australia's hospital system but better co-ordinated primary care would result in far fewer admissions.

"So, we think quite a significant proportion of people - particularly newly diagnosed diabetics - would want to opt into a system that



On site: Prime Minister Kevin Rudd tours a new medical centre in Geelong. Picture: PAT SCALA

works better for them."

Diabetes Australia isn't prepared to say whether \$1200 would be enough to meet the needs of sufferers.

But the Government says people with less severe diabetes cost Medicare an average \$490 each year. People harder hit by the disease cost taxpayers \$760.

The Australian General Practice Network agrees yesterday's announcement will result in fewer diabetics being hospitalised.

"For those born with the disease, good care can mean a healthier future," network chairman Emil Djakic said.

He is at odds with Dr Pesce on the policy front, but both doctors are equally outraged by what they say was a lack of consultation.

They weren't told about the plan until late Tuesday night.

"That's a fairly challenging time-frame to try and work with on something that looks as fundamental (as this)," Dr Djakic said.

The AMA's Dr Pesce was less diplomatic. "This is policy on the run without consultation with the doctors that provide the health services," he said.

Minogue tops beautiful list

PREGNANT star Dannii Minogue has topped Who Magazine's annual 25 Most Beautiful People list.

At almost six months' pregnant, Minogue graces the cover of the magazine in a form-fitting blue strapless gown, showing off her baby belly.

Other Aussie stars on the list include actresses Teresa Palmer and Rose Byrne, singer Lisa Mitchell, newsreader

Chris Bath and Winter Olympics gold medalist Lydia Lassila.

It's not just women who make the grade - Neighbours star-turned Hollywood hunk Liam Hemsworth, is also pictured.

Among the international celebrities noted for their beauty are Angelina Jolie, Bradley Cooper, Robert Pattinson, Robert Downey Jr, Johnny Depp and Helen Mirren.



DANNII MINOGUE

Taxi boss denies payment monopoly

CABCHARGE chief Reg Kermode denies his company's electronic taxi payment system has monopolised the industry.

A NSW parliamentary inquiry is investigating the regulation and operation of the state's taxi industry.

Yesterday the upper house probe focused its attention on claims of anti-

competitive practices.

Cabcharge is fighting legal action by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, which accuses the taxi giant of anti-competitive behaviour over its electronic payment system and supply of taxi meters.

About 19,000 of the systems are installed across

the country and because the machines only accept the popular Cabcharge payment cards, the company has long faced accusations of operating a monopoly.

But Mr Kermode told the inquiry: "I don't know how you could say we have a monopoly when there are other payment systems out there."