

**AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF
GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS
PRESS RELEASE 947
PRIVATE SCHOOL CLOSED AT A MOMENT'S NOTICE
LEAVING STUDENTS STRANDED**

Private schools are just that, private in purpose and outcome; private in access, ie. discriminatory; private in ownership and control; and lacking in accountability – even though they are publicly funded.

Public schools are the exact opposite and have obligations to students, employees and the citizen taxpayers.

The uncertain, irresponsible nature of private educational enterprises was bought home in the last week with the sudden closure of the Colmont School, previously known as the International School at Kilmore. The school collapsed last week due to a lack of funds, leaving hundreds of students in years 8 to 10 to find a new school. How could a well-established school in one of Australia's fastest-growing regions go to the wall so hard and so quickly? The simplest answer is COVID-19, but there is far more to the story.

The school is bitterly divided over recent history. Its unorthodox corporate structure means that, while the school is run out of the Victorian town, its land, buildings and all associated intellectual property are ultimately owned by Chinese interests headquartered in the communist party's tropical island playground, Hainan. But before that, it had been privately owned by a Mr Wittmer who, with various companies and taxpayers money has managed to buy an \$11 million home with his second wife, Xuan Kan, the former executive manager of the school's international operations. (Saturday Age, August 6 2022) Within days, all students, including Year 11 and 12 students studying for the baccalaureate were forced to look for another school – which is peculiarly difficult since this school only offered the baccalaureate. The Administrators for Colmont, which was heavily reliant on fees from International students, has been appealing to the school's landlord's Taiwanese-born business man Chien-Long Tai and his wife, Yuyu Chen, for rent relief – without success.

The closest State secondary schools are at Wallan and Broadford, so the question could be asked: Why has Kilmore, one of the oldest country towns in Victoria not got a public secondary school? Why have public facilities been crowded out by religious schools and insecure private enterprise and international money in search of profits at the expense of Australian children?

Year 10 student Amber Meuwissen, with her mother Cheryl Abela, is scared she won't have a school to go to on Monday. *CREDIT: JASON SOUTH*

On Tuesday this week, when [administrators called in by the school board](#) opened the books for the first time, they saw the place was nearly broke.

“They were going to run out of cash within eight weeks,” administrator Paul Langdon told *The Age*.

Langdon and his partner Ian Grant, insolvency experts with the Melbourne firm Vince & Associates, judged that without a government bailout or a financial Hail Mary from another source, the school would be forced to close by week's end.

The money never came, more than 300 families are now looking for new schools for their children and an entire school community is devastated.

Year 10 student Amber Meuwissen said her classmates finished their last day on Friday in tears and in the dark. “We're so scared, just the complete fear of not knowing if we are going to school next week,” she said.

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