

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

Press Release 959

PRIVATE SCHOOL PRINCIPALS ARE CEOS WORTH MORE THAN THE PRIME MINISTER.

The best kept secret about the view of education taken by the private sector is out – it is a business, pure and simple. Forget the moral and religious respectability overlay. Even forget the lip service given to the wellbeing of our children. It is a business, run along business lines, with huge salaries offered to the CEOs – otherwise known as principals.

The secret was exposed by [Lucy Carroll in the Sydney Morning Herald of November 17 2022](#) in an article entitled *Principals at top private schools notch up pay packages of nearly \$1 million*

In defence of the extraordinary pay packets offered wealthy private school principals, one commentator noted

New Englander

What is lost on some critics is that Independent School Heads is that beyond education they have to manage the finance of their schools, hire and fire and run a board, basically working as a CEO of a multi-million dollar business. Many oversee over 250 employees and answer to 1000+ clients (parents and kids) as well as manage Risk, Finance, Building as well as Education - on which they are judged on their success.

Others noted that public school principals, on considerably less salary, fulfil the same responsibilities, but the most interesting thing about this media coverage is the assumption that schools are businesses offering a commodity as opposed to educational institutions offering all children an opportunity.

DOGS note that the greed and shamelessness of these institutions should mean that, if they wish to run business operations they should be free to do so – but not at public expense and the expense of educational opportunities for the majority of Australian children.

The following is the text of the SMH article together with some of the 262 comments it provoked.

The heads of some of Sydney's private schools have notched up annual pay packages of nearly \$1 million in recent years, according to confidential industry data that has put the spotlight on transparency around top staff pay.

Figures obtained by the Herald show that some principals have received remuneration packages – including benefits such as houses and cars – that have ranged from about \$460,000 to almost \$970,000.

The confidential industry data has put the spotlight on transparency around top staff pay at some of Sydney's private schools. CREDIT: LOUISE KENNERLEY

It puts the highest salaries in line with some university vice chancellors, and eclipses that of the prime minister and the head of NSW's 2200 public schools.

The data is based on information collected for a survey in which multiple independent Sydney schools have participated, including Ascham, Barker College, Cranbrook, Kambala, Knox Grammar, Presbyterian Ladies College, Shore School, SCEGGS Darlinghurst, The Scots College and Trinity Grammar, among others.

The figures, which are not current but were assembled in the past five years, [come as school](#) boards face increasing pressure to adhere to the highest governance standards, [while fees rise](#), surpluses run into the millions and [massive capital works projects expand](#).

A leading specialist in education governance, John Simpson, said the salaries were not surprising given the highly competitive market, but parents deserved greater transparency on matters of pay for heads, senior staff and on how funds are spent outside of salaries.

“The fact that private schools receive Commonwealth funding, and have tax-free status, increases the need for transparency on matters of interest to paying parents,” said Simpson, who also sits on the Monash University council. Remuneration packages could be included in annual reports, and be disclosed in pay bands, he said.

“I can't see any downside to schools being more open with how money is allocated by boards. Some schools appear to be stuck in the last century when it comes to managing disclosure.”

The industry data reveals the average salaries of top private school heads was about \$664,000, but when adding extra benefits such as housing, the average total packages tipped over \$768,000. At least four principals have received total remuneration packages exceeding \$870,000. The data does not identify which pay package is linked to each school.

Sydney private school fees jump 50 per cent in a decade

A spokesperson for federal Education Minister Jason Clare said it was his view that the government “should have line of sight on how the funding invested in schools is spent”.

Chief executive of the NSW Association of Independent Schools Geoff Newcombe said principal salaries reflected the significant responsibilities and skills of the head, their experience and the school’s size.

“The salary levels quoted are typically for schools with 1500 to 3000 students, 300 or more staff and budgets of up to \$80 million,” he said. “In large independent schools, principals have much wider roles and responsibilities than their counterparts in government schools, where many functions are carried out by the department.”

These include managing large capital works, finances, large boarding facilities, weekend sports programs and hiring and firing staff.

“They also have less certainty of tenure and are accountable to boards for their performance,” Newcombe said.

While private schools are not required to divulge salaries of principals or their deputies, changes to charity commission rules mean [independent schools will this year need to report the total sum paid to some of their highest earners](#). It will remain voluntary to disclose individual salaries.

In England and Wales, registered charities including some of the most expensive private schools – such as Eton, St Paul’s School and Harrow – are required to report what their staff earn by pay bands, including their highest earner.

Not-for-profit expert from the Centre for Social Impact at Swinburne University, Krystian Seibert, said charities needed to “think about going beyond what’s required of them” and share more information publicly.

Revelations of the private school salaries come as unions warn that teaching graduates are being snapped up by private schools that can offer higher pay and

incentives, including gym and health fund memberships, paid leave for doctoral fellowships, catered morning teas and financing postgraduate studies.

NSW Teachers Federation president Angelo Gavrielatos said private schools could offer pay above award wages, incentives and smaller class sizes.

“This is the labour market at work. The salaries of NSW public school teachers are uncompetitive and don’t reflect their expertise or the value of their work.”

Some Catholic schools have diverged from other dioceses that match the public sector’s pay. The Catholic Diocese of Broken Bay now offers wages above the minimum rates in the enterprise agreement, additional planning time for teachers, and a 25 per cent school fee discount for teachers’ children.

NSW public school principals earn \$194,816 and last year the secretary of the NSW Education Department, Georgina Harrisson, had a salary of \$599,000.

Independent school fees have shot up in recent years, outstripping inflation with average increases of more than 50 per cent in the past decade.

An analysis by think tank the Blueprint Institute found fees at Sydney and Melbourne private schools rose by an average of 54 per cent in the past 10 years, and in some cases have risen by more than 80 per cent since 2011.

Mork from Ork

Our taxes at work at propping up the private schools at the expense of the needy public schools. This has to stop.

A.E. Quitas

This, is beyond belief. It is extraordinary. I am not sure that even public school principals knew that that is the salary of the elite principals. That we have come to this, is mind-boggling. That Independent Schools chief notes that the salaries 'reflect the significant responsibilities and skills of the head, their experience and the school’s size' - while acknowledging staff of over 300 and budgets of over \$80m, is quite simply, pure arrogance. The equivalents in the public system who take the students they don't, the antithesis of equity, with half the staff numbers and therefore double the workload, and a quarter of the budget. That we have allowed this to happen, I am lost for words.

Bored by smirk and mirrors

I'm not sure why there are any objections here - private school principals are responsible for and oversee, far more than public school principals. They're effectively akin to CEOs of multi-million dollar corporations. Their salaries are reasonable.

New Englander

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And public school principals don't do these things?

Null hypothesis

Pretty sure all principals do pretty much all of those things too, irrespective of whether they are independent, religious or public.

Show more replies

Yowzer

Time for a public education political party!

Edgar Walkowsky

Any government funded organisation (including private schools) should have a wage cap at 10% lower than the PMs wage.

GJH

The ever-worsening state of schools in NSW stems mainly from government schools. Its accomplices include education academics and bureaucrats, especially the very senior ones, along with dullard politicians a timid media and complaisant parents. And, of course, Angelo Gavrielatos and his directionless union, the NSW Teachers Federation. When last did Angelo or it make a positive suggestion about reversing the decades long, dismal trend? I would suggest the obvious, the closing down of government schools and education departments. Let principals run the schools they are supposedly in charge of.

Moth

But private schools already receive tax payer funded allocation per pupil, they should surely pay tax on the fees and donations from parents. They are having their cake and eating it at the expense of government schools and able to provide all the wonderful facilities that state schools can only salivate at, where state schools are cluttered with demountables taking up valuable outdoor space and many do not have air conditioning. It's sickening.

RTP.I didn't believe I was actually reading this. This is the same argument they put forward to the elite schooled High Court judges in the sixties when they were granted these concessions and when the federal government wasn't pouring billions of taxpayers' dollars into these places. It's what the Constitution doesn't say that's important. Nowhere does it say the federal government should subsidise these places at the expense of our public schools and nowhere does it say it should provide private and religious institutions taxpayers dollars to assist them to open more of these places.

Sense

A non story. These schools are multi million dollar business. If they want to pay their principals a fortune, that's their business.

RESPECT12

Reportflag

Three Wide No Cover

1 DAY AGO

I wonder how much they would be paid if government funding was pulled and changes to their taxation status was made?

Jamil

Would have almost no impact. Check Myschool-edu.au and you'll see government funding represents less than 10% of these schools' income. Most of it is from parents' fees and other fund-raising

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And tax deductible building donations.

1 DAY AGO

However once you combine tax free/ charitable status and the funds it becomes a very significant public subsidy.

Heavily subsidized by taxpayers, it is definitely our business.

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