

2023 Annual Report Alice Miller School



‘Each time we deprive an individual, whether adult or child, of the opportunity to make a decision that he could make himself, we negate the democratic process. Psychologically, we learn to assume responsibility by successfully assuming responsibility. As we learn to assume responsibility, we become aware that we can. This may seem simplistic, but in reality it is not. One of the great wastes in individuals and in society as a whole is that we are not in touch with our strengths, our resources – what is available to us for our use, both within ourselves and in our world.’

(from *Human Teaching for Human Learning* By George Isaac Brown)

Constitutional lawyer CL Skach argues in her book *How to Be a Citizen* that ‘our reliance on rules is based on three fallacies – humankind needs authority and good order to exist; good order is imposed by authority and is stable; and constitutions give us a just order and therefore justice.’

She says that these fallacies cause great damage to humanity... and in particular, great damage to democracy.

Before beginning to write this annual report, on December 16, 2023, I was browsing through *The Age* newspaper, and read one of those articles which can be found in the media pretty much every day.

It concerned a company I'd never heard of: Phoslock Environmental Technologies. The article was quite long, describing allegations of bribery, false accounting and misappropriation of funds. It was reported that just a couple of months before the publication of the article, two Phoslock board directors had made a 'sudden departure.'

The article quoted the head of Transparency International Australia, Clancy Moore, saying, after reviewing some of the leaked documents, that 'the company's fortunes appear at least partly built on unsuspected corporate misconduct, dodgy payments and poor governance.'

The Age article finished with the words 'According to governance expert Dean Paatsch, the ASX and Australia's corporate watchdog, ASIC, appear to have missed obvious warning signs that Phoslock was up to no good.

"The repeated failure of regulators to properly investigate dubious transactions has meant shareholders were not protected," says Paatsch.'

These events are a feature of corporate life. Banks which charge for advice given to people who've been dead for a decade or two, casinos which eagerly and illegally embrace gambling addicts and money launderers, mining companies which destroy aboriginal sacred sites, institutions where child abuse is concealed, nursing homes where needy people are ignored and/or assaulted, are among the many entities which could reasonably be said to have a serious degree of rot at their core.

One of Australia's biggest accounting firms turns out to have been blatantly cheating one of its biggest clients... namely, the Australian government... and therefore, the people of Australia... but the regulators didn't notice.

What has this to do with schools?

Well, rather a lot.

One thing which all these institutions and corporations have in common is that they all have boards of directors.

Another is that they are all supposed to be regularly and thoroughly monitored by regulatory authorities.

And what happens? Directors of both public and private companies all too often turn out to be corrupt or negligent or both. And the regulatory authorities fail and fail and fail and fail.

It always takes years, or more often, decades, for truth to be revealed, and that statement of course ignores the unquantifiable numbers of corrupt or negligent behaviours which are never uncovered.

Further, the failures, crimes and misdemeanours are rarely discovered by regulatory authorities. They are more often discovered by 'ordinary people,' frequently whistleblowers within an organisation, or journalists and other people outside an organisation who use relatively easily available media as their point of access.

For example, it took the long-running podcast *The Teacher's Pet*, by journalist Hedley Thomas, to finally force law-and-order entities like the New South Wales Police to recognise that their original investigation into the disappearance of Sydney woman Lynette Dawson had been so utterly hopeless

that her husband had not been troubled by any responsibility for her murder... for more than 20 years.

Without the podcast it seems almost beyond dispute to assert that the arrest and conviction which finally took place – when the husband was in his 70s – would never have happened.

Recently I was reading a memoir by a man called Cecil Edwards, who had been editor of the Melbourne Herald, many decades ago. He kept a journal of jottings during his time at the paper, and I was interested in some of the notes he made during World War II. For example, in July 1940 he wrote 'on Friday, there was a big patriotic day. Every sort of device was trotted out to wheedle, beg, or seduce people into giving money for soldiers' comforts... The police, doing their duty, took the names of those who operated spinning jennies and sweat (sic) wheels, as the government... had legalised raffles only.'

In December 1941 he noted that 'the State Government told us lighting restrictions would operate at once. We asked: "What are they?" The government did not know.'

In January 1942 he records this incident: 'the military complained to a furniture manufacturer that he has supplied a defective shelf. He [the manufacturer] offers to send a boy to pick it up. Offer refused. Shelf arrives in a large truck, otherwise empty except for an escort of two soldiers.'

In the same month he writes about a scientist who 'arranged a conference with an officer whose office is half a mile away on a direct tramline. Officer rang to say he would be late as he had not been able to arrange transport.'

A book I've been enjoying in the last couple of days is *North Coast Run: Men and Ships of the New South Wales North Coast*, by Mike Richards, published in 1977. He describes the extraordinary – heroic – salvage of the ship 'Melinga' in 1941 when it hit a sand bar, then rocks, then the beach while trying to enter the Manning River. Captain Gibson, legendary as the man who had refloated 'literally scores of stranded coasters,' was sent to the rescue. He managed to get her off the beach and bring her all the way to Sydney Heads, aided by just three assistants and a tug. As she entered the Harbour, still leaking, with large salvage pumps going full bore to keep her afloat, but still in danger of sinking, the naval examination vessel ordered Gibson to halt the ship and 'wait to go through the normal routine examination'.

Gibson ignored the order and suggested that they come and inspect her when she had safely reached Watson's Bay – if she got that far.

It seems, in 2023, that when it comes to bureaucracy, nothing has changed since World War II. But I'll go a little further and suggest that when it comes to bureaucracy, nothing ever changes.

Nearly 2000 years ago, the Roman Petronius Arbiter wrote 'We trained hard - but it seemed that every time we were beginning to form into teams, we would be reorganized. I was to learn later in life that we tend to meet any new situation by reorganising; and a wonderful method it can be for creating the illusion of progress while producing confusion, inefficiency, and demoralisation.'

There are at least two lessons which can be learned from the scenarios described so far in this report. Yet Australians, far from learning those lessons, continue to be blind to them and, almost unbelievably, make Australian life worse and worse by 'trusting' more and more in systems which are continuously failing – and failing on a massive scale.

I'm sure you're agog to know what the two lessons are, but it should be pretty obvious already. Firstly, boards of directors are no solution to any problem and are no guarantee of anything.

Secondly, most regulatory authorities are mostly inept most of the time. To work as a bureaucrat is an occupation which strongly appeals to people who have not been able to develop into fully rounded and mature adults. They are 'arrested' at a stage of growth which means they are made uneasy, uncomfortable, and therefore unable to cope, with whatever falls outside what they regard as the 'norms.'

This leads inevitably to an obsession with precision, order, neatness. It's no coincidence that Edna Everage's husband was named Norm.

John Clarke's Fred Dagg tapes should be compulsory listening for all Australians perhaps... especially for bureaucrats. Here is a monologue by Fred Dagg: he is holding forth to an enquirer who is seeking information from the government department in which Fred works...

'Unfortunately, the person who normally deals with matters of this nature has just slipped out for a few moments. He was here just a moment ago; but as I scan the departmental horizon as I speak to you now, I can see that as far as I can see, I can't really see him. I don't know where he's gone – he didn't actually leave any message with me re-his movements and in particular vis-à-vis his apparent departure, which he seems to have made ASAP. I suppose I could check round the office and see whether or not he left word with anyone else as to his projected return but on the other hand I probably can't do that very effectively because there's really no one else here either; they've all just slipped out of the office very briefly, for perhaps just a moment or two, and I'm sure they won't be long; in fact, they were here just a few moments ago. I suppose you could ring him at home. He's certainly been home. He was home a couple of minutes ago because he contacted us from home via telephone over a matter with regard to some forms so you could probably try him there, except I'm not really allowed to give you his phone number. I'm afraid this is a procedural ruling and I'm sorry but I cannot give you his private personal residential home number vis-à-vis and nett re a matter of telephonic contact with him in actual point of fact. What I can do, and I really shouldn't do this, but for heaven's sake this place is terribly bureaucratic and if we can't cut a few corners from time to time for a friend, nothing'd get done at all. What I can do and you must never tell anybody that I did this for you: I can't tell you his phone number but if you guess it correctly, I won't deny that that's it, so you just have a ... whoops, hang on a minute, there's another phone ringing; I'll have to put you on hold for a couple of years...'

This is intended to be satire of course, but apart from the guessing competition – and the final word in the monologue – it could stand as an accurate rendition which closely enough resembles many or most of our attempts to communicate with the many government departments who have any responsibility for schools – and that includes the regulatory authorities.

We do keep detailed notes of some of these attempted interactions, so I can assure anyone reading this report that I have not indulged in hyperbole, in making these remarks.

For 18 years our primary campus Candlebark, and for eight years, our secondary campus Alice Miller, have been running successfully.

I'll be so bold as to say that no matter how you define the word 'successfully', we tick every box.

We are always among the leading schools in Victoria for NAPLAN and VCE results and ATAR scores, if these things matter to you.

We are debt free, as we have almost always been; we recently bought, paying in full upon settlement, a 375-acre farm about 50 minutes from the Melbourne CBD as our third campus; and we have healthy funds in reserve. This year big groups of our students undertook school trips to such places as the Northern Territory, Canberra, Spain & France, Sydney, Tasmania, Adelaide, the Great Ocean Walk west of Geelong, Bright, and Mount Buller.

In the last few days of Term 4 I was handed or sent various unprompted, unsolicited cards and letters from students and others, who wanted to communicate matters which they felt were important to them.

One wrote: 'Thank you so much for creating this enchanted place and I am so glad that you invited all these wonderful teachers to Candlebark. You made tonnes of kids' lives better and I'm glad that when I'm older, this place will still be in my heart.'



That was from a Grade 6 boy. Another, anonymous card, told me: 'Without you I don't know what I would have done. Candlebark just suits me so good (*sic*) and I'm very excited to be moving campuses next year. I don't think I can thank you enough but without you my whole life would have been a mess.'

A parent wrote to me two days ago to say that the end of year performance by the primary students 'was certainly the best school performance I have ever seen. Layers of meaning weaved throughout – so much energy and confidence oozing from the young people – made me super happy and reassured that the boys are in the right place and the last two terms, that have been logistically challenging, because we aren't based near the school, have been worth it. Great work, thank you for creating such a special place.'

Another parent commented on this presentation with an email saying 'the concert... was brilliant... I was filled with proud tears the entire time.'

A parent wrote to me yesterday to say of her Year 7 son: 'he has grown into a lovely, caring young man, with an open mind and a kind heart, and this has been helped by the wonderful care, support and guidance received at Candlebark. On reflection of his years at the school, I am blown away with the experiences he has had the pleasure of taking part in. The thought, care and planning that goes into every class, activity, hike, camp and adventure is a reflection on the dedication of the teachers and staff. As his time at Candlebark comes to a close, my heart is full watching the Year 7s support each other. They have become a very close-knit group of adolescents and it is truly lovely to see how close they all are... A heartfelt thank you for having the vision and commitment to bring a school like Candlebark alive. I am sure it would never have been an easy road to take...'

I am sure it would never have been an easy road to take...?

Well, it wasn't too bad for that first dozen or so years. But it has become quite spectacularly more difficult in recent times.

Why? Because we are surrounded by regulatory authorities who do nothing but carp and criticise, in their obsessive desire to find faults. They seem to have no mission other than to find faults... any fault... they seem almost desperate to 'catch us out' in something... anything...

They are relentlessly negative. In my 18 years of running the school, I would offer the generalisation that no regulatory authority, no statutory authority, no governmental department or agency, no one from any level of government (national, state or local) has ever given us any positive advice or encouragement or said anything nice to us, or offered us any meaningful help (apart from the regular government grants of money paid more-or-less-automatically to virtually all independent schools, and lobbying on our behalf by two Macedon Ranges mayors on two separate occasions).

That is a generalisation, but I have sat here for quite a while, trying (unsuccessfully) to think of anything helpful that has ever been said or written to us or about us from any of the huge numbers of bureaucrats with whom we have to deal.

To use a couple of analogies, we are like sheep farmers who are constantly monitored by agricultural authorities who froth with excitement if they find a dead lamb in a paddock, or an orchestra whose members' shoe laces are inspected by government officials from the Victorian Department of Shoe Laces prior to every fifth rehearsal, or a hospital besieged by bureaucrats who demand regular statements that one of the primary goals of the hospital is to take care of patients.

In other words, we are never 'inspected' in any meaningful way. Instead, we are scrutinised pedantically and endlessly over issues which have nothing to do with the effective functioning of schools.

What kind of people become bureaucrats? Are those who join, for example, the so-called Public Service actually engaged in providing services to the public? I've cast quite a wide net to see if anyone has researched the personality-types who are attracted to this kind of work. Interestingly, there appears to have been very little research done globally or nationally. However, the research I have found confirms my own observations... that nearly all the public servants (i.e. bureaucrats) with whom we deal are not competent to do the work which they are supposed to be doing.

They send us endless pompous and patronising letters, demonstrating over and over their deep suspicion that we are secretly sending Australian military information to authorities in North Korea,

or flying our family members on first-class tickets to North American ski resorts to stay in five-star hotels, or plying our Foundation students with mind altering drugs, or holding black masses where we sacrifice koalas on inverted crosses every time a Friday the 13th comes around.

That may be slightly exaggerated, but dealing with bureaucrats (i.e. regulatory authorities) is quite simply – and I use this word very carefully: a farce. Their knowledge of how schools operate and



their understanding of how schools operate (two very different things, although most people don't realise it) are so lacking that we do a lot of laughing at them behind their backs.

The trouble is that sometimes we can't laugh, because often what they do is not funny at all.

I'm not able to give examples in this report of some of the serious problems caused for individuals and schools by the ineptitude and in extreme cases what appears to be negligence of the various bureaucratic bodies/regulatory authorities with which we have to deal, because any examples I cite imperil the privacy rights of students and/or others, but I can say that in at least one case in 2023 the life of a student was imperilled by what I, as a layperson, would interpret as bureaucrats operating in a manner which was outside their jurisdiction (i.e. illegally).

In that instance, as in others, we subsequently – as you would expect from any school which functions effectively – engaged in a prolonged discussion/correspondence with the relevant regulatory authority. Their response comprised a combination of evasions, meaningless emails, and silence... a response which they would not accept from us, but which it is apparently convenient for them to adopt when it suits their interests.

Their shutdown included what was capable of being interpreted as a deliberate policy of blocking any direct interaction between us and officials from their department with whom we wished to raise questions regarding their behaviour.

In other words, although schools are held accountable for anything and everything, we have, when dealing with officials in regulatory authorities, become all too accustomed to behaviours which suggest strongly that they zigzag from one hidey-hole to another if required or requested to be held accountable for anything. As seems to be the case in Fred Dagg's department, they are just mysteriously unavailable, 'missing in action', when they are called upon to justify actions or words which appear to us to be unjustifiable. In other words, when bureaucrats are wrong, as they so frequently are, they run for cover, metaphorically (and perhaps literally) hiding under their desks, after pulling down the blinds and locking the doors.

How well I remember my first experience of a full school inspection by VRQA, the Victorian Regulation and Qualifications Authority. The justification for carrying out the inspection was articulated by a young bureaucrat who immediately after delivering a ludicrous speech, which began with the warning that my public statements about education was one of the primary reasons for the inspection being needed, scurried back to the city and was never seen again.

The report we received subsequent to the completion of the inspection was so ludicrously incompetent that I wrote to the Director of the VRQA, copying a letter to the chairperson of its board, and to the Victorian Minister for Education, who was at that time The Honourable Martin Dixon, pointing out all the faults and inadequacies in the report – and also pointing out the unnecessarily aggressive and pompous language used by the Director in conveying to us the news that we were a Danger to Shipping, a Disgrace to Education and probably, by implication at least, a Disgrace to Humanity.

Needless to say, I received only the tokenistic, computer-generated response from the Minister, and from the Director to whom my letter was addressed. However, my long letter and my report on their report led to action being taken by the chairperson of the board, which resulted in the Deputy Director paying an official visit to the school to apologise for their ineptitude and to invite me to join a committee they were forming to improve their practices.

I accepted that invitation... and of course never heard from them about this mysterious committee again.

I would not be writing this if things had not gotten notably worse over the last five or so years. I apologise for all the negatives in that sentence, but the suffocation of schools by bureaucratic idiots has now reached such a level that I can say with confidence that it is a major contributor to the current nationwide teacher shortage.

Dealing with such bodies as the VRQA, the Victorian Institute of Teachers, CCYP, and, on numerous (but not all) occasions, Victoria Police, makes Fawcett Towers and Yes Minister appear understated.

One characteristic of the VRQA for example is that they are obsessed with the fact that we do not have a Board of Directors. They apparently believe that our having a Board of Directors will make us more proper and honest and decorous and righteous and pure and virtuous...

CL Skach, whom I quoted at the head of this report, would not agree. I refer you, dear reader, back to my opening paragraphs and, if those are not persuasive, I invite you to study the history of Australian corporate behaviour, including the frequent wrongdoing and implosions in schools which have Boards of Directors or School Councils or other governing bodies, and then... if you can, come back to me with proof that having a Board of Directors is of any discernible merit to anyone.

And of course the Board can include scoundrels, cheats, liars, thieves, because there is no morality test which directors have to undergo... and what kind of morality test has any real meaning or value anyway?

Remember how there used to be a Sydney Church of England Girls Grammar School at Moss Vale,



until the Controller of the Anglican Diocesan Schools absconded (to South America) with so much of the school's money that the school was forced to close? Remember that extremely successful –

outstanding – big independent school in the outer suburbs of Melbourne which eventually had to be closed at short notice because the dictatorial manner and authoritarianism of the chairman of the board led to such a rapid turnover of school principals and a decision so catastrophically stupid that financial doom followed? Remember another independent school of long-standing to the north of Melbourne which collapsed suddenly and was closed because the chairman of the board, who already was notorious for wrecking two other community organisations where he had been chair of the board, caused such divisions among board members and such a division between the board and the executive that the school imploded? Remember Kilmore International School, which had been flourishing for so long and which suddenly closed recently, midyear, giving the school community 24-hours' notice?

It eventually emerged that extraordinarily naïve and misguided contractual and financial decisions were highly significant factors in Kilmore International School's collapse.

Funnily enough, all these schools had Boards of Directors or equivalent bodies...

Remember the huge government school in a regional Victorian city where the principal for many years behaved corruptly, but somehow the School Board never noticed? Have you noticed the big independent school in the Brisbane area where the person who had been principal for more than 15 years was eventually, along with another member of his family, arrested and charged with serious criminal offences relating to allegations of misappropriation over a period of time spanning 2012 to 2018, and is now awaiting trial? They had a Board of Directors. Remember Caulfield Grammar School, whose Board of Directors appointed a School Principal, a man who presided over the school for many years, but some years after his retirement was found to have been a complete fraud who had tricked the directors into accepting his fake qualifications?

So, here, in more detail, are some of the stupid fallacies upon which Australian society rests.

1. To combat corruption, laziness, ineptitude, what we need are rules, regulations, laws.
2. The more rules, regulations, laws we have, the more likely it is that we will be able to combat corruption, laziness, and ineptitude.
3. An individual cannot be trusted, but three or four or more individuals who meet every month or so will be reliable and trustworthy.
4. To assess whether an entity is operating effectively, all that is needed is a very large pile of paperwork with lots and lots of banal and clichéd (and meaningless) statements printed upon them.
5. To assess whether a school is operating effectively, it is important to send bureaucrats to the school and have those bureaucrats sit in a small office for a number of days, looking at a very large pile of paperwork obediently supplied by the school. How silly it would be for the bureaucrats to wander around the school with their eyes and ears opening, watching and listening! (It would actually be silly, because 18 years of interacting with these people has proved to me repeatedly that they are bereft of any useful knowledge or understanding. I remember one of them commenting suspiciously to me one day 'The grass appears to be longer than it was the last time I was here,' upon which a colleague of mine sweetly enquired, 'What is the regulation height for grass in schools?' Unsurprisingly the bureaucrat had no answer. He/she/they turned away – as they always do – and started examining... I can't remember what... probably the screeching of the nearby cockatoos, to make sure that they were at acceptable auditory levels.)

Under no circumstances should bureaucrats speak with employees or students of the school, or, if they really must, such conversations should be brief, and limited to just a couple of carefully selected people.

And here are the flaws in this *modus operandi*:

1. No matter what the rules, regulations and laws say, no matter how many of them there are and no matter how many officials are appointed to enforce them, people who are corrupt will continue to be corrupt, people who are lazy will continue to be lazy, people who are abusive will continue to be abusive, and people who are inept will continue to be inept.

And nearly all of them will be like that throughout their careers – and the very strong likelihood is that nothing meaningful will ever be done about most of them.

2. Committees, including Board of Directors, will almost never do anything innovative, pioneering, experimental or adventurous. Because committees and boards rely so heavily on consensus and compromise before they can make decisions, and because schools are forced to have committees and/or boards, mediocrity becomes the secret motto of almost all Australian schools. Thus it has been for a long time now...

Despite the preceding paragraph, one of the weaknesses of committees, including boards of directors, is that they can be quite easily hijacked by extremists, as demonstrated so frequently in USA schools in recent years, where fundamentalist Christians have so easily seized realistic control of the management of schools. Hence the banning, in a number of schools, of such seditious books as *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

3. Although schools are 'held to account' by regulatory authorities, the people who staff such authorities, are put through the motions of 'being held to account' in such a tokenistic fashion that they cannot be held to account in any meaningful way. Their standards range from dreadful to mediocre.

Some Australians still like to think of themselves as iconoclastic and like to think of Australia as an iconoclastic society. We may have been like that more than fifty years ago, but Australia could now reasonably be described as a strong competitor for the title of 'Most Bureaucratic Country on Earth 2023'.

Following on from the previous point, a study of the history of all Ministers for Education ever appointed in any Australian state or in the Commonwealth of Australia shows that any meaningful knowledge of education is utterly lacking in the life experience of almost all of them... apart from the fact that they were school students decades earlier, and many went to universities, to do, mostly, law degrees... as did lots of other people.

However, all those other people who have been school and/or university students in Australia tend not to be suddenly placed in charge of the massive education system: the one which is meant to be preparing young Australians for 'a better future,' but which continues to fail in most areas most of the time.

Expertise in such matters as the Murray Darling Rivers irrigation system, or commercial and industrial law, or rock music and environmentalism is apparently a good pre-requisite for becoming a Minister for Schools or a Minister for Education.

I made some comments earlier in this report about matters of integrity. It's interesting to note that a recent Federal Minister for Education, Mr Alan Tudge, stood down as the Minister after, to quote

SBS news reports, 'revelations of a consensual affair with his staff, Rachel Miller. Ms Miller later received a \$650,000 taxpayer-funded settlement, having accused him [Mr Tudge] of being abusive towards her on one occasion. Mr Tudge vehemently denied the abuse allegation, and an enquiry last year cleared him of breaching ministerial standards over the affair. Last month [January 2023], he appeared before a Royal Commission in the former coalition government's illegal Robodebt scheme, which he was intimately involved in as then-social services Minister. Mr Tudge denied responsibility for the scheme, saying that as a junior minister he had no authority to change the way the scheme operated.'

It's good to see the high standards set and maintained by those who are ultimately responsible for setting and maintaining the high standards expected from schools and the adults who work in them.

4. The vast piles of paper which schools are now required to write, and keep, are of no practical use. They are generated only because bureaucrats want to justify the jobs they hold and, even more importantly to them, protect themselves when schools go wrong and they [the bureaucrats who staff government agencies, including regulatory bodies] are asked to prove that they are not incompetent.

Among those vast piles of paper are policy documents, which typically number between one hundred and two hundred for the average Australian school, and financial 'projections' i.e. five-year plans which purportedly show how the school's financial position will change over the next five years.

When I started Candlebark, I did not bother talking to an accountant. I worked out that I would need four teachers and me. I worked out how much I would have to pay the teachers, then added 30% to cover the extra costs which employing people always entails. I also chucked in salaries for a business manager, a cook, and a property manager. I checked the prices of second-hand minibuses and estimated figures for fuel and maintenance costs for them. I made a rough estimate of the amount of money we'd need for food, excursions, furniture and various disposables, added a bit more for unforeseeable expenses, divided the total by the number of students I was expecting to enrol, deducted the amount we would get in government allowances –and that's how I determined the school fees.

This process took about 40 minutes.

I knew we would make a loss for the first couple of years, which we did, but since then we have traded at a surplus every year. Now, when bureaucrats demand 'five year plans' we just scribble down a whole lot of numbers and send them off. They are meaningless because we can't predict the future. We don't know whether there will be a pandemic, a scandal, a global financial depression à la 1929, a speech by a gold Logie winner endorsing the school, a Nobel prize winner among our graduates, or any of the other infinite number of variables which affect a school's enrolments.

Like any sensible individual or any sensible entity, we deal with problems as they come along and we make decisions on a case-by-case basis.

Everything else is essentially nonsense.

If you think the preceding couple of paragraphs are just empty babble, here's a quick case study! State politicians announced around the middle of 2023 that independent schools charging more than \$15,000 a year in fees would be liable for payroll tax, from July 1, 2024. Given that our fees at the time were very close to \$15,000 a year and were likely to go up in 2024, I realised that the amount required for payroll tax would have a big impact on our financial situation. So, I began a

series of calls to the State Revenue Office – after learning that it was the government department responsible for levying and collecting payroll taxes – and each time got put through to the Department specifically responsible for payroll tax.



Over the weeks which followed I spoke to six different people in that department. Several of them had no idea that there'd been any announcement about independent schools having to pay payroll tax. Four of them promised me that they would speak to someone of Higher Status within the department and that person would then ring me back.

I never heard back from anyone. When I complained about this to the sixth person I spoke to, he had me wait online for a very long time and finally procured a Higher Status person to speak to me. Like everybody else, this eminent person, the seventh to whom I had spoken, had no idea of the answer to my one and only question – which was actually quite a simple one, wanting to know whether, if our fees were \$15,001 a year, we would have to pay 100% of payroll tax due, or whether a pro rata formula would be applied.

In the end I gave up and did a 2024 budget based on guesswork about payroll tax.

All our interactions with bureaucrats are just games. The games the five-year-olds here play during their free time, in the sandpit, on the trampolines, or whilst running around in the open air, have more meaning. The ineptitude of bureaucrats, and their overlords, who are governments (not the public of course) means it's just an endless, time-consuming, energy-consuming farce which is sapping schools of vitality which they could and should have.

That old TV series *The Naked City* always ended with a voice intoning the words: 'There are 8 million stories in the naked city. This has been one of them.'

There are at least 8 billion stories demonstrating that bureaucratic processes simply do not work. But I'll finish with another one; a nice little example, I think.

According to the internationally recognised United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, a country can lay claim to an island and its surrounding waters, so long as the island's above sea level at all times.

This mightn't seem like much. But those surrounding waters can be pretty damn valuable. 1700 kilometres south of Tokyo are two rocks which, back in the 1980s, would poke 70 centimetres out of the water at high tide but were steadily getting reduced in size by erosion from water and wind.

The human population of the rocks was zero.

By calling these rocks 'islands,' – specifically, Okino Tori Shima – Japan laid claim to them (in 1931) which meant that they could then claim control of 400,000 km² of ocean. That included exclusive mining and fishing rights for this vast area. But – you can guess what's coming – of course Japan wasn't going to let those rocks get eroded until they no longer stuck out of the water at high tide!

So, in April 1987, ships, helicopters and hundreds of workers were sent to Okino Tori Shima to install walls of concrete and other materials around the rocks to protect them.

As a result, Japan continues to have control of those 400,000 km² of ocean.

I think my main feeling about all this madness is sadness, that the world is becoming rapidly paralysed by bureaucratic bodies and the personalities of the people who work in them. The usefulness of boards of directors and regulators can easily be seen by looking at the list of major Australian business corporations which paid no corporate tax and/or income tax in 2022, as listed by the Australian Tax Office. Optus for example had an Australian revenue of about \$8 billion but paid no tax. Qantas's revenue was \$9.3 billion, but again they paid no tax. Woolworths had revenue of \$58 billion and paid \$460 million in tax; Coles had \$44 billion in revenue and paid \$382 million in tax.

I should be so lucky.

A major problem has emerged in Western countries in the last couple of decades. It is a problem of such dimensions that it threatens the ongoing existence of two of our biggest foundation stones, both of which we take for granted. Those foundation stones are democracy and capitalism. In recent years, a new breed of smart, slick operators has emerged. By their relentless searching for loopholes and their equally relentless exploitation of those loopholes, coupled with their utter commitment to self-interest and their contempt for moral laws or the welfare of others, they have succeeded with all kinds of what I will call 'tricks.'

Those tricks have resulted in unelectable people getting elected to positions of power, and the ruthless manipulation of elected people, thereby causing massive instability in the effective functioning of a great many democracies. And tricks have also enabled hundreds of thousands of entities, in this country alone, to engage in practices, some of which may be legally permissible when considered from a highly technical point of view, but are difficult to perceive as being morally permissible or justifiable.

Thus the fallibility of democracies, capitalism and private enterprise has been exposed to such an extent that their existence has been jeopardised and their future made dangerously unstable.

And as has been demonstrated over and over, day after day, year after year, governments and their agents (i.e. bureaucrats, employed by bureaucratic bodies) are, with only occasional exceptions, simply unable to deal with these immense difficulties.

Instead, in our experience anyway, bureaucrats content themselves with tormenting us over issues so trivial that they end up making themselves look ridiculous, and they lose credibility to such an extent that we are not able to take them or their entities seriously as regulators or regulatory bodies.

Looking, as I have done, over a wide range of reports published each year by schools, to accord with bureaucratic regulations that we must all publish school reports each year, it has become obvious that pretty much 'anything goes.' The reports vary so dramatically in quality, quantity, content, style and every other criterion I can think of that obviously the bureaucrats who demand them pay no attention to them.



So, I will report that in 2023 the school had the usual range of delights and vicissitudes which all communities experience; we saw achievements and failures; we had advances and setbacks; but overall, 'the vibe was good.'

I will also record that in 2023, a number of people came and went. The adults who came were teachers Lauren Lennon, Louise Lovett, Andrew Ellis, Madeline Mather, Rohan Sherlock, Manan Walia, Nicholle Russell and Adam Bartlett. Maintenance workers who started employment with the school in 2023 were David Thorpe, Michael Baxter and Jarno Coone.

To quote Arlo Guthrie, we employed all these people after putting them through the necessary 'injections, inspections, detections, neglections and all kinds of stuff.'

For us, the 'all kinds of stuff' included making sure that they were certified, registered, insured, experienced, qualified, immunised, sanitised, civilised, or at least some of the things from that list.

Those who left in 2023 were:

Adam Bartlett (technically Jan 2024)

Chloe Lewis (Dec 2023)

Sarah Murphy (Dec 2023)

Samone Hosking (Dec 2023)

John Philip (Dec 2023)

Meg Philip (Dec 2023)

Dakota Dib (Mar 2023)

Bob Mitchell (June 2023)

The retirement of Property Manager Bob Mitchell after 18 years of service to Candlebark and Alice Miller, and, prior to that, to the Tye Estate, was a profound event, given his extraordinary range of skills, his dedication to his responsibilities, and his good nature. He was loved and respected throughout both campuses, and was admired also for his commitment to the CFA over so many years. We even laughed at his jokes... and we weren't just being polite; they were actually funny!

As a man with a generous nature; many people have been, understandably, grateful to Bob.

We also mourned the departure interstate of John and Meg Philip. What outstanding teachers – and human beings – they are. They both had an extraordinary knowledge of the subject matter which they were trusted to teach, but they were also creative, dedicated, caring and adventurous. Our doors will always be open to them.

So, dear bureaucrats, I present you with the 2023 annual report. You can either take it or leave it... I couldn't care less.

John Marsden
(Principal)



Naplan Test Results

NAPLAN STATISTICS (meaningless, but compulsory to include in school annual reports)

Percentage of students in the Strong or Exceeding proficiency levels in NAPLAN.

Note: The NAPLAN test was revised in 2023 and the results are no longer comparable to previous years. Hence, the 3-year average has been removed until 3 years of data is available.

CANDLEBARK SCHOOL					
Year 3	READING	WRITING	SPELLING	NUMERACY	GRAMMAR & PUNCTUATION
School percentage of students in Strong or Exceeding:	73.40%	100.00%	46.60%	86.70%	60.00%
State average:	71.20%	79.50%	62.60%	69.30%	57.50%
Year 5	READING	WRITING	SPELLING	NUMERACY	GRAMMAR & PUNCTUATION
School percentage of students in Strong or Exceeding:	80.80%	61.50%	53.90%	83.40%	38.50%
State average:	88.90%	74.40%	70.90%	70.30%	67.20%
Year 7	READING	WRITING	SPELLING	NUMERACY	GRAMMAR & PUNCTUATION
School percentage of students in Strong or Exceeding:	100.00%	92.80%	92.30%	100.00%	100.00%
State average:	72.30%	68.60%	73.00%	69.40%	66.20%

ALICE MILLER SCHOOL					
Year 7	READING	WRITING	SPELLING	NUMERACY	GRAMMAR & PUNCTUATION
School percentage of students in Strong or Exceeding:	91.30%	84.00%	65.20%	78.20%	82.60%
State average:	72.30%	68.60%	73.00%	89.40%	66.20%
Year 9	READING	WRITING	SPELLING	NUMERACY	GRAMMAR & PUNCTUATION
School percentage of students in Strong or Exceeding:	86.20%	86.70%	76.20%	82.70%	77.30%
State average:	66.20%	63.80%	71.70%	66.60%	58.40%

Student Attendance

Attendance rate refers to the average proportion of formal school days students in each year level attended.

	Prep	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7
Candlebark attendance rate by year level (2023):	90%	81%	84%	83%	84%	76%	79%	68%
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	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12		
Alice Miller attendance rate by year level (2023):	79%	78%	80%	65%	81%	78%		

Organisational Structure

STAFFING (meaningless, but compulsory to include in school annual reports)

In 2023 Alice Miller employed 32 VIT registered teachers, and Candlebark employed 18 VIT registered teachers. All are qualified and registered. As well as the teaching staff, in 2023 we employed a Principal, a Head of Campus, a Business Manager, an Administration Manager, 2 Property Managers, 2 maintenance staff, a lab technician, an enrolment officer, 2 chefs, 2 kitchen hands and 4 part-time bus drivers.

Financial Analysis

FINANCES (meaningless, but compulsory to include in school annual reports)

