

Good Weekend – The Age – 20 April, 2024

Attracting the best teachers

For the past six years, PLC Sydney has won more science-research project prizes than any other school. It's an enviable result, and one that principal Dr Paul Burgis puts down to more than just smart kids. Rather, it's the result of a thought-out strategy that ensures teachers are well supported so that they have the capacity to go above and beyond.

"We're blessed to be an independent school," Dr Burgis explains. "We've got good resources and parents who are willing to help us. We [also] have scientists and mathematicians in residence [so] the teachers feel they have extra support and that they are not being overloaded — and you get astonishing excellence."

Sourcing great teachers is no longer as simple as wading through a pile of resumes; independent schools are employing increasingly creative techniques to attract top talent.

Take Cornish College in Melbourne, which recently hosted a Teach at Cornish event to allow prospective teachers to get a feel for the school that has a reputation for challenging curriculum norms. "It was quite the production," says principal Nicola Forrest. "We then invited attendees to submit their resumes and we put them on an exclusive mailing list that alerts them whenever a job comes up at Cornish."

Like many industries, it's now a "buyers' market" for teachers who can be selective about where they want to work, and Forrest believes that creating a strong culture with firm values is an important starting point for attracting the right talent. "Interviews always start with, 'Why would you want to work at Cornish? What do you know about who we are and why we exist?'" The resulting hires have been impressive, says Forrest.

"For me, the real key in [retaining great staff] is values alignment. Then you get the buy-in from teachers and they feel more fulfilled."

While pay cheques are no doubt part of the appeal and an important piece of the teacher-hiring puzzle, Phillip Heath, head of Sydney's Barker College, says there's more to a fulfilling career in education.

"The classroom needs to be a safe and positive environment for teachers and students, with the resources and the cultural environment to teach well," he says.

"If we can organise ourselves to make sure that we're a supportive and agile place that has flexibility and diversity, and clearly articulated policies and procedures, that gives people comfort to know that they're being surrounded by supportive structures that allow them to get on and teach."

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