

Private school 'no advantage' for uni

BY AILEEN MACALINTAL

The expectation that a private school education guarantees an advantage at university may be wrong, say leading educators.

"It comes as a shock to discover that, in the immediate post school years, it is the students from more comprehensive schools who seem better equipped to handle the more open and independent learning culture of universities," says a former high school principal, Chris Bonnor.

He says the claim is backed up by at least three separate pieces of research showing that students from private schools don't necessarily fare well in universities compared with those from public schools.

A 2010 study from the London School of Economics found that students from state schools are more likely to succeed than privately educated students from similar backgrounds.



"Students from private and selective schools are around 5 per cent more likely not to proceed beyond the first year of university. The difference is not huge but is significant because it is counter-intuitive," says Bonnor.

He believes these studies are contrary to expectations that when people go to private schools, they will get better education, "especially in the light of the competitive hype surrounding higher socio-educational schools and their students selected by the

charging of fees, if nothing else."

One example of the regarded link between private schools and better education can be seen in an article by education journalist Janet Murray in the *The Guardian*, under the headline *Why I Sent My Child To A Private School*: "By sending your child to private school, you are using the means you have – money – to get the right education for your child."

Commenting on the difference between students from private and public schools, Professor Damien Kingsbury, of the school of international and political studies at Deakin University, says he has noticed a difference between them at an undergraduate level.

"A common experience is that kids who come from private schools tend to be used to being spoon-fed a little bit more and are not quite as independent in their study habits," he says.

"A good student from public education will generally be a more robust student at undergraduate level," says Kingsbury.

Asked how the research findings could influence the school system in Australia, Bonnor says: "Perhaps as universities move away from entry based on ATAR scores, we'll see a cultural shift in the schools, which apparently aren't serving their students as well as we have assumed."



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