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**Subject:** So-called 'fake news' and a crisis years in the making  
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## So-called 'fake news' and a crisis years in the making

Friday February 28, 2025

Earlier this week we had a visit from a delegation of Fijian journalists hosted by DFAT. It was a chance for them to see an Australian newsroom in action and to give them insight into building a digital audience.

As I wrote to you a fortnight ago, we're thinking more and more deeply about what our audience wants and what it doesn't. Our Fijian counterparts are not as far down this road as we are and haven't yet made the leap into digital subscriptions. But it was great to share time and insights with them, journo to journo.

As I walked the group through the office, I pointed out to them our reporters hard at work and the wide range of stories they were on, at that moment ranging from [pumpkin controversies](#) to [sexual harassment](#).

One of the reporters in the room was Sarah Lansdown, who, it is an understatement to say, has had a big couple of weeks. As education reporter, Sarah has for the past five years been leading our reporting on Brindabella Christian College. It was a few years before that when Sarah's predecessors [first picked up on issues](#) at what was then a very young school ("the [devil has his sights set on Christian education](#)" the chairman wrote at the time, showing he's nothing if not consistent).

Sarah's reporting has ranged from the [absurdity of a robot dog being acquired](#) while staff's superannuation wasn't being paid, to the succession of [principals stepping](#)

down or being turfed out, to strange and “political” bus advertisements.

Sarah broke the news last week that the ATO was moving to wind-up the school, then last weekend she reported on [staff not being paid](#). The school’s response was a late night letter from [the chairman Greg Zwajgenberg](#) (he who pines for [Donald Trump to be “our president”](#)) [alleging an anti-Christian government conspiracy](#) to take the school down.

If their troubles with the ATO and the ACT government weren’t bad enough, yesterday the federal education department, which has been frustratingly slow-moving and uncommunicative on its investigations into the school, finally showed its hand.

It is [moving to strip the school of approval](#) for Commonwealth funding, which would spell certain death for even a well-managed non-government school.

For the school this is an existential crisis. But it has been a long time coming and no one can claim to be surprised, least of all the school board.

For almost five years Sarah has been trolled online, accused of writing “vexatious hit pieces” and mocked in bizarre videos. *The Canberra Times* has been derided as “fake news” from an outfit that conjures up wild conspiracy theories and has the gall to blame parents for staff not being paid.

Our reporting has never been successfully challenged, despite myriad complaints, public attacks and no-doubt costly legal threats.

The chairman’s blame-everyone-else desperation revealed in his weekend letter and the daily disasters besetting the school suggest this cannot go on for much longer.

To be clear, I feel for the families and the students caught up in this mess, many of whom I’m sure like their school very much, despite its administrative strife.

But our role is to report on matters of importance in this community, especially when it’s hard going, and on that count I’m proud of how we’ve covered this story every step of the way.

Thanks for reading,

**John-Paul Moloney,**

*The Canberra Times* managing editor

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