

# Look who has an eye on schools [AU] <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

See text below.

## EXCERPTS

A company created by the global child care powerhouse ABC Learning Centres is planning to open private schools in NSW, raising accusations it is trying to profit from the generous public funding of private education.

ABC Learning has already been banned from opening schools in Queensland, following the State Government's rushing through of laws denying for-profit schools state funds.

Independent Colleges Australia announced yesterday it would apply to register a \$25 million child care centre, primary and secondary school at Kurri Kurri in the Hunter Valley.

As it is a "not-for-profit" subsidiary of ABC Learning, which is worth \$1.9 billion, it can apply for generous Commonwealth grants, as well as annual funding per student from state and federal governments.

Independent Colleges Australia plans to open its Hunter college campus by 2007 and aims to employ more than 100 teachers and educate up to 1200 students within five years. The company's chairman, Frank Peach, who is a former director of Queensland Education, said the child-care centre "could very well be run by ABC because they're the market leader in that". He said the company had plans to open more schools in NSW and other states.

ABC Learning had originally planned to open and run a primary school in Brisbane. It forecast it could generate returns of more than 20 per cent by channelling children from its child-care centres into schools it ran. However, the plan was stopped last year by the Queensland Government.

ABC Learning then set up Independent Colleges Australia but it was again prohibited from registering the school.

Politicians and the NSW Teachers Federation have denounced the Hunter Valley venture as a thinly-veiled commercial exercise.

"This is an insidious attempt to capture children at a young age and entrench them into a corporate education model," said the Greens' education spokesman, John Kaye.

"It's the thin edge of the wedge - corporations must not be given the impression they can milk the public purse."

He urged the NSW Education Minister, Carmel Tebbutt, "not be fooled by the corporate veil between the corporate giant ABC Learning and Independent Colleges Australia".

The NSW Teachers Federation president, Maree O'Halloran, said she was "completely and utterly opposed to the commercialisation of education and would call on [Ms Tebbutt] to see through the deception and ensure that this school did not get a cent of public money".

Ms O'Halloran said the application would set a dangerous precedent. "At the moment our public schools are about the common good and individual excellence. The type of school being proposed is the start of a totally for-profit primary and secondary education sector."

- reprinted from the Sydney Morning Herald

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