How it all came crashing down

Directors found to have put their own interests ahead Brindabella Christian College.

EXPLAINER

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Brindabella Christian College and, inset, company director Greg Zwajgenberg, the solar tree and robot dog. Pictures by Karleen Minney, Keegan Carroll, supplied

AFTER years of investigations, media coverage and calls from Canberra families, the trials and tribulations of Brindabella Christian College have finally been laid bare.

Administrators of the company behind the school, Brindabella Christian Education Limited, found the directors put their own financial interests before the college's, attempted to reclaim property in the days before administrators came in and could be criminally prosecuted for their offences.

Everything finally came crashing down for the company in February 2025, when the Australian Tax Office issued a wind-up notice for millions in unpaid tax and super.

The company was trading insolvent from at least January 2021 according to administrators, and owed creditors, including staff, parents and the ATO, $12,226,625.

The administrators conducted extensive investigations into potential insolvent trading, voidable transactions, and breaches of directors' duties.

Investigations were ongoing and would continue if the company was placed into liquidation.

The offences

Some of the directors' actions that violated the Corporations Act with "recklessness, dishonesty or intentional disregard" could warrant further investigations by the Australian Securities and Investment Commission for criminal prosecution.

At the time of voluntary administration, the company's members included Greg Zwajgenberg, Alyn Doig, Suzanne Louise Power and John Raymond Clarke.

This includes the early payment of school fees, which the administrators argued the directors did to relieve themselves of personal liability, as well as a robot dog and associated travel.

The offer of discounted 2025 school fees was made at the end of 2024 to raise cash to pay the $5.8 million owed to the ATO.

Due to the company's inability to pay the ATO, the company's directors, including Mr Zwajgenberg, had become personally liable for the debt.

The early tuition payments generated substantial cash inflows, allowing the company to pay $4.5 million to the ATO between December 2024 and February 2025, effectively reducing the directors' personal liabilities.

The decision left the company with a substantial reduction in fee revenue, placing it in a position "from which it could not realistically recover", the administrators said.

The offences were set to be reported to ASIC by the administrators.

Other offences include amendments to the company's constitution in January 2025, which sought to remove directors' liability, the purchase of the solar tree, and the failure to address numerous 'Show Cause' notices issued by the government with regard to the company's fitness to be the approved authority for the college.

The company awarded contracts to businesses related to directors or employees, including two businesses owned by board director Mr Zwajgenberg. Applications by parents to become members of the company were also refused without providing reasons.

Between 2021 and 2024, about $30,000 was donated to the Liberal Party on a company credit card held by Mr Zwajgenberg.

Mr Zwajgenberg also used the company credit card to pay for hotel accommodation and Uber Eats takeaway food purchases, which administrators believed could be unreasonable director-related expenses.

The directors

When asked about the reasons for the company's financial difficulties, the directors continued to assert that the ongoing legal issues requiring extensive representation, monthly government payments of student funding and NAB refusing to further extend credit led to the predicament.

The directors also blamed a targeted campaign against the board by Reform BCC, the media and various government agencies "to enable the government to create a 'super school' at the Lyneham campus".

The administrators concluded, however, that poor governance, ongoing trading losses, insufficient cash flow and/or high cash use, poor financial controls and strategic management and failure to pay statutory liabilities led to the company's difficulties.

Greg Zwajgenberg was paid $155,000 on the settlement of the school's sale, which was advanced to meet wage payments early in 2025.

The school was bought by Christian Community Ministries in May 2025, the company forking out $30 million for the campus to cover owed debts.

The robot dog

The purchase of the infamous Boston Dynamic "Agile Mobile Robot" and travel to the US by board members could lead to criminal prosecution, with administrators describing the robot dog as "not a core operational requirement" that "had no clear link to the college's curriculum or educational outcomes".

The trip, which included business class flights, extended overseas travel, and luxury accommodation for five people, cost more than $460,000 at a time when the company was already trading insolvent.

Accommodation for the group added up to $39,053 over a 12-night period, with five days spent at a "board retreat" and three days spent attending the Kentucky Derby Festival in April 2024.

The robot dog itself and associated training cost US$221,350, about AU$336,556. The robot was included as part of the sale to CCM.

The solar tree

The school's solar tree was donated by Mr Zwajgenberg, via his company Eagle Vision Technologies Pty Ltd, in December 2020 and was partially funded by a $27,500 grant from the ACT government, which was paid to the school, and then to Mr Zwajgenberg's company, under the Community Zero Emissions Grants Program.

However the administrators found the 2020 contract was updated on March 3, 2025, two days before their appointment and after the board had decided to put the company into administration, to include a line restoring ownership to Mr Zwajgenberg's company.

The administrators found the move indicated an attempt by the board to transfer ownership of a company asset to a business controlled by Mr Zwajgenberg, which they considered an improper use of position by board members.

The solar tree was also included in the sale to CCM.

The financials

The school's financials show recurrent losses since the 2020 financial year.

Significant discrepancies in financial statements showed statements filed after the 2022 financial year included substantial increases in revenue resulting from accounting practices not meeting the Australian Accounting Standards. Receipts for future years' tuition were incorrectly recorded as revenue in the previous year's accounts, and the company was regularly behind in its tax lodgements.

A high staff turnover and inconsistent implementation of financial systems resulted in a "fragmented finance function".

The school employed only one accounting professional, its former business manager, who was also a director, at the time it went into administration.

Insurance costs rose by more than $300,000 in 2024 due to a higher number of employee Fair Work claims, including unpaid superannuation and an allegation of bullying by a company director.

Sal Algeri and Sam Marsden from Deloitte were appointed joint administrators by the directors on March 5, 2025.