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Union gives evidence at parliamentary inquiry into Redeemer Baptist school

The union representing teachers and support staff in non-government schools in NSW and the ACT has today attended a hearing of the NSW parliamentary inquiry into Redeemer Baptist School in North Parramatta.

The inquiry was called after [media reports](#) alleging heavy-handed control of students through excessive restrictions on dress, study choices and contact with the outside world.

Independent Education Union of Australia NSW/ACT Branch Secretary Carol Matthews told the inquiry there were also allegations that the school is not paying its staff and teachers are “volunteers” not employees.

“I’m not aware of any other school where core teaching duties are performed by volunteers,” she said.

The school’s reliance on unpaid manual work by students in the church community such as building maintenance, gardening and lawn mowing was highly unorthodox.

“Practices such as students and teachers sharing bedrooms were inappropriate, unsafe and raised serious child protection concerns,” Matthews said.

Questions were also raised as to whether the school had complied with work health and safety and workers’ compensation laws.

Matthews said the school appeared to exert extreme control over staff and students, limiting their contact with the outside world.

“This has had a chilling effect on staff seeking union support,” she said. “Redeemer claims an entitlement to take control of staff property, exerting a high degree of financial control.”

Teachers and professional and operational staff in non-government schools are covered by enterprise agreements that provide for salaries broadly comparable with salaries paid to teachers and support staff in NSW government schools.

If there is no enterprise agreement, a minimum federal award and legislated conditions (including superannuation) apply. It appears that the school’s teacher “volunteers” are not receiving even these minimum conditions.

The inquiry also heard from former students and teachers, as well as NSW Anti-Slavery Commissioner Dr James Cockayne.

“The IEU has talked to several former staff and is working to ensure the school meets its legal obligations to them,” Matthews said. “We look forward to hearing the inquiry’s outcome.”

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The IEUA NSW/ACT Branch represents over 32,000 teachers, principals and support staff in Catholic and independent schools, early childhood centres and post-secondary colleges.

Authorised by Carol Matthews, IEUA NSW/ACT Branch Secretary