

# NewsExtra

29 July 2024

## Independent Schools Your working conditions under threat

Bargaining has commenced for new multi-enterprise agreements (MEAs) for teachers and for professional, administrative and operational staff in NSW and ACT independent schools.

We presented [our claims](#) for improved pay and conditions to the independent schools' bargaining representative, the Association of Independent Schools (AIS), in May. The AIS responded to our claims on 27 June 2024. We have had several bargaining meetings, most recently on 24 July 2024.

We have agreed in-principle to MEAs with a three-year term, provided the salary increases and conditions meet our expectations.

### Threat to your current working conditions

The response from the AIS on 27 June includes the following unacceptable proposals:

- removal of 15 days of upfront paid personal leave credited on commencement for new employees
- increased notice of termination (including on resignation) from four term weeks to seven calendar weeks
- new workload requirements during non-term time to "reduce the intensity of work during term time"
- teachers who have been deemed Band 3 (Experienced Teacher) under the current MEAs will no longer have this status. The AIS is proposing that teachers who have undertaken the ISTAA process will be 'Accomplished Teachers' and paid an allowance. However, under the proposed MEA, teachers who were deemed Band 3 will only be classified as proficient and will not be paid the new 'Accomplished Teacher' allowance (unless a particular school agrees to do so outside the MEA).

### No pay offer or commitment to restore pay premium

The AIS has now stated they expect to make a pay offer prior to our next bargaining meeting on 7 August. Previously, they refused to make any pay offer because they said the outcome of NSW government school teacher pay negotiations (due in October 2024) was unknown. They have also failed to respond to our claims to catch up with current rates. Our claim is to match pay rates in NSW government schools (including the scheduled increase in October this year), plus the traditional premium of 5-7% and 4% increases in February 2026 and February 2027.

### New teacher classifications

The AIS is proposing to combine the three current Teacher MEAs into a single NSW and ACT Teachers MEA.

In NSW, teachers will transition from current MEA models to a seven-step pay scale, similar to the classification structures used in NSW government and Catholic systemic schools. In the ACT, the pay scale will have eight steps to align with the ACT government classification structure.

We are still unclear as to how the AIS intend to translocate teachers into this new pay structure. In all the scenarios, we will ensure that no teacher falls behind during the transitional process.

## Workloads remain a problem

Workloads are a major issue for teachers working in independent schools. As a first step in addressing workloads, we have asked for school-based standards to be established at each independent school. These standards should specify face-to-face teaching hours, allocated release time, the number of meetings, extras, duties per term and the expected days of attendance on weekends and during term time in each school.

The AIS has flatly rejected this claim, despite claiming that many schools already provide this information to staff. In refusing our claim, they have referred to the diversity of the sector and the operational requirements of each school.

The AIS has not responded to other suggestions we have made to address workloads, such as ensuring schools do not insist on unnecessary work to be performed in the name of compliance when government authorities do not require it. They have also rejected our claim for guaranteed release for early career teachers and mentors.

We also seek to ensure that independent schools will guarantee that you receive the benefit of the new right to disconnect laws. The AIS has claimed that independent schools should be exempt and that your employer should be able to contact you at any time. You have a right to work/life balance and the right to disconnect!

## Some improvements to paid parental leave

In response to our claim, the AIS has agreed to recognise the 14 weeks of paid parental leave as service for the purposes of leave accrual. However, strangely, this paid leave would not count as service for progression up the salary scale even though all other types of paid leave (annual leave, sick leave and long service leave) do count. The AIS has also not agreed to match the NSW government and Catholic schools' provision that up to 12 months of paid *and unpaid* parental leave counts as service for all purposes. The AIS has also not agreed that the 14 weeks of paid parental leave is exclusive of non-term time falling within the period of leave.

The AIS is still considering our request for superannuation to be payable on paid parental leave.

On a positive note, we have secured 12 weeks of paid parental leave for the non-initial primary carer (usually the father) who assumes primary carer responsibilities within the first 12 months following the birth of their child. This paid leave is in addition to the initial two weeks of paid leave at the time of the child's birth (or adoption). The 12 weeks leave will be inclusive of non-term periods, except for four weeks of annual leave.

## Stand strong with the IEU

We need your support and engagement to fight for better pay and working conditions:

- 1. Stay informed:** stay updated with NewsExtras and follow our campaign, [click here](#).
- 2. Spread the word:** discuss our campaign with your colleagues and encourage non-members to join the IEU. [Click here to join](#). Union members have a say in shaping the MEA and your working conditions.
- 3. Hold a union meeting:** show your solidarity by holding a chapter meeting with your colleagues. Invite your IEU Organiser to the meeting to discuss the AIS's position. Tell your principal what you think as well.
- 4. Empower your chapter:** union reps now have protections and rights under the new delegates' rights. If you do not have an IEU rep in your school, reach out to your IEU Organiser to find out how reps can be elected for your school and advocate for your chapter.

Together, we can achieve the fair pay and working conditions that you have been waiting for.

