

Sky's the limit for today's excursion

BRIANA DOMJEN
EDUCATION
REPORTER

FORGET camps at the local national park, globe-trotting students are travelling to exotic destinations for their annual "cultural" excursions.

A visit to Parliament House used to be considered a calendar highlight but now primary and high school pupils get excited by trips to France, Japan, the US and Israel.

Years 5 and 6 Lindfield Public School students were given the opportunity to jet off to the US Space and Rocket Center in Huntsville, Alabama, in 2011, with plans to go again in next year to allow "Lindfield students to go beyond the school curriculum and develop scientific skills related to space, as well as a personal skill set associated with experiential learning", according to the school's website.

Principal Craig Oliver said the trip — which cost \$5000 per student — was a huge success. "It was the most incredible trip and the kids had an absolute ball," he said.

"The kids who went were identified as having an interest in space and science.

"It provided an opportunity to extend kids' learning. They were very fortunate."

Lucky students in years 9 and 10 at Kirrawee High School have visited their sister school, St Michel College, Reunion Island.

Years 10 and 11 Davidson High School students studying languages were given the opportunity to jet off to Rome and Paris, and Gunnedah High students flew to Athens last April for a week of exploration in the ancient world. Trips to areas including New Zealand, Japan and Europe can cost parents as much as \$5000.

But despite the hefty price tag, Anywhere Travel owner Barbara Whitten said the trend of sending students on international excursions was becoming increasingly popular.

"Overseas school excursions are happening more often, especially amongst private schools," Ms Whitten



Forget a trip to the Powerhouse Museum, Lindfield Public students had a ball at the US Space and Rocket Center in Alabama



said. "It is a lot of organising but we have a system to do it."

"It is very educational for kids, they get an enormous amount out of it and it is something that stays with them for years."

She said Paris, Bali, the US and China were hot spots.

"They generally go for a couple of weeks during the school holidays," she said.

ONLINE
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Guidepost tours' Bob Daniel said the overseas excursions were most often paid for by a combination of parent money and fundraising.

"We send students on ex-

cursions to Greece, Israel, North Korea," he said.

"Government schools will usually make parents pay and they will use fundraising to raise the rest.

"But when it comes to private schools, they will sometimes contribute an amount."

However, Emil Ford and Co lawyer David Ford said sending a cohort of pupils on an overseas excursion came with risks. "I have been contacted by many schools in relation to trips, normally . . . to find out if they are doing the right thing," Mr Ford said.

Private education a budget burden

BRIANA DOMJEN

LARGE numbers of parents are cutting back on holidays, clothing and entertainment to pay for the rising cost of private education fees.

Annual tuition fees have reached \$30,000 at some of Sydney's elite schools — and that excludes charges for music, sport and excursions.

Mother-of-four April Palmerlee said she and her husband Luke had cut down on holidays, clothing, food and after-school activities to send their children to private schools. Her 11-year-old son Henry attends Sydney Grammar Edgecliff Prep, while daughters Scarlett, 6, and Portia, 7, are at Ascham, also in Edgecliff.

"Education stays with you your whole life," Ms Palmerlee said.

"When handling our family budget, the one thing we won't ever change is the children's education."

Child psychologist and Psych Support Assessment Services principal Andrew Greenfield said psychologists are being inundated with parents who are struggling financially to send children to a private school.

He also deals with the negative impact it has on some children.

"Some kids start to feel isolated because they can't talk about the overseas holidays they went on or they don't have the latest technology, so they often feel left out and in some cases can be bullied, which can lead to self-esteem issues as well," he said.

However, NSW Teachers Federation president Maurie Mulheron said skimping to send children to a private school was unnecessary when quality public education was available.

"My advice would be: save your money to give them experiences like buying books, taking them to the theatre, and save the money for when the child needs money for TAFE or university fees."

AGENDA
THE PRIVATE VS PUBLIC BATTLE
>> PAGE 43

New hospital crisis as wait times spiral out of control

EXCLUSIVE
LAURA SPERANZA

SERIOUSLY-ILL patients are waiting up to an hour before receiving life-saving medical treatment as Sydney hospitals buckle under the weight of bed and staff shortages.

The emergency ward backlogs are also having a flow-on effect on paramedics, who say the delays are blowing out response times to triple-0 calls.

A NSW Health report reveals only 57 per cent of patients were seen by an emergency department doctor with-

in 30 minutes of arriving at a hospital, a drop of 4 per cent from last year.

At Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, the most seriously-ill patients with two life-threatening injuries were forced to wait up to 62 minutes to be treated, compared with 32 minutes last year.

On quieter nights, it still took staff up to 13 minutes to respond to urgent cases, up from nine minutes last year.

At some of the state's busiest hospitals, top trauma doctors say the lives of thousands of patients with life-

threatening illness are being put in jeopardy as response times spiral out of control.

"Patients are being forced to wait longer and they don't

“Patients are being forced to wait longer for care

get transferred to appropriate care early enough, which is having an adverse effect on their health," Dr Anthony Cross of the Australasian

College for Emergency Medicine said.

"You also have issues with ambulances not being able to unload their patients into the

emergency department so they can go to their next patient."

Dr Cross said overcrowded emergency departments were affecting the recovery times

and life expectancy of critically-ill patients.

"There's a lot of evidence that shows a correlation between the time spent in emergency department and adverse outcomes — that is, some sort of complication or problem later in their hospital stay," he said.

There were also serious delays at Westmead and Liverpool hospitals, where even those with critical illness were forced to wait an hour.

Meanwhile, ambulance response times for life-threatening cases increased to 11

minutes last year. The NSW Ambulance Service blames hospitals for the lag in their response times in recent years.

"The change in response performance is primarily due to higher demand and longer off-stretcher times, which limited the overall availability of ambulances to respond," a spokeswoman said.

Acting Minister for Health Kevin Humphries said the O'Farrell government was helping to ease the pressure on emergency departments by spending a record \$4.7 billion on hospital infrastructure.