Weighing the cost of a good start

“It’s a big sacrifice,” says Rachael Jakubik, whose daughters Ella and Caitlin attend Donvale Christian College.

Anthony Colangelo
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Fees at some of Melbourne’s most renowned private schools have risen by as much as 6 per cent since last year, with the most expensive tuition fees charged tipping over $40,000.

Ruyton Girls School in Kew raised its fees by 6 per cent to more than $33,000, while Xavier College ($29,870) and Haileybury ($32,580) hiked its fees by 5 per cent.

Geelong Grammar prices were the most expensive at $41,260 for the 2019 school year, a 3.4 per cent rise after charging $39,900 a child in 2018.

Overall, an analysis of 15 of the state’s private schools found fees rose by an average of 3.6 per cent in 2019 which was slightly below the 4 per cent rise for 2018.

Trinity Grammar was the only school in the group to keep its fees the same as 2018.

Education fund provider ASG said its research showed Victoria was the second most expensive state in Australia for independent schooling.

Its projections suggest it will cost, on average, $438,390 to put a child through private education from 2019 onwards. That figure is $461,999 for New South Wales.

However, the Independent Schools Council of Australia disputes these figures. It reported that in Victoria, most independent schools (29 per cent) charged less than $4999 a year in 2017, with 26 per cent charging $20,000 and above.

For Rachael and Paul Jakubik, increasing school fees has meant tighter budgets.

The research couple send their daughters, Caitlin, 17, and Ella, 14, to Donvale Christian College.

They said fees had increased each year, by a small amount.

It costs the Jakubiks about $12,500 per child each year to send their daughters to the school.

The Jakubiks have been contributing to an education saving fund for 15 years to help meet the cost of school fees.

She said extra costs – some of which were optional, such as a
camp to Vanuatu – added to the cost of schooling.

“It does get tricky; you do have to go without things, but I’m sure a lot of families don’t. It’s a big sacrifice.”

In the past four or five years, those sacrifices included not taking holidays and budgeting “for everything”.

University of Sydney education researcher Associate Professor Helen Proctor said Melburnians held on to private school links longer after graduation than independent schools elsewhere.

“It’s a really niche market that top-end market,” Associate Professor Proctor said.

“It is really quite very competitive. The schools jockey with each other to attract students at the same time as they have this idea of exclusiveness that only the chosen few can go.

“There’s a lot of mythology around the waiting lists, which fluctuate, but no school will admit it doesn’t have a waiting list.”

Girls’ schools often try to sell ideas of “leadership and a soft feminist approach”, she said, while boys schools would project the image of “the well-rounded man”.

“Open days are very crucial, it is where the parents get the feeling of seeing the real school,” she said.

“But] parents are aware about how that can be manipulated and they really form opinions about the students and teachers at open days.”