

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

PRESS RELEASE 668#

The Report of the Inquiry into the Independent Public Schools initiative

[http://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/Parliament/commit.nsf/\(Report+Lookup+by+Com+ID\)/56AF902F3A6948E648258010001500F6/\\$file/23820473.pdf](http://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/Parliament/commit.nsf/(Report+Lookup+by+Com+ID)/56AF902F3A6948E648258010001500F6/$file/23820473.pdf)

The Failure of the “Independent Public School “ Concept In Australia

To be Fair and Equal, Public Education requires a Centralised Administration.

In the nineteenth century, public education only succeeded in all colonial States of Australia because the administrators of the various systems of education realised that

- **they could only educate ALL the children and**
- **protect and train ALL the teachers and**
- **offer a career structure to teachers, headmasters and inspectors and finally,**
- **have an accountable, efficient and effective administrator and**
- **be the only recipients of public moneys.**

if they CENTRALISED their administration.

Freeman Butts recognised this when he visited Australia in the 1950s and compared our superior system to that in America and England.

On the other side of the coin, the wealthy, and promoters of privatisation - the religious education systems - not only demanded privileged access to the public Treasury. They continually criticised ‘centralisation’. They have systematically undermined, and in some cases, taken over the centralised bureaucracies.

Victoria has suffered badly from the ‘devolution’ fad. But the latest attempt to privatise public education is the idea of a fully devolved system, with ‘Independent’ public schools. But the Western Australian ‘experiment’ has failed the ‘student outcomes’ test.

It is time to call a halt and think again. We need to centralise the public system and stop State Aid to the private sector.

The Chairman of *The Report of the Inquiry into the Independent Public Schools Initiative* had this to say:

The Independent Public Schools initiative embodies this concept (of devolution) for the Western Australian public education system, following the lead of education Systems with greater autonomy found in Victoria, England, and the United States of America.

However, in any devolved system, and particularly in education, Local decision makers need to be supported by central office guidance and be subject to appropriate levels of accountability. Support and accountability must balance autonomy so it does not become abandonment. The strength of any new initiative in public education must be measured by the effect it has on student outcomes.

The report's finding is damning:

In line with national and international research, there is no evidence that the Independent Public Schools initiative has had a positive effect on student outcomes. [Chairman's Foreword]

The introduction of the IPS initiative has had no significant effect on the academic or non-academic performance of students, including those with additional needs. [p. i]

The Independent Public School initiative has not had any discernible effect on the outcomes of students at Independent Public Schools, nor non-Independent Public Schools, for both students with additional needs, and those without. [p. 27]

This finding is all the more stunning because the report was prepared by a bi-partisan committee of two Liberal MLAs, including the Chairman of the committee, two ALP members and an Independent Liberal member.

Trevor Cobbold from Save our Schools comments further:

Thursday August 18, 2016

Independent public (IP) schools in Western Australia have failed to improve student results according to [a new report by a bi-partisan WA parliamentary committee](#). It also found that the introduction of IP schools has increased inequalities and created a 'two-tiered' education system.

The findings are a major blow to Coalition governments around the country which have made increasing school autonomy a central policy plank. Several recent overseas studies have also found little impact from increasing school autonomy over budgets and staffing.

The report cites evidence provided by the Department of Education that shows:

- No substantial difference in the overall attendance data for schools which became IP schools;
- No major change in the attendance rate for the 2011 to 2014 intakes of schools since they became IP schools;
- NAPLAN reading results in years 3, 5 and 9 have improved for both IP and non-IP schools,

but where NAPLAN reading results decline in year 7, it is more evident in non-IP schools;

- NAPLAN numeracy results indicate marginal improvement for IP schools; – In year 5 there is some improvement in the last two years evident for both IP and non-IP schools; – In year 7 there is no evident difference between IP and non-IP schools; – In year 9 the strong improvement trend is somewhat more evident in IP schools;
- NAPLAN reading results for Aboriginal students, ‘disadvantaged’ and country students show that similar patterns are generally evident in both IP and non-IP schools;
- The percentage of students achieving the WA Certificate of Education in year 12 has been very stable for both IP and non-IP schools;
- Attainment rates (the percentage of students achieving an ATAR or 55+ and/or a VET Certificate II or higher) have improved substantially and in a similar manner for both IP and non-IP schools.

The first intake of IP schools was in 2010 so that these schools have had a longer period of time over which greater autonomy could impact on student outcomes. However, NAPLAN reading data provided to the committee by the Department of Education shows similar trends in Years 5, 7 and 9 for IP schools and non-IP schools. The report states that “this data is consistent with other data that autonomy has negligible effect on student outcomes” [p. 24].

It also noted that these findings are consistent with an earlier evaluation by the Graduate School of Education at the University of Melbourne Evaluation which found that IP schools were generally high-performing before transition and there had been no substantive increase in student achievement after becoming IP schools.

Incredibly, the report found that the Department of Education does not sufficiently monitor student outcomes to analyse the effect of IP schools, either to determine whether outcomes have improved for IP schools, or whether IP schools are improving more than non-IP schools. Nor does the Department sufficiently monitor the outcomes of Aboriginal students, and students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds. It said that the Department should be doing more to monitor the progress of these students.

The report considered the issue of whether it is still too early to tell whether the IP school initiative has created the conditions necessary to improve student outcomes in the future. It considered whether changes made under initiative offer support for several mediating factors that may link student autonomy to improved outcomes. It concluded that “it is unclear whether IPS creates the conditions needed to improve future student outcomes” [p. 36].

The report also found that the introduction of IP schools has exacerbated existing inequalities within the public school system in WA and reinforced a ‘two-tiered system’. It found that IP schools have been able to recruit the best teachers while non-IP schools are likely to be staffed with teachers who are less suitable for the school environment and have less experience.

Independent Public Schools are provided with the opportunity to recruit the best teachers for their circumstances, while non-Independent Public Schools are not. [p. 41]

The report said that remote and hard-to-staff schools are particularly disadvantaged as a result. It said that harder-to-staff remote and regional schools will find it increasingly difficult

to attract staff as incentives for working remotely become less effective due to the smaller number of schools where teachers returning from non-metropolitan service can be placed.

State government promotion and marketing of IP schools has also created the public perception of a 'two-tiered system':

The State Government's promotion and marketing of the Independent Public Schools initiative has led to the perception that Independent Public Schools have greater capacity to better educate students than non-Independent Public Schools, reinforcing the two-tiered public education system. [p.50]

Another key finding of the report is that autonomy has shifted a significant administrative burden to IP schools which they are not always prepared for or equipped to manage. IP school principals have less time to devote to educational leadership. Devolved authority has led to a reduction in the central support and accountability machinery that should be at the core of a public education system. All schools bear a greater administrative burden since the introduction of the Student-Centred Funding Model in 2015, although IP schools are better placed to meet this by way of additional funding for IP school administration.

The report identifies a conceptual problem behind the failure of IP schools to improve results. The focus of IP schools is autonomy in budgeting and staffing. However, the report notes OECD evidence that staffing and budgetary autonomy has limited impact on student outcomes while more autonomy in curriculum and assessment can have a positive impact. The report concludes that:

The budgetary and staffing autonomy provided to schools as part of the Independent Public Schools initiative is unlikely to affect student outcomes. [p. 14]

The findings of the report are a major blow to the Federal Government, and several state governments, which have made autonomy in budgeting and staffing a central part of education policy. The Federal Government has devoted \$70 million to the expansion of independent public schools. The WA report suggests it is unlikely to have any significant effect on student outcomes.

Trevor Cobbold

CHRIS BONNOR & BERNIE SHEPHERD have the following post on John Menadue's blog at <http://johnmenadue.com/blog/?p=7463>

When public schools become part of the problem

Posted on [19/08/2016](#) by [John Menadue](#)

School education in Australia has been invaded from the west. In 2010 Western Australia added its contribution to free-market orthodoxy by declaring that its public schools would be given greater control over staffing and budgets. From 2010 an increasing number have become independent public schools.

Like many reforms (?) over the last few decades it has a certain resonance and indeed was initially welcomed by a large number of schools. School principals have always complained about excessive bureaucratic control of their schools.

WA's Independent Public Schools (IPS) has been Australia's contribution to the move to greater autonomy for public schools. Variations of it exist, in various guises, in most of the other states – usually but not always promoted by conservative governments. When in Opposition, Tony Abbott, promised to [roll out Independent Public Schools \(IPS\) across Australia](#). After all, as his later education minister (Christopher Pyne) was to claim, such a system overseas was improving student outcomes – a claim [deemed to be unsubstantiated](#) by the ABC Fact Check.

In common with much of the neoliberal agenda for education the evidence for IPS was either never produced or was quite easily dismissed. Those who might otherwise support such autonomy for public schools had their doubts, [including Ben Jensen](#), previously with the Grattan Institute. Even at the time the OECD [was at best ambivalent](#) about claims that autonomy would improve student outcomes.

And early cautions came out of Western Australia. In 2011 [the WA Auditor General warned](#) that the program could create a two tier education system. In the same year a [Curtin University report](#) showed that the policy would do little to improve student learning outcomes.

The author of the report said “The evaluations that have taken place afterwards around the world would seem to suggest that it’s actually stacking up problems,” he said. “We’d be better looking at that now rather than waiting two or three years down the line to deal with the problems that may appear further down the track.”

It is now 2016 and we are now indeed further down the track. A review by the Education and Health Standing Committee of the WA parliament has just found that the IPS initiative has [exacerbated existing inequalities in the public education system](#), both perceived and actual, reinforcing a ‘two-tiered system’.

As the ABC reported on August 15, this meant that “more capable schools receive more benefits, and less capable schools fall further behind. Remote and hard-to-staff schools are particularly disadvantaged as a result”. While IPS schools “benefitted by being able to recruit the best teachers” this came at the expense of non-IPS schools, which were then forced to accept teachers rejected by independent schools “who are less suitable for the school environment and have less experience”.

On student achievement the report noted “It’s also too early to tell whether the IPS initiative has created the conditions which will lead to improved student outcomes in the future,”.

Is it really too early? The independent public schools initiative is just another component of a 30 year-old experiment in choice and competition in schooling – an experiment that research and reviews have shown to have failed to lift student achievement while at the same time worsening equity. Our recent analysis of *My School* data, published by the Centre for Policy Development in [Uneven Playing Field](#), highlights the more recent evidence of this failure.

The problem facing public education schools and systems is that every attempt to create greater autonomy ends up becoming a zero-sum game. Some schools, especially those with existing advantages, derive a benefit. Others face compounding challenges. All that the Independent Public Schools initiative seems to be showing is that public schools are perfectly capable of becoming yet another part of problems we steadfastly refuse to address.

Chris Bonnor AM and Bernie Shepherd AM are Fellows of the CPD.

Also see the following:

FYI : Education Inc. part 1 of doco about school privatisation & corporatisation of public schools in US

<https://www.rt.com/shows/documentary/337985-public-school-us-education/ic>

The only critic of the corporatisation of a public school amongst teachers who was prepared to be interviewed on film was an Iraq War veteran.

Education Inc.

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Corporations, billionaires and free-market ideologues see dollar signs when they look at American public schools. Dark money contributors are funding free-market reformers to take over local school boards and transform American public education into a business. As a result, billions of tax dollars are being diverted away from public school children under the banner of "school choice". Education Inc. uncovers the money trail while parents, teachers and students across the country fight back.

Due to copyright restrictions, this video can only be viewed on [RT's live feed](#). Time of broadcast is available on [RT's schedule page](#).

[Documentary : Education Inc.](#)

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