

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

PRESS RELEASE 544#

PUBLIC EDUCATION WITHERS WITHOUT A STRONG CENTRALISED ADMINISTRATION

Why did Australia's Public Education systems centralise

in the first place? The answer brings a bit of basic common sense into the current debate.

Answer:

In a democracy you need accountability for public money (Taxpayers money!)

This can only be guaranteed through a responsible Minister and a strong centralised administration of committed public servants. Privatisation breeds abdication of responsible government, abdication of accountability and corruption in expenditure of public moneys.

In a democracy you need to educate ALL the children, providing teachers and resources to all points of the country

This can only be done by a centralised administration that can:

- 1. train, appoint , pay and provide professional assistance and promotion for teachers and educational assistants*
- 2. build and maintain schools*

In a democracy citizens pay taxes to a central Treasury and expect public services and accountability for expenditure on public services – not private services.

In the nineteenth century, Public school parents were sick of taxing themselves for the education of their children. They demanded central administration for services. They are currently discovering in Victoria that without a strong central administration they do not even have the choice of a public school. Autonomy in public education means privatisation of public education.

No accountability can be provided by private services. This has been proved by the highly centralised Catholic Church bureaucracy which refuses to open its books to public scrutiny.

Meanwhile, other commentators in Australia have been doing their homework . Here is a Media Release from Trevor Cobbold of Save our Schools at <http://www.saveourschools.com.au/choice-and-competition/public-schools-in-the-top-performing-countries-have-little-autonomy-in-budgeting-and-staffing>

Public Schools in the Top Performing Countries Have Little Autonomy in Budgeting and Staffing

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Australia's approach to school autonomy in budgeting and staffing is at odds with the latest results from the OECD's Programme for International Assessments (PISA). [An OECD report on PISA 2012](#) shows that public schools in the top performing countries generally have little autonomy in budgeting and staffing but considerable autonomy over curriculum and assessment. Strangely, however, the Australian Government is intent on devolving greater responsibility over school budgets and staffing to principals rather than responsibility for curriculum and assessment.

As part of PISA 2012, school principals were asked to report whether teachers, the principal, the regional or local education authorities or the national education authority had considerable responsibility for allocating resources to schools (appointing and dismissing teachers; determining teachers' salaries; and formulating school budgets and allocating them within the school). They were also asked about responsibility for the curriculum and instructional assessment within the school (establishing student-assessment policies; choosing textbooks; and determining which courses are offered and the content of those courses). This information was combined to create two composite indices: an index of school responsibility for resource allocation, and an index of school responsibility for curriculum and assessment.

The top twelve performing countries/cities in mathematics for which indices are available are Shanghai, Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea, Japan, Liechtenstein, Switzerland, Netherlands, Estonia, Finland and Canada. Of these countries, only public schools in Netherlands have a high level of autonomy in budgeting and staffing. Control over school budgets and staffing is much more centralised in all the other top performing countries, except Estonia which has an average level of local autonomy.

In contrast, public schools in five countries had high autonomy in curriculum and assessment and three have an average level of autonomy. Only Canada, Shanghai, Switzerland and Liechtenstein have strongly centralised systems for curriculum and assessment.

Ireland and Poland replaced Netherlands and Switzerland in the top twelve performing countries in reading. Budgeting and staffing responsibilities are highly centralised in public schools in both countries, while Ireland has an average level of autonomy in curriculum and assessment and Poland gives more local autonomy in this area to schools.

Germany and Vietnam are in the top twelve countries in science and budgeting and staffing are highly centralised in both. Curriculum and assessment is also highly centralised in Vietnam, while in Germany public schools have an average level of autonomy.

Thus, the large majority of the sixteen countries that appeared in the top twelve countries in mathematics, reading and science have strongly centralised control over budgeting and staffing. The exceptions were Netherlands with high local autonomy and Estonia with an average level. Ten of these countries have either a high or average level of local autonomy over curriculum and assessment, the large majority of these countries. Curriculum and assessment are strongly centralised in Canada, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Shanghai, Singapore and Vietnam.

Clearly, successful school outcomes are more associated with local responsibility for curriculum and assessment than for budgeting and staffing. Centralised responsibility for budgeting and staffing is not a constraint in achieving high student results. Greater school autonomy is not related to increased student achievement. The evidence from the 2012 PISA study is unequivocal and compelling:

PISA shows that school systems that grant more autonomy to schools to define and elaborate their curricula and assessments tend to perform better than systems that don't grant such autonomy....In contrast, greater responsibility in managing resources appears to be unrelated to a school system's overall performance. [OECD 2013, PISA 2012 Results: What Makes Schools Successful? Resources, Policies and Practices (Volume IV): 52]

The priority given to increasing school responsibility for budgeting and staffing is misplaced. It risks creating a two-tiered public school system. It makes it more difficult for disadvantaged schools and rural schools to attract and retain quality teachers. It creates a more privileged group of schools within the public system that have increased opportunities to become more selective in enrolling students.

Education policies should focus on reducing the effects of disadvantage on student outcomes, not increasing them.

Trevor Cobbold