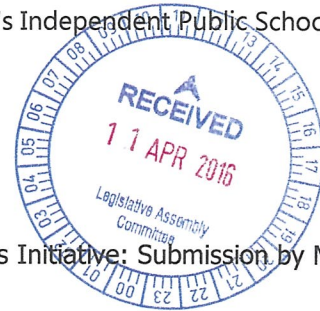


Subject:

FW: Inquiry into the Department of Education's Independent Public Schools Initiative: Submission by Michael Harries



From: Michael Harries

Sent: Saturday, 9 April 2016 10:16 AM

To: Committee, Education & Health Standing

Subject: Inquiry into the Department of Education's Independent Public Schools Initiative: Submission by Michael Harries

Dear Sir/Madam,

I make this submission to the enquiry as a parent and active board member of York District High School. I've been a board member of the school for 3 years and have children attending York District High School.

The reflections made in this email are my personal experiences as a parent and active board member of York District High School, which operates as an independent Public School. These reflections have not been endorsed or reflect the view of the York District High School Board.

Context

- School boards have been established to engage the school community in better educational outcomes for students. Which is a great goal, however is reliant on the school management team engaging the process.
- The school board at present have not real authority other than to
 - Make recommendations on school dress code
 - Set and approve school fee and class material lists
 - Make arrangements for sponsorship with in the school as long as it doesn't contravene the education act.
- The school board can make recommendations
 - Establishing and reviewing from time to time the school's objectives, priorities and general policy direction
 - Planning of financial arrangements for objectives, priorities and directions
 - Evaluate school's performance on achieving objectives.
 - Formulating codes of conduct for students

Reflections:

- The school management team has gained some flexibility in management of the schools operational processes; financing staffing etc. This has been reported to be an advantage by the school's management team. The flexibility may or may not be true, as it is only reported and the board has not power to intervene in the control or management of the school.
- Largely the school management team can choose to take what course of action they see fit without consultation with the school board. There has largely been no real change in educational outcomes for students since moving to an independent public school board; which the board has had real influence over. It has been business as usual for the school with no real change or improvement of day to day school culture or management.
- If the management team doesn't agree with the school board recommendations, the school management team will invoke; the decision made by the school is a management decision and relates to operational procedure within the school; therefore, largely discarding any recommendations made by the board.
- The board has now power to contest or to hold the school management team to account.
- The board only has the power to influence thinking.
- If management practice is flawed the board has not power to act or direct.
- Antidotal evidence suggests moving to an independent school board model has not translated into better school community consultation or student educational outcomes.

- It may or may not have improved internal management freedoms, however this is outside the terms of reference for a school board.
- Evidence would suggest for independent public school boards to be effective the boards need more power
 - to direct school management teams around school culture goal setting
 - the ability to have greater influence in school management team thinking.
 - to direct business objectives, priorities and general policy.
- The School management team has largely engaged the school board as a tick a box exercise in meeting their requirement under the independent public school terms of reference.

Summary

For school boards to be truly effective, School Management teams need to have a fundamental shift in culture away from years of learnt behaviour within the system; moving away from protections available within the Educational Act, to allow creative thinking and exploration of better ways of achieving community consultation and educational outcomes. A culture of 'can do' a Solution focused outcomes model, instead of seeking comfort behind management process and policy. A change in culture is the best evidence of effectiveness and this has not occurred up to now.

I'm happy to take a call or be interviewed in regards to this enquiry, to provide actual working examples, if you wish to discuss my reflections.

Regards,

Michael Harries