

Submission – Independent Public Schools

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Currently Leaders Organiser SSTUWA



I am happy to appear before the committee.

My initial response to the IPS initiative came in 2010 when, as a District Director of the West Coast District, one of four metropolitan districts of the Department of Education was one of outside interest.

Two of the schools I lined managed were selected in the initial 34 schools, however, the principals of both schools Duncraig SHS and Mindarie Senior College clearly stated that wanted to remain part of the networks that I'd set up. I thought it was about selected empowerment through autonomy and agreed that the two schools initially selected where very well placed to proceed in that direction.

My interest changed during the year as the schools selected from within my jurisdiction for following year were not well suited to the identified criteria.

During 2010 I resigned from the Department as I was opposed to the upcoming restructure of districts into regions as I had concerns that a two tier system had been created. I had occasion to discuss issues with principals of IPS outside my district and noticed a change in the approach of a significant number of them. They were acting as if they were no longer a part of a system and, in my opinion, it seemed the power of being an IPS principal had made them utilise a more authoritative style.

In 2012 and I was selected as principal of Woodlands PS, an IP school. I had little induction [I only received what I could from friends in the dept.]; this was with the exception of the outstanding support I received from the Director in charge of the funding mechanism associated with the initiative, Ms Alison Ramm. In fact at a session on DES review process two weeks before my school was scheduled to take part in its first review October 2013, I was informed about the DPA [Delivery Performance Agreement – between the Director General, the principal and the School Board Chair]. This, to me, was of great concern, that a project, still in only its third year, had no capacity to induct newly selected principals of IP Schools.

I remained as Principal of Woodlands PS for three years and although I was a member of a very productive and energetic Network and had fantastic support from the regional office RED and A/RED [Jim Webb and Paul Meacock] I was dismayed at how collegiate networks had broken down and that schools were operating in isolation. This was fine if the leaders

were competent, however, I watched in horror as I noticed the less able leaders fall by the wayside, have their schools ERG'd and generally disconnect themselves from the group.

Although very pleased with the collective work of the staff at Woodlands PS, I initially found it difficult to get staff to voice their opinions openly; this took longer to do there than any other school I have led in my career. When I asked why a particular literacy strategy had been selected [as it didn't meet the needs of high social index students and researched evidence clearly demonstrated this], I was informed the previous principal had insisted on the strategy, even though it cost approximately \$10,000 to implement. Sadly, not one on the teaching staff spoke against this implementation, even though the majority of staff knew it wasn't working. It wasn't until I asked staff to assess the effectiveness of the strategy that they were able to see the damage that had been done.

Interestingly, when I reflect on my own experiences, I realised I was more stressed and over worked at my last school, an IPS one. Admittedly it had been 10 years between stints. However, from 1998 to 2002 I worked in a large level 6 primary school [Middle Swan PS in Stratton] of 930 students with a very low SEI of 92. On arrival this school was described by the Department of Child Welfare officers as the area with the highest incidence of child abuse in the northern metropolitan area. Woodlands PSA on the other hand was a level 5 school of 460 students with an SEI of 116, a leafy green area with highly supportive and interested parents who embraced the decisions made by staff for improvement.

I was then approached by the SSTUWA President and General Secretary of the SSTUWA [State School Teachers Union of WA] to come in and work as a School Leader's Organiser. In this position, I've worked in over 120 schools in the past 12 months; I've seen a broader perspective.

I have found principals feeling abandoned; a clear two tier system of haves [IPS] and have nots [non IPS]. I've provided support to leaders who have been depressed by the IPS approach and many leaders who lack the moral purpose to effectively lead schools. I've seen the interest in becoming a principal plummet, in 1994 I was one of 205 applicants for a number of Level 5 principal positions in the metropolitan area, this year there were four applicants for the school I've just retired from – Woodlands PS a level 5, previously highly sought after western suburbs location.

I am currently working to support the staff in a number of separate schools whose principals have demonstrated a complete and utter disregard for their wellbeing and ever growing workload. These principals are high on demands and extremely low on care and staff are suffering, very stressed, afraid of retribution if they complain, taking leave and going on to workers compensation. This is sure to have a disastrous effect on student learning.

Please understand I was a principal of four schools, over a period of 14 years, a primary deputy of a district high school for three years and a district director for 7½ years.

In all those years I have never seen the state of our system at a lower level, the Centre seems reluctant to support schools and situations that would have been resolved before IPS now seem to drag on indefinitely. I see a Government that is hell bent on the implementation of autonomy at the expense of the system and leaders, school staffs and students being collateral damage.

Phil Riley, in his research into the health and wellbeing of principals, acknowledged that the current levels of stress caused by offensive behaviour, over work as the result of ever increasing job demands, lack of trust and higher levels of compliance have resulted in significantly lower levels of personal wellbeing. I, during my 17 years in school leadership positions have been personally assaulted, threatened and abused, not frequently as I considered myself an effective leader, but enough to register increased levels of stress. Dealing with alcohol and drug affected adults, caught in a spiral of poverty is never easy.

Phil's number one recommendation is to ***adopt a whole of government approach to education*** and to ***stop looking for short-term quick fixes.***

He cited the example of what happened in Finland, when over 40 years ago the government of the day realised, as a result of economic difficulty, they need to invest in their people by and **depoliticize education**. Since then there have been 20 changes of government, but education has not been a political issue. Since then Finland has become one of the world's best education systems.

I believe there is a message in that for all of us.

Kim Dullard

SSTUWA School Leaders Organiser

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