



Submission

to

Education and Health Standing Committee

Inquiry into the Department of Education's Independent Public Schools Initiative

Submitter: Angela Briant, General Secretary

Organisation: INDEPENDENT EDUCATION UNION OF WESTERN
AUSTRALIA (IEUwa)

Address: 20/63 Knutsford Avenue, Rivervale

Phone: 08 9373 1000

Fax: 08 9277 2634

Date: April 15, 2016



The Independent Education Union of Western Australia (IEU) represents the professional interests and industrial concerns of teachers and support staff in non-government schools, early education and care services, post compulsory education and other non-government educational institutions across metropolitan and regional and remote Western Australia.

The IEUwa has a membership in excess of 5,000 teachers and support staff.

IEUwa membership has doubled in size over the last ten years.

The IEUA is a significant national union with more than 75,000 members around Australia.

High Quality Education

The IEU believes that a high quality teaching profession is integral to the achievement of excellent educational outcomes for Western Australia's children and young people.

An important element in attracting and retaining high quality teachers and other staff is to ensure that teaching conditions and staffing arrangements are sound and well supported.

Students thrive in such an environment and have more opportunities to attain quality educational outcomes.

In providing high quality education to the students of Western Australia it is important that both government and non-government education sectors work side by side to meet the needs of students, their families and the community.

The IEU appreciates this opportunity to provide a submission to the **Education and Health Standing Committee** as part of the Inquiry into the Department of Education's Independent Public Schools Initiative.

Summary

As requested by the **Education and Health Standing Committee** the IEU submission will focus on the impact on 'independent' or non-government schools of the Independent Public Schools initiative, in particular in relation to teaching conditions and staffing arrangements

The IEU considers that the IPS initiative is impacting negatively on non-government enrollments. This in turn has direct negative implications for staffing and teaching conditions in non-government schools.

Impact of the Independent Public Schools Initiative

Within a relatively short period of time after the IPS education reform was first introduced in Western Australia in 2009 by the Department of Education (Western Australia) the IEU became aware of an impact on the non-Government Education sector.

IPS schools have increased autonomy and the capacity to make a wider range of school-specific decisions, including decisions on staffing.

The perceived desirability of a school that has been granted IPS status in the eyes of the current school community, prospective students and their families ordinarily leads to the retention or increase of student enrolments.

The pressure on a neighbouring non-government school, particularly when their enrolment numbers have reduced may result in instances where the non-government school:

- Employs new staff, both teachers and support staff on short-term and insecure 'contracts'. This often leads to rapid turnover of staff.
- Employs a disproportionate number of inexperienced teachers
- Employs less specialist teachers and reduces specialist subject offerings

Some evidence from interstate trials supports this concern.

An analysis of the ACT Education Directorate 'financial autonomy trial' for some government schools in Canberra in 2011 – 2013 included information that 70% of the 33 Principals and Deputy Principals who responded to an AEU survey said the impact of being a 'trial' school was negative.

One major concern was that class sizes would increase in an attempt to reduce staffing costs. In most cases increased class sizes lead to less optimal learning experiences and learning outcomes for students.

School leaders who responded to the survey also reported that they overwhelmingly experienced higher administrative workloads during the trial, warning they were being distracted from the task of school leadership while they concentrated on accounting issues.



The perceived desirability of a school being granted IPS status.

'Independent Public Schools and the communities they serve, gain a powerful combination of local autonomy and central support to deliver high quality, tailored and distinctive education experiences' (<http://www.education.wa.edu.au/home/detcms/navigation/about-us/programs-and-initiatives/independent-public-schools/?page=5#toc5>)

Education Department (DETTWA) figures based on census data collected in February 2016 show that for the fifth consecutive year annual enrolment growth rates for public schools have outstripped non-government schools.

For the first time since 1981 (when DETWA began collecting data) the number of students at non-government schools dropped by 0.3 per cent. It appears that the government school sector is increasing in market share.

The Education Minister Peter Collier and DETWA have both identified factors in parents' choosing Independent Public Schools: the distinctive education experience their children will participate in and the ability for parents to have a voice in their children's education.

In those areas where there has been a decrease in the number of students attending non-government schools there are clear implications for the local non-government schools. Reduced student numbers impacts on the federal and state government funding and school fees received by the school. This has a direct and immediate negative impact on staffing arrangements.

Redundancies in Non-Government Schools

Towards the end of the 2015 school year there were many non-government schools where teachers and Support staff were made redundant. To the best of our knowledge and 30 years of experience a greater number of staff were made redundant from non-government schools than in any previous year.

There were between 10- 15 schools at which redundancies took place.



This clearly has a direct and immediate negative impact on these staff members. This is particularly difficult situation in regional areas where employment opportunities are limited.

The IEU considers that the end of the mining boom and resulting economic implications has undoubtedly had an impact of non-government school enrolments.

A number of the non-government schools where staff were made redundant were schools with a public school with IPS status in the same geographical location. For example, Living Waters Lutheran School in Halls Head experienced a high level of redundancies and it is within walking distance of a Halls Heads Primary school, which has IPS status.

Staff redundancies may also result in the narrowing and/or diminution of subject options for students, particularly in both smaller metropolitan schools and regional schools. This is a significant matter as it may negatively impact on future career choices for those students.

Competition

There has been well documented public concern that the roll out of the IPS scheme has resulted in the creation of a new tier of schools; government schools that now have a structure that is similar to that of a non-government school.

A school with IPS status is one that operates autonomously making decisions on the basis of the unique make up and character of their school and community. This autonomy is what has always allowed non-government schools to create a unique and distinctive education experience, a feature that is now being promoted as a key benefit of IPS.

Concern about competitiveness between non-government schools and those with IPS status is not a new concept. Gobby (2013) explores the criticism that the autonomy created by the IPS structure encourages principals to be 'entrepreneurial and competitive'. Gobby writes about a Principal, Bridgette who confirms that this has been the practice in some IPS schools. She identifies this as occurring in higher socio-economic areas where schools with IPS status are in a position to compete with non-government schools.



The large number of government schools seeking to be granted IPS status (135 schools have registered for the IPS briefing day in 2016) and the data collected in the 2013 IPS review by Melbourne Graduate School of Education identifies IPS status as highly desirable.

This view is supported by anecdotal feedback from parents at both IPS and non-IPS schools who support the IPS program and see the benefits of the program to create 'better' schools. Competition in itself may have a positive influence in that school practices and processes, including teaching are reviewed and finessed.

However there is also the potential for competition to result in cost-cutting, with less funds dedicated to experienced teachers and specialist programs.

The confusion around the nomenclature of IPS

The IEU also takes this opportunity to note that the terminology **Independent Public School** has led to some confusion amongst both the wider community and the education community. The term 'independent' has historically been used to identify non-government schools.

This is illustrated by the name of our union the *Independent Education Union*, representing employees at non-government schools and also *AISWA* the Association for Independent Schools; the body representing the non-government school employers.

The use of the term 'independent' to refer to government schools has caused confusion as to which 'group' the schools granted IPS status belong.

As an indicator of community confusion the IEU regularly fields queries from education students as to which union they would join if they were teaching at a school with IPS status.



Conclusion

The IEU acknowledges that the benefits of a public school being granted IPS status may have a positive impact on the educational outcomes for West Australian students.

However we note that the creation of a second tier of government schools that encourages negative competition between government and non-government schools may lead to diminished outcomes for teaching condition and staffing arrangements. This has a direct relationship with the quality of teaching and student outcomes and may lead to a diminution of both.

The IEU would welcome the opportunity to appear before the committee to speak to our submission and present additional anecdotal feedback from our members in more detail.

The IEU supports the principles that both the Government and non-Government education sectors providing high quality education and complement each other.

Significant changes to either sector need to be monitored so that any impact is noted and assessed in regard to impact on the other sector.

SOURCES

canberratimes.com.au/act-news/schools-autonomy-trial-scaledback-20130723-2qhpt.html

*Issues in Educational Research, 2013, Vol 23(1), 19-34, **Enacting the Independent Public Schools program in Western Australia**, Brad Gobby Curtin University)*
<http://www.iier.org.au/iier23/gobby.html>

