

EDUCATION AND HEALTH STANDING COMMITTEE

Twelfth Report — “Committee’s objection to the Government’s response to IPS Report Card: The Report of the Inquiry into the Independent Public Schools initiative” — Tabling

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms L.L. Baker): Member for Eyre.

DR G.G. JACOBS (Eyre) [11.51 am]: Madam Acting Speaker, you were going to call me the member for Esperance, I know! I present for tabling the twelfth report of the Education and Health Standing Committee entitled, “Committee’s objection to the Government’s response to *IPS Report Card: The Report of the Inquiry into the Independent Public Schools initiative*.”

[See paper 4898.]

Dr G.G. JACOBS: The committee was of the view that it behove us to redress the allegations to us as a committee of bias, lack of objectivity and erroneous findings and recommendations made by the government in its response to our report, “IPS Report Card: The Report of the Inquiry into the Independent Public Schools initiative.”

The Committee undertook significant work as part of its inquiry into the independent public schools initiative. I draw the Assembly’s attention to the 32 submissions received and eight hearings conducted during the course of the inquiry upon which the report is based. At no time in the beginning, middle or the end was the committee biased in conducting its inquiry. Highlighting the number of negative findings compared with positive findings in the government’s response does not, in our view, indicate our bias or a lack of objectivity. Rather, it indicates our aim of identifying matters that need attention for the purpose of making the initiative better. Indeed, we support the autonomy concept. We also continue to stress that all education reform needs to be based on the paramount principle of improving student outcomes. I will say that again because I think it is, really, very important. We stress that any education reform needs to be based on the paramount principle of improving student outcomes, otherwise, what is it all about? In particular, as the chairman, I would like to address that the committee responded to the government’s allegedly more misleading and erroneous claims of the report. I will list the responses as follows—there are four, Madam Acting Speaker. The first states —

- Despite the government response’s long-winded account of the papers which supposedly support the link between autonomy and improved student outcomes, we refer again to the significant volume of literature discussing the complexities of the relationship, as noted in the University of Melbourne’s review of the IPS initiative in 2013. As the Director General of the Department of Education said at hearing, “you can find research either way about a direct correlation with greater autonomy and student outcomes.”

This indicates that there is no scientific evidence or repeated evidence of a correlation between autonomy and improved student outcomes. We can postulate how student outcomes could be affected and how autonomy could improve it, but we are saying that there was no literature evidence that that was the case. The other issue around the long-winded response to the education department is that we have not waited long enough. A report from New Zealand states that we have to wait for two generations before we can see an effect. The IPS initiative has been around for about six years now since the first schools were introduced. We would expect that there would be some evidence of improved outcomes.

The second response states —

- The Committee’s concerns that the IPS initiative exacerbates a two-tiered system by allowing IP Schools to select the more appropriate teachers, leaving less suitable —

The words are chosen very carefully —

teachers available for positions at non-IP Schools, was a major concern raised by many submitters and witnesses at hearings.

It was not only us who raised these concerns —

To suggest that these concerns originate from a regressive centralised unionised lobby is insulting.

The third response states —

- It is difficult for the Committee to understand the Government’s position that principals in IP Schools are not faced with increased administrative duties.

Again, we are not saying this; it is the information we were getting —

The increased autonomy of an IP School by its very nature increases the workload of principals as administrators, chief executive officers, chief financial officers, and educators. How can principals be more autonomous yet not have more administrative tasks? Further, the Director General of the

Department of Education would simply not have time to effectively line manage 445 (now 524) principals, providing them with appropriate levels of mentoring and support.

This is particularly the case as the model for directors and principals has now been disbanded.

The final response to the allegations in the response to our report is very short. It states —

- The Committee’s justified concerns about the rigour of school performance monitoring are demonstrated by the inconsistencies between schools being selected to become IPS, findings of the Department of Education Services’ reviews and findings of the Expert Review Group.

There was evidence of a particular school that was subject to an expert review and, in fact, it actually became an IPS. We sometimes question some of the inconsistencies in the rigour of school performance and monitoring. That is the point we make. I reiterate that we supported the concept of the IPS initiative and, to put it in education parlance, we believe that there were some lessons to be learnt! We provided those lessons in this report and to Parliament. The concerns raised by the committee did not materialise out of thin air. We worked very hard at this and we did not think it up of own volition; we actually listened to the people who came before us at the hearings and read the submissions that we received. That is what a committee does and should do.

Nothing in this world is ever perfect; we are not perfect. I think it is really important to have a parliamentary committee system so that we can look at matters forensically and listen to the people involved in education—in this case in the independent public school system—and report to this place after due consideration as a committee. The concerns we raised were based on the evidence received during the inquiry. They highlight ways in which the initiative can be improved so that, most importantly—this is the most important matter—our kids receive the best education. That is what we want. I am happy to provide this report. I think it was important, as part of the committee process, to redress some of those allegations and again justify our concerns, but that justification is well based.

I have thanked the executive, but I want to thank it for the work over the term. I think we have been a pretty good committee that has worked pretty well and played the ball. We wanted to play the ball, not the man. I think that is an important contribution. I thank all the members of the committee: the member for West Swan, the member for Mirrabooka, the member for Hillarys and the member for Murray–Wellington. I thank the committee staff for their great work: Alison Sharpe, Catherine Parsons, Alice Jones earlier, and Franchesca later in the proceedings, particularly in the Aboriginal youth suicide inquiry, the report on which we presented earlier today.

I wish everybody a merry Christmas, and I look forward—the constituents and God willing, but not necessarily in that order—to seeing you next year.

[Quorum formed.]

MR R.F. JOHNSON (Hillarys) [12.04 pm]: I wish to follow on from what the Chairman of the Education and Health Standing Committee has said. In doing so, I first of all thank my colleagues on the committee for the work they did on the inquiry into the independent public school system, including you, Madam Acting Speaker (Ms J.M. Freeman), but I know you cannot respond from your current position. I once again thank the committee staff for the tremendous work they did on all the reports we delivered to Parliament, but particularly this one because of the very, very short time frame we had to respond to what I found to be an appalling response from the Minister for Education. It was not necessarily a government response; it was from the Minister for Education. I have known him a long time, and I could tell from the way the report was written that it almost certainly came from his ministerial office rather than the Department of Education. I found the description he gave to the committee I serve on absolutely insulting. He described the committee as biased. I have never really seen that before. That is a disgraceful term to use against a committee. If there was any bias, I would say it was coming from him rather than the committee members.

The committee members took on this inquiry in good faith. No politics were to be involved—none whatsoever. There was a genuine concern. It was either you, Madam Acting Speaker, or the member for West Swan who wanted to have a close look at the independent public school system. I was more than happy to go along with that and we carried out a very thorough inquiry. Many people gave evidence at the hearings, and as a committee all we did was take that evidence, compile it in a report and deliver that report to Parliament. Because the report did not find that the IPS system was a 100 per cent wonderful utopia at this stage—I stress “at this stage”—the minister got a bit precious and started insulting members of this committee. It was absolutely insulting; I had never seen it before. The independent public school system was initiated under, from what I remember, Hon Liz Constable, who was an extremely good and honourable Minister for Education. I think she did a fantastic job. Her life as a minister was cut short by eight months, which was unnecessary. She should have been allowed to carry on, and I think she would have carried on with the independent public school system that she had put in place.

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Thursday, 17 November 2016]

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Many people came forward who were very much in favour of the independent public school system, and indeed I think I am. My background is in independent public schools in the United Kingdom. We had local communities that ran or oversaw the schools. The governing body, or school council as we would call it here, had the right to take on their own principals. They also had local representatives on the school councils, and the principals had the authority to select and employ the best teachers who they thought would deliver the best education for their pupils. At the end of the day all we are really interested in as a committee and as a Parliament is providing the best education we can to the children of this state. The committee set out to try to find out whether it is the best system, and it certainly came up with a view that it is a very good system. It is not perfect, and there are some shortcomings. We accept that after such a small number of years it is very difficult to have 100 per cent positive outcomes. But why would the Minister for Education be so precious and sensitive to take such offence at a committee report in which there was no bias whatsoever? I took great offence at his comments that the report's authors lacked objectivity. The committee finds those statements offensive and unfounded.

The minister said that the report was heavily biased. I do not believe it was heavily biased. I think it was very accurate. The report was obviously authorised and adopted by the members of the committee, but the staff put a lot of this together on the evidence and submissions given to the committee. The minister should not shoot the messenger just because we delivered an honest report. The minister may be a bit precious and sensitive about it, but any reasonable person would accept some criticism of a system and say, "Okay, we accept that and we'll try to do better." That has not been the case. The Minister for Education is accusing members of a committee I serve on as being biased. That is an insult to not only the members of the Education and Health Standing Committee but also everyone who gave evidence—the members of the public, the members of the teaching profession, the members of the State School Teachers' Union, the principals and the deputy principals. I believe he has insulted all the people who gave evidence to our committee with his comments that their evidence was biased. People from all walks of life gave evidence; some were for it and some were against it, but they came forward with honest submissions, some of which were critical and some were not. Overall, the committee thinks the IPS initiative is quite a good system but it is a bit early to say it is an absolute success. I suggest that the Minister for Education take a good look at himself in the mirror and see whether he is doing the best job he should be doing and can accept honest criticism from members of the public and people from the teaching profession—not from the committee. The committee was simply reporting what the witnesses said to us as a committee. That is all we are doing.

As far as I am concerned, no bias was shown whatsoever in that committee. Some people say it is an opposition committee because there are three former ministers and two Labor members on it. I take that as an insult. That has been said by certain ministers and certain people in and around this place. Members of our committee do an honourable job. They feel insulted and I feel insulted. I did not want to simply take on the chin the minister's comments and say that the minister can have his own way and he can have the last word without responding to what I believe was a disgraceful submission from the minister himself. This submission was from the minister; it was not from the education department. The minister needs to take good stock of himself, stop being so precious and try to do a better job as the Minister for Education.

DR A.D. BUTI (Armadale) [12.12 pm] — by leave: I was listening to the comments of two members on the Education and Health Standing Committee's report entitled "Committee's objection to the Government's response to *IPS Report Card: The Report of the Inquiry into the Independent Public Schools initiative*", which I have not seen but I want to make a couple of comments because I sit on the school management committees of about eight or nine of my local schools. All bar one are independent public schools, and the last one is about to become an IPS. I think the IPS philosophy is appropriate. We should be trying to involve more local decision-making in education. However, we must be very careful with the potential for inequality to become greater in the sense of independent versus non-independent schools. From the way things are going, I think all schools will soon be IPS. I think 50 or 60 schools became IPS this year. I think government and the Department of Education have to make a decision about whether the department will continue with the IPS model, and I think it will. I think every school should become an IPS, but, of course, they must meet certain eligibility criteria, otherwise the problem of the divide mentioned by the member for Eyre will occur. The majority of so-called more able teachers will want to go to IP schools. Some very good schools are not IPS and they are being unfairly tarnished as non-IPS and that is the problem with a two-tier system.

We have to be careful when we say IPS. It is not a full IPS scheme. The department still has a great deal of control. In some ways it has allowed the government and the department to very nicely get around funding issues by saying, "It's a one-line budget, you deal with it." Non-IP schools also now have one-line budgets. Whether they are IPS or non-IPS, schools have a one-line budget. Many of the principals in my electorate are tearing out their hair trying to make sure that the money stretches, but they are told by the department, "You've got the one-line budget; you sort it out." The philosophy behind IPS is the way forward because if the principal has a greater say in recruiting staff and, ultimately, the ability to terminate staff employment, it can create a better

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linkage between the principal, the school and the teacher. If a monolithic department such as the Department of Education determines where people go, they become a number in the system. I was formerly a teacher in a private school and did relief teaching in a public school; I did not do full-time teaching in a public school. In a public school, teachers are generally numbers but in a private school, they have a greater affinity with the school and the administrative staff. As the member for Hillarys said, it is too early to be definitive, but I do not think we can say at this stage that IPS has resulted in improved academic achievements. I think the committee's report came to that conclusion. Although I am in favour of IPS because I think it allows very good principals to be more innovative and more flexible and to match the number of staff to the student population, we cannot at this stage say it is improving academic performance. That will come about with better teachers, better resourced teachers and better education assistants et cetera.

In conclusion, I have two comments. There is a requirement now that all students pass the Online Literacy and Numeracy Assessment before they can graduate from secondary school. The problem with that is that many, many students from culturally and linguistically diverse and Indigenous backgrounds and students with special needs will never graduate from secondary school. That is a crying shame. The member for Forrestfield mentioned, I think in estimates hearings, that a couple of students in one of his schools are A-students but they have a learning problem that prevents them from passing OLNA, so they cannot graduate. I think that is absurd. Everyone should be able to graduate. Perhaps the graduation certificate should indicate whether they have passed OLNA or not. It is a real shame that policy has resulted.

I have forgotten the other point because I did not prepare any notes, so hopefully, I will remember it over the Christmas break. I thank members for their indulgence in allowing me leave to make a few comments.