

**EDUCATION AND HEALTH
STANDING COMMITTEE**

**INQUIRY INTO THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION'S
INDEPENDENT PUBLIC SCHOOLS INITIATIVE**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
MONDAY, 16 MAY 2016**

SESSION FIVE

Members

Dr G.G. Jacobs (Chair)
Ms R. Saffioti (Deputy Chair)
Mr R.F. Johnson
Ms J.M. Freeman
Mr M.J. Cowper

Hearing commenced at 3.16 pm

Mr RICHARD STRICKLAND

Director General, Department of Education Services, examined:

Dr PETER WOOD

Assistant Director, Department of Education Services, examined:

Mr TERRY WERNER

Director, Higher Education and Legislative Review, Department of Education Services, examined:

The CHAIR: On behalf of the Education and Health Standing Committee, I would like to thank you for your appearance before us today. The purpose of this hearing is an inquiry into independent public schools. Graham Jacobs is my name. I am the chair. On my left is Janine Freeman. On her left is Murray Cowper. On my right are Alison and Alice, who are the executive who help us and keep us on track and make sure it all runs very smoothly. Hansard is recording the proceedings today. The Education and Health Standing Committee is a committee of the Legislative Assembly of the Parliament of Western Australia. This hearing is a formal procedure of the Parliament and therefore commands the same respect given to the proceedings of the house itself. Even though the committee is not asking you as witnesses to provide evidence on oath or affirmation, it is important that you understand that any deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as a contempt of Parliament. But generally we are a pretty friendly group and we want to have a discussion on, and improve our understanding of, IPS. If you mention any document, can you give the full title for the record for Hansard.

Before we commence, there are a number of procedural questions I need to ask you. Have you each completed the “Details of Witness” form?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIR: Do you understand the notes at the bottom of the form about giving evidence?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIR: Did you each receive and read an information for witnesses sheet provided with the “Details of Witness” form today?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIR: Do you want to ask us any questions about how this is going to go?

The Witnesses: No.

Mr M.J. COWPER: This is to whoever wishes to answer. I understand that most schools now are IPS.

Dr Wood: Four hundred and forty-five of the government schools are IPS with another 50 to be announced later this year.

Mr M.J. COWPER: Have any relinquished their positions as IPS schools?

Dr Wood: No, not that I am aware of.

Mr M.J. COWPER: I understand you are looking after the process of implementation and the feedback coming from the introduction of it.

Mr Strickland: Is it worth me explaining what we do?

The CHAIR: I am sorry; I forgot to invite you to give us a bit of an overview before we start.

[3.20 pm]

Mr Strickland: Yes, an overview of what our role is and what it is not, I guess, as well. We have a responsibility for doing reviews of the independent public schools and we are independent from the Department of Education in doing that, although we provide our information to the director general of the Department of Education, the chair of the school, the principal of the school and also to the Minister for Education.

To tell you what the nature of the reviews are, they are more of a peer review in that the school does its own self-review and it does this after its first three-year delivery and performance agreement. We go in and validate their self-review and commend things that we see that they have been doing right and make recommendations around areas where we think they have not quite met the requirements of their delivery and performance agreement. We look at the targets in their delivery and performance agreement when we are doing that review and their operational plan that comes out of that delivery and performance agreement and we focus on a number of areas. We have to bear in mind their context and the sort of school they are, where they are et cetera. We look at their self-review process to see how that went because that is what we are validating and we look very closely at whether they have improved student learning, whether they have improved the learning environment and whether what they have been putting in place is sustainable through time. We use a panel of reviewers who are basically ex-district directors, principals from both government and non-government schools, private and Catholic, in doing this job. They go through a selection process and we are providing ongoing professional development for them and moderating them to make sure that similar standards of reviews are being done.

The CHAIR: How many are there, Richard?

Mr Strickland: We got 38 in August. Some of them do non-government schools. How many on the independent public schools, Peter?

Dr Wood: There are forty-three.

Mr Strickland: As for things that we do not do, we do not duplicate what the director general does in terms of making sure their finances are all right and ensuring they are following Department of Education policies, legislation et cetera. We do that with non-government schools. That is not our job here, and we are not responsible for the overall evaluation of the program. We are not looking at how good the IPS program is across the board—whether it is improving school learning or whatever. We are going in and doing reviews of particular schools, school by school. That is what our role is and function is.

The CHAIR: Is it around education—I think you said “learning outcomes”?

Mr Strickland: Yes. For each school we look at how they are going in terms of their learning outcomes and their learning environment. We are looking at how well they are actually doing their planning, how much they are using data; looking at where their strengths and weaknesses are, how they are doing whole-of-school planning and aligning their resources to enhance their strengths and improve on their weaknesses.

The CHAIR: Richard, sorry to interrupt—what is the quality overall of the self-review process in IPS schools?

Mr Strickland: What we have had, the feedback we have had—we put this in the submission—has been, I would think, excellent, because basically we do a survey of the principals each year and if you look across the various areas that they report back to us on, you would find that 95 per cent, well over 90 per cent generally, of them are happy with how the process went.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Do you actually, apart from reviewing the principals, do a process that gives them a tick off, go back and do a review with any of the board members or any of the council members to find out whether the process was what they had anticipated or expected or whether they felt the process was worthwhile?

Mr Strickland: Do you want to comment on that?

Dr Wood: Yes, I can. Yes, the short answer is. We send a survey to the principal after the report is done, signed off and the review is finished, and also one to the board chair, and questions along the lines of: how was the manner of the reviewers, did the school have a chance to present its data fairly, were they heard, and did they have the opportunity to look at the factual accuracy of the report? All of the aspects of the review we couch in terms of how well did we do that as a department in undertaking the review of that school. I should add that we have not done the review survey of the board chairs up until this year; this is the first time we have done that because it is the time we have started to re-review schools.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Other than the board chair, none of the other board members get an opportunity to do that?

Dr Wood: We send it to the principal and the board chair because they are the two co-signatories of the delivery and performance agreement.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: If someone on the board wants to make a complaint about the process that you have done, or the people you sent out to do it, how do they go about doing that?

Dr Wood: They can write directly to us or contact either Richard or —

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: But there is no formal process.

Dr Wood: Only through the survey, the opportunity at the school, because we do meet with other board members at the school as well. We have a close-out meeting—an exit meeting—prior to leaving the school where all of those issues can come up where we are actually clarifying elements of our findings; getting that sorted out before the report is actually written.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: You have a close-out meeting?

Dr Wood: Yes. We call it an exit meeting.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I have done three of these; I have never had a close-out meeting so I have never known anything called a close-out meeting.

Dr Wood: An exit meeting is typically the principal, the board chair and the reviewers, and whoever else they want to invite in. But we say —

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: But are the board members made aware that there will be a close-out meeting when they have that first meeting with board members?

Dr Wood: We negotiate the agenda with the principal prior to the review commencing—that is about a month before. At that stage what we say to the principal is: can you suggest who should talk to these different items, lines of inquiry, for the two days we are in the school? We make it very clear that there is an expectation, if possible, that the board chair would be there at the first meeting where we are setting the scene and learning about the culture of the school and context. Similarly, at the end, at the close out, when we are wrapping up our initial thoughts and findings.

Mr Strickland: The other stakeholder whom we meet with at least once a year is the director general, because she would also, if there were issues and complaints from school councils, principals or whatever, be a focus for those sorts of issues. But, generally, our feedback from her has been extremely positive.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: What happens if you guys go in and do a review in terms of that and give a report that says that all is fine and you are meeting your DPA, and then the Department of

Education sends in an ERG group six or seven months later? Do you then go back and have a look at your reports?

Dr Wood: We are not aware of when the ERG visits take place so that is not part of it.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Does the department not tell you that or does it just not fit into what you do? Why, on one hand—we have been told of at least one instance where there has been a report from Education Services saying “Tick off. All good. Independent school meeting what they need to; thanks very much”, and then six months later it gets ERG-ed.

Mr Strickland: The Department of Education looks at more than we do—as I have said, financial viability, following its policies, observing its legislation et cetera. There could be elements of that that the ERG is looking at or they have had other information than we have gathered. It can depend. Things can change over a period of time when you get changes in leadership and what have you.

[3.30 pm]

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: That was a pretty short time frame, though; this is six months.

Mr Strickland: Six months, yes, but depending on what has happened in that school.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: They do not come and tell you about that so that you can be aware of it?

Mr Strickland: I would imagine if there was an issue in terms of this was coming up on an ongoing basis that they were having to do ERG reviews, and what they found out of that was not matching what we have been doing, the director general would have brought this up with me when I have been meeting with her, and that certainly has not come up.

Dr Wood: If I could add there, Richard, if I may, that it could very well be the case that we identify that a school’s results are not at the level that they are expected to be or that they were hoping to achieve, and that in a period of three years’ time when we come back and do a report of the school again that once more the results are not to the level that they should be. In our discussions with the director general of the Department of Education, she has said, “I need to intervene in those instances.” That, I think, is part-response to your query that our report is saying these are the states of play in that school, but we are not the ones that action any follow-up to that. We are writing the report to her, and clearly an ERG report is where she would take action.

Mr Strickland: Could it be that after she has got the report from us when they have looked through what we have suggested as school improvements, that has raised concerns that might in fact generate an ERG?

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: We have not been told the school. We have the education department in here next week, so we will ask the school. We may come back and we can have a look at both and come back and ask you some questions about that. I am sure it would be better if we know the actual instance. The problem we have is that we have evidence that says they got ticked off by you guys, DES, and six months later—I think that is what they said; it was just evidence we just received—they got ERG-ed, and you are, like, nowhere.

Mr Strickland: Is that just one instance?

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: That was just the evidence today. I think that was the question, and it was not suggested that it was a one-off but they did not say it was multiple either. We did not ask which school. We probably could have asked which school it was. It is easier to ask the education department that question.

Mr Werner: Our process asks how the school is going on its own terms. I imagine that if the ERG is interested, the question might be: how is this school going on other people’s terms? In other words: how does it compare with all the others? That may be information that the DG of education has. It is not information we go to. We look at the targets they set in their business plan and ask questions about how they are going in respect of those.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Why do you need to do that? Why can the education department not do that? Why do they need to pay you to do that?

Mr Strickland: They do not pay us.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Sorry. You do it because it is less resources they have to use. You have answered my question now. That is why they get you to do it.

Mr Strickland: It was a policy decision of government. That is how it came about. The feedback we have had is that schools have a strong preference. They like the fact that an independent body is doing the review.

The CHAIR: Richard, do review findings ever go as far as to conclude that an IP school has failed in its DPA commitment? If they did, what processes would follow?

Mr Strickland: I think where there are improvements, that often relates to the fact they have come a bit short in terms of the targets in their DPA. But it does not mean that the school is overall failing or what have you. It is pointing out that it was striving for particular targets and has not been able to get to that target. There could be a number of reasons. They might have set themselves too ambitious a target. These targets are negotiated between the school boards and the schools themselves and—we would sign off, not in the business plan but in the DPA—any targets get signed off with the director general of Education. I would not view it as their falling short, as being a failure of the school; it just has not met some of the targets that it was shooting for.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: It is almost a self-review process. You just manage that self-review process, do you not?

Mr Strickland: We validate it. We go beyond it because we are making recommendations. It is a peer review. They do their own review and then our reviewers look at how well they did that. They look at the process. They also look at, and add to, “There are these things you haven’t seen that would improve what you’re doing.”

The CHAIR: Can you outline the survey process? You mentioned a little bit about a survey. How does that work and where does it fit into the system and the time line of any review of a school?

Mr Strickland: Our survey of the principals and the chairs?

The CHAIR: Yes.

Dr Wood: Once the report has been finalised and endorsed by Richard and the reviewers and sent off to the minister, the director general and the school, a couple of weeks after that we send out the survey form for the first time. As indicated before, it goes to the board chair. We deliberately do it that way so that the school has had a chance to get over the whole review process and think about what has worked and what has not worked, and it cannot be seen that their survey answers would be affecting the quality of the report. It is done after the fact.

The CHAIR: This is not an anonymous process. The argument has been put that if it is not anonymous, you may think that a positive result is self-perpetuating because schools would be reluctant to provide negative feedback in case it prejudiced their future review. This process is, “Yes, I think the process is fantastic; I think da, da, da, da”, because that is a positive, self-perpetuating thing. How many boards and principals would say, “No; I thought the whole system was crap and basically I didn’t think it was a good reflection of our school”, or whatever; if there was some negative thing. How many principals and school boards would actually criticise the process and, therefore, it could be argued that it is a self-perpetuating thing and is, therefore, of no value.

Dr Wood: We ask what areas could be improved and principals do respond in that manner. We ask about the quality of our induction processes, telling them about the lead-in; were they familiar with

what was required of schools. And we ask about each of those aspects to work out whether we could be doing something differently. It is on a Likert scale, so they can rate us; it is not necessarily a yes or no. There are varying degrees of response there. We similarly say to them: What could be done differently? What would you do differently? That is a bit self-reflecting. Many schools say, “We over-prepared; I’ve done too much work in this area. I wouldn’t do that again.” It is as much feedback for them, I suppose too, as a bit of self-reflecting on the whole process as informing us about how we can change it or we can do it better.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: The review findings from you guys are sent back to the school but you do not publish them, do you?

Dr Wood: No; the director general of the education department requires that the school make them public. The wording of that has changed a bit over the years but now it is to be made public on the school’s website and Schools Online, which is the education department.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: “Made public” previously could have meant that you stuck it up on a noticeboard somewhere and said, “I made it public.”

Dr Wood: I think some schools did not have web pages in those days. I understand they put excerpts in their newsletters, took it to the school board and worked through that.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: But now it very much has to be made publicly available to the broad public, not just a community —

Dr Wood: Yes.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: That has changed.

Dr Wood: The current one is the school’s website, and I do not think it is an “and/or”. I believe it is “and Schools Online”.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: The evidence we heard this morning from the Western Australian Primary Principals’ Association and the Western Australian Secondary School Executives Association and the principals who came along with the State School Teachers’ Union—but those two principals’ organisations—is that the primary reason they do independent schools is staffing. They do it so they can have autonomy over who they employ. That is the primary reason they are keen on an IPS. You do not get anywhere near that whole issue of staffing, do you, and their staffing choice and check that if that is the primary reason they want to do IPS they have mechanisms around their staffing to ensure those choices?

[3.40 pm]

What they are saying to us is, “We are doing it so we get staff that meet our cohort, to fit our school, to fit what we want to deliver.” Given that is the primary reason principals want to go to IPS, what is your role in seeing whether they are meeting that?

Mr Strickland: That is not our role. We are looking at the school outcomes, basically. Like I said, whether they are improving student learning and I guess to the extent that we look at their learning environment, how the school team is working together and collaborating and doing whole-of-school planning and identifying their strengths and weaknesses is part of that, but the side to do with recruitment and how that is working for them is not something that we investigate.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: When you are looking at school learning, do you look at their NAPLAN results and do you look at their NAPLAN results in terms of year 3s and year 5s? So year 3 cohort in 2014 and then 2016, because they are the year 5s now, and do you look at their increases and stuff like and make comment on those in particular?

Dr Wood: We do. We do that in the month leading up to the two day in-school visit our reviewers are analysing the information the school has sent to us. We are looking at NAPLAN data if the school does NAPLAN tests and they cite that as a measure. Not all schools do. A lot of ed support

schools do not do NAPLAN tests and, similarly, some agricultural colleges; if they have not got year 9 students, which is as far as it goes, then they do not do it either. It is whatever tool they are using, then we look at that data and we compare them with whatever they are using—like schools or similar schools or Australian average—and we take that back to what they set out to achieve. So, whatever their stated purpose was, the target—to improve the reading of the year 7s by X amount or the year 3s by X amount—we look at the data in front-loading our reviewers so that they can develop lines of inquiry when they go into the school to be able to engage informatively about whether the school has achieved that or not.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Is that in the report?

Dr Wood: Yes.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Is it put whether they have actually achieved an improvement in their NAPLAN results in a period of time?

Dr Wood: Yes. If they cite that as one of their targets, then yes. That comes in the student learning section, which is about two or three sections into the report.

Mr Strickland: Has that got more rigorous as we have gone on?

Dr Wood: I think it has. Some of the admissions from principals in the early days were that they were not confident in the way they were setting targets. If they set the targets very low and achieved them, they would get a good report; they would get a good mark. There is no mark; it is not a matter of a pass or fail in that sense. But, of course, with the discussions over the years and schools becoming more familiar with what our process is, it is not a catch-out mentality. It is a matter of us verifying that what they have said, when we go into the school and we talk to the other stakeholders, actually is the state of play, and that is the results that are being achieved.

Mr Strickland: Also, I think it is why it is very important that there are strong boards with good strategic oversight, because they are the ones that are going to push for better performance—most principals would as well. But in terms of being a check on that and what have you, the involvement of the board is very important.

Dr Wood: The early days of the DPA required the board to endorse the business plan and the latest version is saying participate in the development of the business plan and endorse that, so it is more a hands-on role.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Do you check how their involvement was involved in the business plan?

Dr Wood: Yes.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Other than the business plan just being presented to the board, you say, “How did you actually —

Mr Strickland: Quite a lot of the suggestions for improvement are around the board and the board’s strategic oversight and its involvement in the planning process and in the ongoing monitoring, and communicating that to the school community.

The CHAIR: Richard, because a lot of your review process is student focused and focused on learning outcomes, I would like to know: has there been any research done regarding the effects of IPS on student engagement and do you have any insights in this area, because really a system is a system, but where are we going with this system? What is all the reason for it? Central to it all must be the student and for engagement in the system and learning outcomes. So, we can do all this and restructure and have all this stuff happening and do all the mechanics but if it does not actually get traction on the ground as far as students are concerned—what are your insights into the effects of IPS on student engagement and, obviously, improvement in learning areas and learning outcomes?

Mr Strickland: I might start by throwing to Peter and come in after.

Dr Wood: Certainly, it is a key element of our discussions when we get into schools to engage with the students. Of course, that takes a different profile in perhaps a junior primary school through to a senior college, but the level of engagement, the sense of wellbeing of the student in the school, engagement in their learning. Schools are required by the Department of Education or suggested—not required, but suggested—that they should couch their targets in terms of academic achievement and non-academic achievement. The NAPLAN query really does lend itself to a lot of the discussion about academic achievement, plus all the other tools that are out there. The non-academic achievement quite often is behavioural aspects—participation, attendance—and that is the level of discussion it takes with all the stakeholders, but certainly that is a key focus of the discussion with students. It is rare that the students would say something is out of kilter, but they are one more part of our triangulation of the data to find out what it looks like embedded in the school processes.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Do IPSs tend to have student unions or student councils?

Dr Wood: Yes, they do, at varying levels too. Some of the senior colleges have very powerful student groups, but it is all an opportunity for the student voice to be heard, and we engage with that.

The CHAIR: What is your insight into that student engagement at an IPS? I mean, this has been going on for five years now.

Dr Wood: Yes. Really open and honest feedback and at times the reviewers say, “We expect there to be another adult in the audience”, but perhaps not the principal or a senior person, because we really want the children to be able to engage with them openly—and very positive feedback comes through.

The CHAIR: What about engagement of students with the learning program?

Dr Wood: Yes. Well, there are other models in the world where the reviewers sit in classrooms and observe lessons, but we say that is not the remit of our reviewers, but clearly the principal should know about that or the senior leadership of the school and the board. We will engage with those people about the quality of the teaching and learning that is taking place and whether the outcomes are being achieved as a result of effective teaching. We do not sit at the back of the classroom for 30 minutes—it is a limited time, in two days—and then make a judgement about how effective that teaching is, but we will engage with the stakeholders who should know about the quality of teaching and see what their take on it is, and then we triangulate that with the board and parents and what their views are.

Mr M.J. COWPER: How many schools would you do annually?

Dr Wood: It is growing. When we first started we reviewed 34 schools in 2012, then 64, 73, 84; we are 107 this year. Currently, with the announcement of 178 new schools last year, they will be reviewed next year, but we are now in the second reviews of schools coming up as well.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: When you say you are not paid to do it, you must get extra —

Mr Strickland: We are not paid by the Department of Education.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: But you are paid through CRF. You are paid additional funds through CRF that could otherwise go to the education department if you did not do it.

Mr Strickland: How we got our budget to start with is transferred, but not a very great amount of funding, from the Department of Education and we have, basically, managed within budget since then, although we did get a little bit —

[3.50 pm]

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Can you teach them to do the same thing?

Mr Werner: They are not full-time reviewers.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: They are on contracts, are they not?

Dr Wood: They are casual staff.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: So they do not have ABNs. You pay for their workers' comp plus a percentage so they do not get leave loading; is that how you do it?

Dr Wood: We pay them on an hourly rate of the time that they are in the school—time for reading. They keep the time —

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: But they are not contractors; they are direct employee casuals.

Dr Wood: No, they are casual. They need not have an ABN.

The CHAIR: What is your budget?

Mr Strickland: I have not brought that detail.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: If we look at estimates next week and the budget papers, it comes in —

Mr Strickland: It will be in there, yes.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Do you separate out what you do for privates and publics?

Mr Strickland: Yes.

The CHAIR: Our terms of reference actually touch on how IPS would deliver, if at all, learning outcomes and engagement with students with additional needs. I have a personal view that anybody can teach the top 25 per cent of students, and I am not particularly fussed because they will do well anywhere under any means, generally. You might disagree with that. I am sorry; that is a bit broad. What I am really interested in is what happens with the lower 25 per cent of students, and that may include students with special needs. Have you any insights into how IPS could deliver better outcomes for students with special needs? From a political perspective, we went through all this issue around restructure and the whole issue of the student-centred funding model and how educational assistants were being pulled out of school and obviously there is a policy to bring students with special needs into mainstream education and how we are going to support them. Have you got any insights into how IPS could deliver, or not, outcomes for special needs?

Mr Strickland: In terms of those that are performing very well, I will just give you a bit of an overarching in terms of how that school is functioning and then throw to Peter particularly about how it might be working on the ground. What we are finding is that—for some schools, this comes out as where they need to improve—they have really looked at their context and articulated what their strengths and weaknesses are in the student body, where the problems lie et cetera, and, when you are saying those that are falling behind, who are they, what is their background et cetera. They have identified their strengths and weaknesses and then they are doing whole-of-school planning across the years and curriculum levels around how to address those problems and then they are accessing data through time to see how they are going and adjusting their programs accordingly. They are doing that by making sure that all their resources—their budget and their planning et cetera and, I presume, who they recruit and the like to support particular programs—are aligning to those particular areas. That is a sort of overarching. A school that is performing really well is going about its business in that sort of way. But, Peter, can you carry on from there?

Dr Wood: Yes; thank you. Our review process has a set of common features, no matter what sort of school it is. We referred earlier to ed support schools through to agricultural schools. Yes, we would know prior to going into the school by looking at the standardised test data that is available to us—the NAPLAN and results that have been published and also the schools' annual reports that have been published each year. We have done a lot of analysis there and we can actually see where those areas of need are from a data point of view, but we cannot see that until we get into a school and what it looks like on the ground. Irrespective of whether it is a straight mainstream school, for example, or an ed support school, we would be saying to the school: How did you determine the

baseline of student performance data to know what is acceptable and what is not acceptable—we would pose that question to the board as well, because they are having a say in setting the targets? How do you know? Is that good enough? What are the areas you need to fix up or improve upon? Then we engage with them about the strategies they have used, what has been successful and what has not been successful. I suppose what I am saying is it is almost the same line of inquiry but you have to tailor that to the different scenarios of the schools—ed support to an agricultural school; a huge secondary college through to a little country school in the bush that may have two teachers and 20 or 30 students. Nevertheless, they still have to achieve, or should be achieving, the outcomes of the delivery and performance agreement. That is why it is important for us to know the context of what they are doing for them to show against that context—these are the difficulties, these are the celebrations that we have and here is the progress we have made with these students. For many of the ed support schools, they do not necessarily have a whole-of-school target. It is individualised education plans. We will engage with them about: “You set out to do this with this particular child or two or three children with a similar learning need. How did you go? What progress have you made? Is that satisfactory? If it is not, what are you going to do about it?” That is how we engage at those different levels.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: For the special needs schools, what about socioeconomic types or people with CALD backgrounds? Is that different or is that the same?

Dr Wood: It is really important to know, when we are setting the scene for what the school is, whether there is a huge turnover in the demographic or fly in, fly out families. We do not make a judgement that that has an impact, but we ask the school does it have an impact. Children taking holidays in the middle of the year often comes up as one of the problems. How do you deal with that?

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: It is not just for the middle of the year, but large tracts of the middle of the year.

Dr Wood: It is, is it not? Our line of inquiry there is: What impact is that having on the quality of learning? How do you get around that? What do you do as a response, knowing full well that these children are not here or they are leaving and going to the school down the road or wherever? What impact does that have on the quality of the program?

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Yes, and how do they? For example, in some of the schools that I represent, the kids go back to Iraq for a year, which just blows my mind, where they lose all their English and they do no studies while they are there and then they come back and re-enter the school.

Dr Wood: A big part of our questioning there is to know has the school got processes in place to identify that and what are they doing to build upon that. That is almost something out of their control—that the child has gone to Iraq—but knowing that the child has gone to Iraq and comes back, how does that impact on the program that you offer? What do you do as a result? How effective are your actions?

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: As long as they know it, acknowledge it and do something, then you get a tick.

Dr Wood: We want to know how rigorous that is and that is when we double-check when we are asking the parents and the board about how satisfied they are with what is happening here.

Mr Strickland: One of the big benefits of the review is that schools are quite variable in their understanding and capability. Some actually do these sorts of self-reviews on an annual basis. In fact, all schools should because there is an annual report they are supposed to do. Some have only sort of really got to it not long before we have notified them that it is now time. Then they do their first self-review and that is quite revelatory to them about perhaps what they should have been looking more at et cetera. The reviews are a very good educative process in terms of how to run their school. We are hoping, because now we are starting to repeat the process, that for the schools

that have been through it once, we are going to find that there is an upward progress as they go from one review to the next.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I think that is really beneficial for a school to be looking at itself in that way and looking at a student cohort and how they deal with it and what processes they have got in place and what policies and stuff. You may not be able to answer this, but clearly it is invaluable for an IP school to be able to do that. When you give yourself time to reflect on the processes in the school community and what is happening, that gives you a better capacity to plan.

Mr Strickland: Exactly, yes.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: You may not be able to answer this, but do they do something similar in non-IP schools?

[4.00 pm]

Mr Strickland: That would be variable as well. In terms of what we do with—you are talking non-IPS. Sorry. I flicked to non-government. I am not across the non-IPS. No, I do not know.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: So you are not aware of whether something which is of value and benefit to IPS schools, which is going through this process which, as you say, gets them to see what they want to achieve in terms of their outcomes for learning —

Mr Strickland: You would need to talk to the director general about that.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: That is fine.

Mr Strickland: The crux of our whole review process is that there is an understanding that the school should be doing this anyway—if they are implementing practices and programs, they should be reviewing them, and that is a requirement that the director general asks of schools. Instead of our process being an inspectorial one with a checklist saying “Show me this, show me that and show me that, and I will add it up and tell you whether you are any good”, it puts the onus on the school to say, “We know what we are charged with; this is our responsibility now as an independent public school; we have got control of the reins; what are we good at, and what needs to be fixed up, and what are we going to do to fix it up; and how will we then tell our community, our board and our parents”, and we are just another slice in there that says, “We will find out that information”, and we will validate that and whether or not they have got it right.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: When you validate it, in the second round you go back and look at what they said. Do you go back and look at the first report as well?

Mr Strickland: Yes, absolutely.

Dr Wood: But really the first couple of questions are, “These areas were commended three years ago. Have you managed to maintain that? They were successes for you before. Is it still a success? Have you kept that going?” These are the areas where we have suggested, without giving strategies of how they should go about, that these are areas of need—“You need to have a closer look at that and do something about it”, or “The board is not comfortable with this”, or “You were not able to demonstrate that you had collected any information and made a judgement about student learning in that area where you had set a target, and you should do that.” They are the two parts when we come back for a re-review, plus anything that has come out with their data in the period of time since then and their new business plan and new targets. So, we engage them at that level.

Mr M.J. COWPER: So, a big rubber stamp—“well done; can do better next time”.

Dr Wood: There is no summative sort of conclusion like that. It really breaks it down into those areas that have worked particularly well. I guess that is the rubber stamp, saying, “This is recognition of your achievements against what you said you were going to achieve, and you have done it well, against those areas where perhaps you have not met the mark, and this is something you should go back and look at.”

Mr M.J. COWPER: So basically what you are doing is walking them through a self-audit?

Dr Wood: Yes; that is it.

Mr Werner: The universities and other higher education providers at non-universities were subjected to a very similar process by the Australian Universities Quality Agency, or AUQA as it was known at the time. One of the things that the AUQA people did at the end—very similar to what Peter does—was after the dust had settled on the reviews, they would ring the vice chancellor and ask for any reflections, comments and so on. Over and over again, the answer was more or less something like, “We hated it. We did an enormous amount of work to get ready for you. But in hindsight we found out a lot of things about our organisation that we should have known about and we did not know about, and we have adjusted our internal self-review processes in the light of this” and they were sustained in the main, I think. I think that is not to be underestimated.

Dr Wood: I would say the parallel is here with IPS review as well. They really enjoy that professional engagement and that discussion and the bringing in of, “I am here for the school.”

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: They love the tick-off as well. The principals love the tick-off, and they will tell you that.

Mr Werner: Sure, but they also get areas for improvement.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: They do not tell you about that, though! They tell you about the tick-off.

Mr Werner: If you read the reports and enough of them, you will see that some of them have quite a lot of areas for improvement.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: They are not going to say to you, “Here is the report. I have got a tick-off on all these areas but —

Mr Werner: They know how to decode the sentence! The principals know what it really means!

Dr Wood: I think principals acknowledge that the level of buy-in of their staff and their community and their board into the process has been a really significant thing that has happened over the last few years. It is not job of just the principal to do the review and talk to the reviewers, but everyone has a stake in it. The feedback we have had is that it has really changed a lot of the processes in the school and they are very comfortable in doing that.

The CHAIR: I know that the spending of money and one-line budgets does not really come under your brief in the reviews, but would you agree with me that there is some perhaps concern that—I am sure that this is not just around IPS and non-IPS; it is more to do with the student-centred funding model. Under that program, there are certain additional funds that schools get for particular facets, such as Aboriginality, isolation, and students who speak another language. Have you got any comments to make about when that extra funding is attracted to or is drawn to a school, how do know that that money is spent on the students that attracted that extra funding?

Mr Strickland: No. We cannot comment on that. That is not in our remit or in our processes in terms of what we do.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Do you know whether anyone audits that?

Dr Wood: The education department does financial audits.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: They do financial audits that they have spent the money. You do quality audits that they are meeting student outcomes. There is spending the money, and the quality outcomes, but the bit in the middle is whether they are spending the money on the students that they want to get the quality outcomes for. You do not look at that? The education department does the financial audits, but there could be a gap.

Mr Strickland: That is something to ask them. That is not our role.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Yes, but you do that at independent schools, do you not?

Mr Strickland: Non-government?

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Yes, non-government.

Mr Strickland: Non-government schools have to meet standards and they have to meet other requirements, and they have to be financially viable. When we are doing the non-government schools, it is more of a minimum compliance. We are not looking at their effectiveness in the same way as we are with the independent public schools. They need to be meeting all the standards—are they delivering the curriculum; do they have school improvement plans; do they have registered teachers; are their buildings and facilities fit for purpose; do they have policies and processes around a whole lot of things; is the level of care for students adequate, et cetera? We basically tick the boxes and make sure that they are meeting the standards. How they put the money around themselves is up to them. They have just got to meet the standards so far as we are concerned.

The CHAIR: But, Richard, you do not go any further, so if the additional funding was attracted to this one-line budget and that was not actually spent on the students with special needs who needed it, you would see that —

Mr Strickland: Are we talking non-government schools?

The CHAIR: No; we are talking IPS.

Mr Strickland: Those comments were in regard to non-government schools, not IPS.

The CHAIR: Sure. But I put to you that in your review if you saw that in fact this particular cohort within an independent public school was not performing, you might say, “Why would they not be performing? I wonder whether the additional funding that they attracted was actually spent on them.”

Mr Strickland: That is the job of the director general. We send the report to the director general. The director general looks at the report, and then if there is something that needs to be done, I mean other than perhaps letting that inform the next delivery and performance review, if the director general has concerns, she might well bring in the ERG and the ERG might well look at issues about that et cetera. But that is certainly not our role.

The CHAIR: We should wind up soon.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Yes. In terms of that, in looking at independent schools outside of the public system, and independent public schools, is there something that independent schools are doing really well that you know of from your reviews and that you feed back into the independent public schools? Is there a process for that in terms of policy-making for the education department?

Mr Strickland: Some of the reviewers that we have, and we have usually more than one reviewer on the panels, obviously have an independent school background. Some of the high fee schools —

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: There is nothing formal that can happen?

[4.10 pm]

Mr Strickland: Nothing formal. There is not a formal look at what they are doing et cetera. I think you would have to ask the director general. In terms of framing the policy they have for independent public schools, they were looking at those sorts of things.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: You are a source of information around that. There is no capacity formally to be able to cross the line.

I know you do not look at staffing and I know that that is not a factor, but one of my concerns is that the primary purpose for principals of doing independent schools is choosing staff. I am concerned about substantive equity issues, about them choosing diversity—women or people from various backgrounds. Is there any way, when you are doing your assessments, that you look at substantive equity issues—discrimination issues, those sorts of issues?

Mr Strickland: No.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. I now have to put you through this closing statement—sorry, gentlemen.

Thank you for your evidence before the committee today. A transcript of this hearing will be forwarded to you for your correction, as you see fit, of minor errors. Any such corrections must be made to the transcript and returned within 10 days, if you believe that they need correcting. If we do not receive anything from you, we assume that you have deemed it all correct, but we invite you to provide any additional information or elaborate on particular points. New material cannot be added of course, and the sense of your evidence cannot be altered. I look forward to any supplementary submission that you may wish to bring for our consideration. Thank you again for your time; we appreciate it very much.

Hearing concluded at 4.12 pm
