

**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 FOUR

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 2.02 pm

Mrs JANETTE GEE

President, Western Australian Secondary School Executives Association, examined:

Mrs KARENA SHEARING

Associate Principal, Churchlands Senior High School, examined:

Mrs MARY GRIFFITHS

Principal, Armadale Senior High School, examined:

Mr MARK GILLETT

Principal, Department of Education, examined:

Mr ABE KASSAB

Teacher, School of Special Educational Needs: Disability, 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 the inquiry into independent public schools. I am Graham Jacobs; I am the chairman. To my left is Janine Freeman and on her left is Murray Cowper. On my right are Alison Sharpe and Alice, who does the work that keeps us on track and makes sure that all this runs very, very smoothly. The Education and Health Standing Committee is a committee of the Legislative Assembly of Parliament of Western Australia. This hearing is a formal procedure—hopefully, not too formal—and therefore commands the same respect given to proceedings in the house itself. Even though the committee is not asking 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. This is a public hearing and will be recorded by Hansard for the public record. If you refer to any documents, I would appreciate if you would assist Hansard by providing the full title for the record.

Before we commence, there is a number of procedural questions. Have you each completed the “Details of Witness” form?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIR: Sorry about this question: do you understand the notes at the bottom of the form about giving evidence to a parliamentary committee?

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: Before I ask you to state the capacity in which you appear before the committee today, do you have any questions of us in relation to being a witness before us?

The Witnesses: No.

The CHAIR: Ok, we will start at your end Abe and just move through.

Mr Kassab: I am a deputy principal and I am an executive member of the Western Australian Secondary School Executives Association.

Mr Gillett: I am a principal, Western Australian Secondary School Executives Association.

Mrs Gee: I am a principal but I am seconded as the president, full time, of WASSEA, which is the Western Australian Secondary School Executives Association.

Mrs Griffiths: I am principal at Armadale Senior High School and I am here to represent as a committee member for WASSEA.

Mrs Shearing: I am an associate principal at Churchlands Senior High School and I am here today as a member of the Western Australian Secondary School Executives Association.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. Thank you, all, for your time. Janette, would you like to give us a bit of an opening statement, maybe just a bit of an overview, in particular in relation to the description of the implementation of the IPS initiative by the Department of Education in the education space in Western Australia?

Mrs Gee: Yes. So you have our submission.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much for it.

Mrs Gee: The information we got for that was mainly through our WASSEA executive. I will refer to our organisation as WASSEA rather than the Western Australian Secondary School Executives Association. It is a bit of a mouthful!

The first thing I would like to say is that on the whole you will find across the state that secondary principals and deputy principals are pretty well in agreement with the IPS initiative and are happy with the autonomy agenda that has been rolled out. There have been some issues with it from some schools that are feeling marginalised because they have not had the opportunity to be IPS, but I will say that perhaps later in the hearing, where it comes up in our submission. But, in general, we have been pretty pleased with the way it has been rolled out.

At the beginning, as I have said in the submission, it was very, very hard work for the first schools. It was a very rushed initiative. People applied to become IPS and did not find out until right at the end of term 3, and so the training for IPS was all rolled out in term 4. You may be aware of what happens in secondary schools in term 4, but it is probably the most frantic, crazy term in the whole year. There is so much to do and on top of that there was a whole raft of training to do and it was a nightmare for the schools that were involved. I am really pleased to say that the department learnt from that and took the feedback from the schools that were involved at that stage. The training agenda and timetable, I believe, over the next iterations of the initiative that have been rolled out have been much better. They have been well spaced and, in fact, the last one, which—one of the reasons why Mary is here, she is in the very last cohort to have gone through and that was a year-long process where a school is prepared for being part of the IPS cohort, which was far better than trying to learn everything in a term.

The implementation at first, as I say, was very rushed but it was very exciting. It was an exciting time for schools. Schools were really falling over themselves to be part of that first initiative. I think that the schools that came through in that first initiative were ones that had shown themselves to be working in an autonomous way anyway. They were working quite differently than many schools in the state. They were already using the money that came to them. At that stage we only had money that came to us in terms of staffing. So instead of saying, “You have got a budget of \$3 million”, you would be told, “You have got a budget of 100 teachers or 30 teachers”, something like that. If you wanted to do something differently, you had to sell off a teacher and you would have to ask for permission to do that and get it signed off by your director.

[2.10 pm]

Schools were doing that, but they really had to justify what they were going to do. Although there was a degree of autonomy and you could ask your director whether you could sell off a teacher or two and do something a bit different, not everyone had the opportunity to do that. The IPS initiative was really welcomed by those schools that had been working outside the box anyway.

The things that we have talked about as a group that we feel possibly the support could be better for now include looking at the roles of boards and helping schools understand better what the roles of school boards are and how they are different from school councils, because in the act a school board is a school council. There has actually been no change to the education act. The powers of school councils are exactly the same as the powers of school boards. The function, however, is different, really only by the fact that they are in an IPS and called a board; you all agree with that?

The Witnesses: Yes.

Mrs Gee: However, the status of school boards is far greater than that of school councils. With the status that goes with being on a school board comes a raft of different sorts of people that you can attract to work with your school. We were actually having this discussion this afternoon. We do not feel that every school that has come on board with the autonomy initiative understands how school boards can work differently with their school, how they can add value to their school and, I think importantly too, how the board members can find out how they can work on a board more effectively. There is training for board members, but most of the training, as I understand it—Mary and Mark, I know you agree with me; Abe and Karena, you may have different information—is rolled out during work hours. So if you have people that are giving up their time to be on your school board, it really is quite a big task; they have things to read, they have to come with opinions and have a look at your budgets and make sure that they are filling all the compliance roles, and then you expect them to take time off work and go to training. If they do not go to training, it is a problem for the schools themselves when they have reviews, because you are asked if all your board is trained, and not all of them can access training, so there is a problem. There is also a problem then with the delivery of training. It is not on all that often. It is face-to-face training, so it is not accessible to country schools and country board members, unless you can get a whole lot of people together in a country area and bring them in. Mark is in the Busselton area. So you would have to try to negotiate with the other schools around you and bring all the board members in and that could be a couple of hours' drive or more for some of them.

Mr Gillett: Can I just answer that? Very briefly, the request is often processed in a way that “Yes, we are prepared to do board training”—this is from obviously the department—“but we won't deliver it to a single school. It is better if you arrange for a number of IP schools for that.” The onus for that training falls back onto schools. What we are saying is that for schools like ours, and certainly the further away you get from the metro area, that becomes more and more problematic.

Mrs Gee: We propose that if there was a recommendation from this inquiry, perhaps if the board training was rolled into a package that could be accessed online or in a book form or something like that, that might be a lot more useful to schools in rural and country areas but also to people who work in the city. A lot of schools have quite high-flying board members. I literally mean that. They fly around the country. They might be on lots of different boards. They might be politicians. I had a federal politician on my school board, so they are not necessarily here all the time either.

Mr M.J. COWPER: Never mind; you will get over it!

Mrs Gee: Yes! What I am saying is they are not available for the training, so it can take a while. I guess you have my point here.

The CHAIR: Janette, we have heard from the Primary Principals' Association and they had some regulatory guidelines on how you move from being on a council to being on a board. Have you got that?

Mrs Gee: No. They have their own guidelines?

The CHAIR: Yes. They gave us a regulatory guideline statement.

Mr Gillett: To be fair, I think that document is actually on the Department of Education website for public use and it does take parts of the other documents that are there to guide schools. I guess, in essence, what I would say is that information is there.

Mrs Gee: We do not have our own guidelines.

Mr Gillett: No. The information is there, but it is in a broader context and has to be sort of filtered through the school.

Mrs Gee: All the information you need is supplied to you, but it is not always accessible when you need it, as in the training for board members.

Mrs Griffiths: One of the things is when you have board members, depending on which school you are and which district you are at, you have complexities and capabilities of your various board members to be able to ascertain what is actually going on in some of these presentations. I do not mean that in a patronising way either. They come along to support the school in much the same way as the old P&C situation, and lifting that capacity is quite long term to be able to have a look at more involved finances and data analysis and having a look at planning. It is not necessarily what they are comfortable with, so there is training involved in that sort of thing and you do not just have necessarily access to people already trained in that area. That is what we are saying here. It is about the type of training and how accessible it is. We sort of think that probably a little bit of improvement could go on there.

Mrs Gee: I could give you, if you like, an example. My board had quite a few people from —

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: What school are you from?

Mrs Gee: The last school I was at was Yule Brook College.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Are you all IP schools?

Mrs Shearing: Yes.

Mrs Griffiths: Yes.

Mrs Gee: Yes.

Mr Gillett: Yes.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: So there are no non-IP schools?

Mr Gillett: Abe is not.

Mr Kassab: We are not. I am from statewide services. I am from the School of Special Educational Needs: Disability. We are a school but we provide support to schools across the state.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: You are at Leederville?

Mr Kassab: No, at Padbury.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: But is Leederville where your headquarters are?

Mr Kassab: No. That is the IPL; the Institute for Professional Learning. We are part of statewide services.

Mr M.J. COWPER: So you have an eclectic group on your board.

Mrs Gee: On our board? Yes, it is a very varied group.

Mr M.J. COWPER: I thought that was what you were leading to. I was just trying to prompt you.

Mrs Gee: Yes. I lost my head. We had a good representation of industry and community, but we also, of course, had a couple of parents and grandparents on the board who were offered board training and were given the package that came: “This is what your responsibility of being a board member is.” But, of course, when the review came up for the school, they said, “No, we haven’t been trained”, so the school got a bit of a black mark on that. They did not want to go to training;

they did not want to do anything. But we were not going to not have those people on the board. One was an Aboriginal elder for the area, and the school had 40 per cent Aboriginal students, so as if we were not going to have an Aboriginal elder, and the other one was a grandparent of some Aboriginal kids who was very well regarded in the community and brought a lot to the board. What I am trying to say is that how a school should be judged is not just on the capacity of the board members to be able to engage with training. Does that make sense? When you asked, Janine, whether we are all IPSs, Mary has only just come on board with IPS. She was in the last cohort.

Mrs Griffiths: Yes, we are in our second year. We started last year. We are still in a developmental process of improving the capacity of the board, while we are talking about the board, because that is not all we are going through.

Mr M.J. COWPER: The boards last three years. Have you had any problems getting recruits for your boards?

Mrs Griffiths: Yes.

Mr Gillett: No.

Mrs Griffiths: You can tap and nominate and ring people up and do that sort of stuff, but as far as putting it out to the community and asking them to nominate, yes. That is on a personal level at my school, of course. But we have the same issue with quite a few of those sorts of things—capacity or the willingness or the time to come into the school, because they are all busy getting bread on the table.

[2.20 pm]

Mr M.J. COWPER: I am going to declare that I am actually a board member of a primary school. I understand it is for a three-year period, and we are halfway through. When we have a new board member come on—so when they transition in and they transition off—we have a number of nominations, and we will go through in our board and we will discuss the prospects, and usually they are pretty good. I do not know of one instance since I have been there when we have declined them. It will be nice to see how you are faring in other parts.

Mr Gillett: Certainly where we are in Vasse—actually, Cape Naturaliste College—my experience is very similar to yours. The parent body is quite receptive to nominating, and the process is quite explicit again through the department's documents. We have the chancellor—I will say that again. We have ECU representation, we have TAFE representation and we have one of the local accountants on there; they are co-opted members. From a personal perspective, I think it is a good board and a very interesting board. Certainly from where we are as a regional school and the opportunity that people will take to be involved in a school like ours is probably different from the one—perhaps—where Mary is.

Mrs Gee: Karena, do you have any trouble at Churchlands?

Mrs Shearing: No, not to my knowledge.

Mrs Gee: I am going to agree with Mary, because my school is very low socioeconomic. Mary is from our Armadale region. It is very hard to get parents to step up. You really have to ask them, twist their arms —

Mr M.J. COWPER: Frighten them!

Mrs Gee: Yes, to get them in. But I did not have any trouble getting industry leaders, someone from Clontarf, someone from Dare to Lead, someone from Relationships Australia and Ken Wyatt. We had very good board representation, with good people. Those people were not too hard. But certainly we did not have an election, because we did not have people clawing to go on the board. So it does depend a bit on the capability of the principal, but, not only that, the willingness of

the community to step up, as to whether you have enough community representation. Would you say that?

Mrs Griffiths: Yes, definitely.

Mrs Gee: Having said that, I want to say one last thing about boards before we move on, if that is okay. Boards are really one of the major highlights of IPS. Many principals will say they are one of major highlights of IPS. They bring a diversity to the school that we did not have before. They bring a whole lot of people from the community into the school who would not have been interested in being on a school council—even though according to the act it is exactly the same thing—and people become a lot more engaged with the school and you find help in all sorts of ways. It is too broad to sit and talk about it, I guess.

Mr M.J. COWPER: Following on from that, I segue to the next aspect, which is that what I find extraordinary—actually, I do not find it extraordinary because I come from a policing background—is the amount of process and regulatory stuff that you have to get through. It is almost as though they become process-driven and not outcomes-focused, in my view. I am interested in some comment around that.

Mrs Griffiths: We have talked about the workload, and also just reflecting back on boards, too, because the board people come on and have to go through a lot of that. That is a big ask, is it not, to come on and contribute to the school, as opposed to making sure you are compliant and making sure you are accountable and making sure you are all of these things. We have talked about that, and you can say that, Janette, because you have it written down, about our agreement expansion.

Mrs Gee: Our delivery and performance agreement, which is what a school agrees to when they come under the IPS banner, the first one that came out for the first group of IPSs was four pages long, including the signatory page. It is now 11 pages long. I got online to check that today, because I wrote this in the holidays and I did not have one in front of me when I wrote it, but it is definitely 11 pages long. Not only that, the list of accountabilities has grown over the years as well. I am pretty sure that the union would have given you a good account of that when they were in here before us. So, yes, there is a lot more red tape. I do not have a list of evidence to show you, but we feel, and it is coming from every principal group that I deal with across the state because I go to the meetings quite regularly, that things seem to be tightening up. So we had this sort of more freedom with the autonomy agenda, and then it is like, “Oops! Maybe we shouldn’t have given them that bit of freedom, so let’s put another regulation in place that sits under the policy.” I have to say something else though; I want to be quite clear on this: some people have the misguided view that autonomy translates to freedom from compliance to the act and policy, and of course it does not. We are still bound by the education act and we are still bound by the rules that our employer gives us. I believe some of the tightening that has come is because people have interpreted autonomy as freedom to do different things.

The CHAIR: What do they do? That is financial autonomy, is it?

Mrs Gee: They just think that they can do other things—perhaps employ outside of the regulations for staffing, for example. There are not many people who do that. But it does not take many people for everything to tighten up, if that makes sense.

Mrs Griffiths: I think what Janette is also saying is sometimes there are complaints that possibly we do not have enough room to move even though we are IPS. The reason we do not is because we are under the same act. It is not that everybody is going off doing different things.

Mrs Gee: They have a different understanding of it. Most people have a pretty good idea that they need to run their school under the education act and it is not really a problem.

The other thing I have down here and that we talked about today was that the DPA is more prescriptive. One of the things that I noted in the submission we put in is that we feel that it is actually not doable in some cases. For example, it contains the statement that “student and school

characteristic funding is used to implement appropriate teaching and learning adjustments to support demonstrated outcomes of students for whom it is provided.” With the student-centred funding model, you get extra money for five pipelines, as you would know. There is Aboriginality, disability, regional, social disadvantage, and students with another language background. So you have all those. We know who all of those kids are, except the ones with social disadvantage. That is really weird. We supply all the information that they do the little magic numbers with, and it comes out that you get this much money. But you are actually signing an agreement, and your board chair is signing the agreement on behalf of the board, that the money is spent on the students who it is supplied for. But we are not able to do that. So we find that is an anomaly.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I would assume that Armadale gets social disadvantage funding —

Mrs Griffiths: Yes. We do not know which children specifically get it.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: So the school does not get it as a whole; each child has to get it?

Mrs Griffiths: No. What happens is that the funding is calculated on the number of kids from our census who are socially disadvantaged. So, the school does get it, but we have to sign an agreement to say that it is specifically used for the children who need it. We do not know who needs it. That is what Janette is saying.

Mrs Gee: We know who the Aboriginal kids are, so for the Aboriginal funding we can put in a program —

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: And you know who the CALD kids are.

Mrs Gee: Yes. We can demonstrate who they are. We know who the NLD kids are. We can demonstrate that. But we are actually signing a document that we do not believe we can deliver on, because we do not know exactly who the kids are; you do not always know. You can get very nicely presented kids who come to school always in uniform, who are very poor. You have no idea who those kids are.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: And there could be kids from very wealthy backgrounds.

Mrs Gee: Yes. So, it could be misleading. That is just one little point that we wanted to bring up.

Mrs Griffiths: It does not mean that the funding should change, but possibly the agreement should change. When you are putting programs in place for social disadvantage, it does spread across, because there is a very fine line between social disadvantage and the next layer of social disadvantage. At my school, for instance, there are various layers of social disadvantage. What we are saying is it does not need to be more prescriptive about who gets the money —

Mrs Gee: And you do not want to kick kids off and say you are —

Mrs Griffiths: No; you do not want to do that. The schools are capable of sorting out the program. It is just that what you actually have to sign off needs to be a bit more general—the signatory.

[2.30 pm]

Mrs Gee: There is one other thing I wanted to bring up under that training part—the implementation—and that is training for new principals into an established independent public school is not necessarily timely. If the training is offered at the beginning of the year and I take over the school in May, there will be support there, but there will not be the full training suite available for me.

The CHAIR: Like an induction?

Mrs Gee: Yes, and how to use the one-line budget. Everyone is on a one-line budget now. It used to be only IPSs that were on one-line budgets. What a board is—all the different bits and pieces. You could be coming in a little bit blind.

The CHAIR: We have heard that already today, from different people.

Mrs Gee: That is sort of section 1; I do not think there is much more.

The CHAIR: Janette, can I ask you, what is the main attraction for a principal to IPS? Maybe I could ask Mary. What is the main attraction to IPS for a school principal? Becoming an IPS school—what are the big-ticket items that made you go, “Yes I want to be part of this”?

Mrs Griffiths: Being able to select our own staff within the context of our schools, I think that is something that has made a difference. A lot of our staff, probably in the second year of IPS, have their individual processes. It may not have changed very much, but our ability to select staff who actually match the profile of our needs is the number one thing that it has allowed.

Mr Gillett: I think selection for context is an important aspect of it. I would say that is for all IPS schools. The flexibility to be able to go out and, for example, employ somebody who is employed as a public servant level 4 to do roles that traditionally had to go to educational or teacher staff, that has been one of those things.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: What is the example there?

Mr Gillett: We have level 4 public servants who are part-time, who place students in workplaces and VET places for work experience, whereas normally that would be done by a teacher.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: A level 4 public servant is on about \$60 000 a year or —

Mr Gillett: Yes, about that.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: And a teacher would have been about \$80 000, so you save yourself \$20 000.

Mr Gillett: Yes.

Mrs Gee: A teacher would be on about \$100 000.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: So you have saved yourself about \$40 000, have you?

Mrs Gee: Yes, and, you know, you can get two or three education assistants who you can skill up very well in targeted literacy programs, and you can give one-on-one or small-group literacy training very easily under the eye of a teacher, but with people who are very skilled at doing that one job and save yourself a lot of money there as well, and the kids get better outcomes, because you have more of them getting small-group help.

Mrs Griffiths: When we talk about saving money, it is so that it can go to another project. It is about using —

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I am not suggesting you are buying yourself new chairs.

Mrs Griffiths: That is really important, and that is the flexibility of staffing. There are the two areas: there is the flexibility of staffing and there is the ability to choose staff within the context of the need of your specific school. Both of those are very important.

Mr Gillett: There is a downside to that. For example, if I want to reclassify my manager of corporate services from a level 4 to a level 5, I cannot do that. I have to follow the rules. It says that you can only do that when there are 500-plus children in your school, even though the workload of somebody who is in a school of 495 students is probably exactly the same as somebody who is in a school of 501. The management of that is there, and we have had many discussions with the department over that, but that aspect is the other side to what we were just talking about with that whole employment sphere.

The CHAIR: With the positive of appointing your own staff for your needs and for the student cohort, would it be that the other side—the negative part—of IPS is that it has imposed a pretty burdensome administrative role on principals? Not only do they have to be a teacher, an educator and think about education programs, but they have got to run this business.

Mr Gillett: I think that is exactly what we are seeing. I do think there is a spectrum of principals who are quite happy to do that and are very well versed in that but certainly if you take financial management, that is something that we as principals learn on the job. Although there are periods of training, and training is available—I am not being critical of the department in any way, shape or form—it is about making the time to actually do that and go through the department’s system to get those skills in things like management and HR. Again, that training is something that Janette was talking about, with this training for principals that go into that. It is there but, goodness, it is complicated.

Mrs Gee: Having said that, I do not think you will find any IPS principal who would go backwards. I must say that; I do not think any of them would. The problem with employing your own staff is not so much learning how to do it, because it is pretty —

Mrs Griffiths: You have to do that anyway.

Mrs Gee: You have to do it anyway, unless you have got a redeployed person, an employee-initiated transfer, or whatever you want to call them—a surplus-to-needs person—or you just chose someone out of the department pool, which you can do now. You can still do that, so you can remove that big burden of having to create online jobs and advertise and get a whole lot of applicants. There can be a whole lot of work under that, but I do not know anyone who would not want that now. If you ask any of them, they would say, “I would still want to be able to employ for the context of my school.”

The CHAIR: In the one-line budget—whether you are IPS or non-IPS, they are all one line now—with the possible attraction of particular funds from different areas, one of those five areas, is there enough money in the system in that one line for a school to go, “Well, okay, we will employ a financial officer or we will employ a CEO-like person, so we will just let the principal do what he is good at.”

Mrs Gee: The manager of corporate services really does do that anyway. Every school has a manager of corporate services.

Mr Gillett: They used to be called registrars, and then they were business managers once they get to level 5.

Mrs Gee: Now they are called managers of corporate services. Depending on the size of the school, would probably depend on the skill of the person, because they get paid according to the size of the school—level 4, 5 or 6 or whatever—and that person takes over the bulk of the financial management and regulation. But I have to say, as Mark was pointing out, that with IPS—and not just with IPS because everyone has a one-line budget now—those jobs have really blown out for those people, so for them to keep on top of it with the same pay scale, and for principals to keep on top of it as well, I think we have lagged behind in recognising the amount of work they do. We also wanted to point out at the same time we have had drastic cuts in the education budget for three years in a row—I cannot see it increasing this year; it does not look like much has come out through Treasury—within that time, for example, people that support those managers of corporate services in schools have gone from, I think, eight in the metropolitan area to two. There is one person who does the support for the whole of the south west region from Bunbury through to Esperance. There would be one for the northern part of the state. You used to be able to get on the phone and say, “I just can’t make this work; I don’t understand this. There’s no training available for the next three weeks. My budget looks like it is in the red and I know it’s not.” They would take over your computer and sit there with you on the phone or come out and sit next to you and go through and find the problem and talk it through with you. You do not have that anymore. Now people rely on their colleagues’ goodwill to come and help them or work with them on the phone. There is just no help at all from regional centres because they had to cut their number of staff so savagely.

[2.40 pm]

Mr Gillett: Can I also say that the financial management tool that has now been developed is very thorough. How do I put it? It is very thorough —

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Is very complex—extraordinarily complex.

Mr Gillett: Very complex—thank you. In a school such as ours for example, that relies on internet access, we cannot always get to make changes and to go through that in real time. My manager for corporate services, for example, regularly goes to work at six o'clock in the morning so that she can have internet.

Mrs Griffiths: Round and round and round.

Mrs Gee: Many, many schools just cannot get internet during the day that will run the packages.

Mr Gillett: Along with the rest of the school.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I think that is a really good point, though, because if you think about how complex those documents are, having looked at them from a school board perspective, once they said, “But I thought you were on a one-line budget!”

Mr Gillett: Yes. My board regularly looks at the documents that I give them, particularly when they are going to pass the budget for the next year. I have a chartered accountant there and they simply look at it and go, “Why can't you use MYOB?” I really do not have an answer there because I am not financially great; I just go, “Look, this is part of what it is” and they just look and smile and carry on.

Mr M.J. COWPER: How is the impact of managing your leave liability going with your director of something services?

Mrs Gee: Manager of corporate services?

Mr M.J. COWPER: That is the one!

Mr Gillett: That person, like most of the key people, certainly in my school and I am sure I am speaking for everybody else —

Mrs Gee: In all schools.

Mr Gillett: You take that person out and we will find it very difficult to run it in exactly the same way because you are right; it is a very complicated process and to train somebody up means taking somebody away from their job existing in schools already and then showing them that process. Certainly, she manages it beautifully but when she takes leave next year, then there will not be trouble but we will need to —

Mrs Gee: It is very hard to find fill-in people for that role as well. They are as scarce as hen's teeth.

Mrs Griffiths: Is that what you meant or did you mean are they actually organising and managing the leave liability? I thought that was what you meant.

Mr M.J. COWPER: I understand it was centrally controlled and it has now been devolved to the schools to manage. I am just wondering how that additional workload, if you like, will impact on your budgets, directly or indirectly. Also, then there is the matter of you are now having to have a whole bunch of teachers go off on leave.

Mrs Griffiths: That is the issue but it is not a financial issue so much because that is still paid centrally; it does not come out of our budget, the long service leave. However, it is the replacement that is the issue. But we have certainly cut back the leave liability because it had been allowed systemically to go on and on, not just in education, as you know. I have had, as a principal, to sit down with my business manager—because she looks after the non-teaching staff in that area and I look after the teaching staff—and have conversations where they want to take it next year, “Sorry, you can't” and all that sort of stuff. You just have to bite the bullet but it certainly has

opened our eyes to the fact that you cannot let it keep going on, but it certainly is very disruptive to be able to replace teachers who are almost irreplaceable, like an automotive teacher for instance. You might think physics as well, but try and replace an auto teacher in a school—a specific teacher—when they have to take six months. It is difficult. Is that sort of what you are asking? The business manager shares that role with us. She is always coming and saying, “Look, this person hasn’t gone yet” and we deal with that together. But it has a big impact, not so much financially, but just the replacement issue more so. My business manager is on leave at the moment and I am holding my breath for nine weeks to see nothing happens because she is, like Mark, awesome and amazing, and the person who is replacing her is just a normal person.

The CHAIR: Or a year 12 teacher with kids coming up to the TEE assessment.

Mrs Griffiths: We would not let them, probably, take a year 12 class.

Mrs Gee: We can get an exemption for teachers like that to go earlier in the year, next year for example. There is that possibility. The school can make a case.

Mrs Griffiths: In a school like mine, as I say, it is highly likely. First of all, we would not have timetabled them into year 12 because we know they had it, but I can replace an English teacher of year 12 far more easily than, as I said, an automotive teacher.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Half the problem with an automotive teacher, is it not, is because they have a trade but they do not have a qualification to teach?

Mrs Griffiths: No, no. They are just not around; there are not any of them—a teacher who is qualified as a teacher and has the trade qualifications as well. I am using that as an example but they are sometimes the hardest people —

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Is that part of the problem because you are required to have the teacher qualification as well as the trade qualification, whereas in previous years, in a school like yours, if they had the trade qualification and they —

Mrs Griffiths: No. They have never been able to just have the trade qualifications. Usually they just have or they would not be in that area but that has changed. My auto—this is a good example—is on leave for six months. He has been saving it up and said, “Can I come in and just check on my auto centre every week” or whatever because he is scared someone else is going to wreck it; that is what they are like. We have a non-teaching auto. We have had to find someone who is actually a mechanic. He has lectured at TAFE but he has not got a teaching thing and we have had to ask for an exemption so he gets paid less. There are not any; they are just not out there. They are not coming through our universities, some particular —

Mrs Gee: That is not a problem of IPS.

Mrs Griffiths: No, it is not.

Mrs Gee: That is just a problem of schools in general.

Mr M.J. COWPER: One of the phenomena that has occurred at a similar timing was this management of the principles of additional things like that and also the student-funded model and other bits and pieces that have also impacted on top of it as well. So, if you like, it is a perfect storm.

Mrs Griffiths: It is not just IPS.

Mrs Gee: Yes, it has been, and I think for secondaries—primaries may not say it is as bad; I do not know—we certainly had a couple of extra things on top. We had year 7s coming into secondary school. We also had the new WACE come through, which changed for two years in a row. We have had a whole stack of compliances on top of that, and something else that Mark is writing here—and online —

Mr Gillett: NAPLAN and OLNA.

Mrs Gee: But none of these are IPS; these are just all stuff that has happened.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Let us get back to the issue that is particularly important in IPS, which is the capacity to employ staff. The difficulty is that, especially in secondary—I am a member of Parliament for the northern suburbs—there are only three non-IPS secondary schools now in the northern suburbs. That means that they do not have the capacity to not take from the redundancies.

Mrs Gee: From the surplus pool.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: That is right. I have a couple of questions around that but how do you see that having an impact on the quality of education as a total, given that you are saying that is the primary reason why you want to do IPS?

Mrs Gee: Most people would say that is the primary reason. It is a real problem for those schools that are non-IPS and all of us will recognise that. It has marginalised those schools. There are schools whose communities just are not ready to commit to IPS. It is not that they would necessarily have a principal that is not up for the job or who does not understand their community or could not run an IPS, just their community is not in the right place. It is very, very clear when you are applying to be an IPS, especially with the new process, you have got a year to bring your community on board. Some communities just are not there and then you have also got rural and remote communities who want to be part of this school, but they just do not want all the other bits. They do not see any advantage of IPS at all. You end up with schools that have to take staff that may not be the perfect fit for the job that they have got. You might be asking for a maths teacher and there are none so you get the phys. ed. teacher who has got a little bit of maths, for example. He might be a good teacher and might not be a good maths teacher. You end up with this whole mismatch in your school. We have to say, because it is true, not every teacher in that surplus-to-needs pool is a poor teacher, but there are some in there that you would not want to employ. Those schools definitely have to take them, and they have to take more than their fair share of them and it marginalises those schools within the community.

[2.50 pm]

The CHAIR: As more and more schools come to IPS, the less are left over to become non-IPS. Who is going to take them then?

Mrs Gee: That is a question that I cannot answer.

The CHAIR: I just want to pursue the issue around line management. We are told that for the IP schools, that 445 of them or something are line-managed by the director general. I have a couple of questions. How are the non-IPSs line managed and how can one person line manage 445 schools? Is there actually a real or perceived gap there in management, particularly support for the organisations and the members that you represent—the principals?

Mrs Gee: I think you have touched on a really raw nerve there, because there is no doubt that while people want autonomy, they also want to be able to talk to their boss and have some recognition, and run things past them—all those sorts of normal things that you do, which I guess you get from having collegiate groups now. The director general does run groups that she meets with every year, and you can speak quite openly within those groups as a principal—go up and raise concerns or whatever—but it is certainly not a performance management. Any performance management that she does would be more looking at your results that she would have been made aware of by other people who look at the data for her and then you find out you are in trouble because you get a letter to say your NAPLAN results were not good enough this year and you did not have enough kids graduating and, by the way, we are going to do an external review of this school because of it or you can come in and explain to me what the problem is. That happens to some schools—certainly not all schools. The majority of the 445, I think, just go through on their own and their DPA is what they have to deliver on and then, of course, they have their DES review.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: What happens if your DES review is inconsistent with an ERG review—say, if you are ERG-ed?

Mrs Gee: There is certainly a school I know of in the metro area at the moment that has a glowing DES review and less than a year later was ERG-ed. We cannot understand how that can happen. I mentioned that in my report. Certainly the DES review said they were on track and they had set appropriate targets and that although there had been some issues, they were fixing them up, blah, blah and so on, and then suddenly somebody has decided to look at their data, without looking, perhaps, at the DES review—I do not know whether they have looked at that or not—and said, “We need to pull this school up and do some —

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: And that was a secondary school?

Mrs Gee: It was a secondary school. I believe there is probably in the order of four to half a dozen independent schools that have been ERG-ed. I do not know the exact number.

Mr Gillett: I am just going back to what Dr Jacobs asked. The big plus for having the director general being responsible for our schools, say my school, is that I can write to her direct —

Mrs Gee: That is true.

Mr Gillett: — and then she will pass that on to somebody in that system to look at it. I think there is a certain quality assurance for us, or certainly for me, in knowing that the DG is actually doing that. There is another avenue into the system. There are a number of directors who are assigned to IP schools and I can have a phone call with a person who is assigned to me and discuss an issue —

The CHAIR: They are REDS, are they? There are not many of them.

Mr Gillett: No. What do you call David?

Mrs Gee: He is a director. There are directors.

Mr Gillett: Sorry, what is his title?

Mrs Gee: Director of SIRU—that is his title. Then you have the executive directors who are people like Mr Hale and Mr Gillam.

Mr Gillett: But certainly we have access to the SIRU—did you call them directors?

Mrs Gee: Yes, he is a director, and he has managers underneath him, unless they are all consultants.

Mr Gillett: I can make a phone call to him or email him and he will discuss that with me and work out whether he takes that on or whether or not I should do something about it at the local level. That is a good conversation because, again, he has a direct pathway to the DG. I think you asked the questions about how non-IP schools managed.

The CHAIR: Yes, how does that work?

Mr Gillett: Exactly the way as they were before, which is we have regional executive directors—they were district directors before that. Those schools are accountable directly to that person and any discussion will go through that person or those people who are responsible —

Mrs Gee: They have to fill in online performance management every year, do they not—and then that goes to their RED, and if their RED wishes to speak to them they will hold meetings with them? Certainly, if they are new principals, the RED would be more involved, I guess.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Do IPSs not have relationships with the REDs at all?

Mrs Griffiths: Not as a line manager.

Mrs Gee: They do, but not as a line management responsibility.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: So it is just a collegiate thing?

Mrs Gee: They are above them in the hierarchy, but they are not directly responsible to them.

Mr Gillett: Yes.

Mrs Gee: Sorry, the REDs are above you in the hierarchy, but you are not directly responsible.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: So is it just a collegiate relationship?

Mrs Gee: It is not a collegiate relations; it is still a hierarchical relationship —

Mr Gillett: It is still one-sided but —

Mrs Griffiths: But it is more to the side.

Mrs Gee: The director general is your line manager.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: So you do not have to talk to them if you do not want to.

Mrs Griffiths: It would not be advisable, I would say!

Mr Gillett: Again, to be fair, there are instances, for example, where the director general will instruct the regional executive director, the RED, to intervene in an issue that is happening at a school. From our perspective, we may well talk to the RED and —

Mrs Gee: A RED.

Mr Gillett: — about an issue in the school, particularly behaviour management, that really should not be here. I mean, those issues that are local, if I need support there, I am more than happy to talk to my RED. However, he will tell me that if I have an issue, for example, with my IT or my bandwidth, that I go directly to the director general rather than him.

Mrs Gee: But if I want to get my travel signed off, it goes to the RED. If I want to get my leave signed off, it has to go to the RED.

Mr Gillett: But that has come down from the DG.

Mrs Gee: So it is a delegation to the DG.

Mr Gillett: We are making it sound very complex and it is not that complex.

Mrs Gee: So operational matters, they line manage that.

The CHAIR: So, on operational matters, who would you talk to? You are not going to talk to the RED—he is to the side—so who do you talk to if you did not pick up the phone and talk to the director general?

Mrs Griffiths: Your CRO.

Mr Gillett: Again, if it was a management issue, if I was going to deal, for example, with students or a parent complaint or whatever, I would go to district office —

Mrs Gee: The regional office, yes.

Mr Gillett: — the regional executive office, which is run by the RED and have a conversation with—what are they called?

Mrs Gee: The appropriate person, whomever that might be—the lead psyche or the coordinator of regional operations.

The CHAIR: That is what a non-IPS would do, too, would it not?

Mr Gillett: That is right.

Mrs Griffiths: Yes, to the direct line manager. The official line manager is just different that is all.

Mr Gillett: In answer to your question, I know that might sound complicated, but again I think what has happened there is that that process has been delegated by the director general down to that level.

Mrs Gee: So it is more the operational stuff that goes back to those areas.

Mrs Griffiths: If your RED says to you, “Here’s something you need to do,” then you do it, really. It does not have to come from the director general, unless there is some sort of query there. They are still our boss. They are still up the hierarchy. So if she gives me an instruction, unless I think I need to go higher, which I do not usually—you do not get many of them because we are autonomous; it is only when an issue comes through in the community, possibly.

[3.00 pm]

Mr Gillett: I am not sure that is entirely accurate. I think a lot of those operational issues, for example, are dealt with with our DPA. Certainly what surprised me last night was something Janette touched on. When a review started they wanted to look at our attendance figures, for example. Now that is certainly outside the scope of what I planned for through IPS. Certainly those things that I would be accountable for if I was non-IPS, such as attendance of students and those sorts of things, are now in the DPA.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I think it sounds like it is really clear and simple!

Mr Gillett: In essence, and to be fair to the director general, she makes it absolutely crystal clear that if you are IPS, we are accountable to her directly rather than to her through our regional executive directors.

Mrs Gee: But the operational things that she could not possibly sign off on herself, she delegates—travel, for example, and leave; all of those sorts of things. If you need help, you would go to your regional office or you might ring —

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I did watch that YouTube thing on mansplaining the other day, and Mark is seriously getting into that area at this point in time, so let us move on!

Mr Gillett: I think we have made it quite complicated.

Mrs Griffiths: One of the things is that if you read the act, nothing ever says anything about anybody else at the school except the principal, as does our DPA with our director general. However, I cannot possibly do that, so every time my position is mentioned in the act or in any policies, there is an assumption that delegation will happen. I think that is exactly the same sort of situation. A principal cannot do everything they are supposed to do; that is why we have deputies and that is why we have heads of learning areas; that is why we have teachers. We are responsible for everything in the school, but you cannot do everything; the same as the director general, I would think.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Can you talk to me about the public partnerships in the schools in 2017 and whether that is a positive development in —

Mrs Griffiths: In the building?

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Yes.

Mrs Gee: Do you mean the public–private partnerships?

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Yes, public–private partnerships and stuff. Do you have any position on that?

Mrs Gee: I will just wait and see what happens with that. I know there have been pluses and minuses come out of the models in the eastern states and we are yet to see how it is implemented here. I know the schools that have been built with it at the moment are quite happy with the process.

The CHAIR: Janine finished with a really contentious thing—what was your terminology?

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I did a contentious thing and a polite thing on the last one!

The CHAIR: I just want to put this to you—I can do some contention, too! There were some thoughts going around that says, “Well, this has created autonomy for schools.” But the other, more

cynical, view is that this devolvment, if you like—if that is a word—of responsibility to the school site autonomously, is really a way of devolving blame so that if, in fact, the Education Department says, “Here guys, you run it, your show, you’re autonomous”, so that if it does not actually turn out and you do not get outcomes that one would expect or no improvement in student outcomes, no improvement for the needs of special needs children and no improvement in that, then, “Hey, it’s not us as the Education Department; it’s you guys. You guys, as an isolated, autonomous unit, haven’t made it happen.”

Mrs Griffiths: No, there are still lots of ties. I would not think that, on a personal level. I am part of the education department system and would not see that in any shape or form, because ultimately the director general is responsible for every single outcome of every single child, as am I at my school. That is on a personal level; I would not see that at all.

Mrs Gee: We work under the Department of Education’s strategic plan, we are accountable to that, and under the particular year focus—it is “Focus 2016” this year—I think really if you were bucking the system, going outside that, then, yes, that would certainly be the case, but as long as you are doing what you are supposed to be doing within the scope of your job, which is doing what you are supposed to do under the strategic plan for the department you work for, then you should be fine.

The CHAIR: And all the policies that are issued—about 80 of them.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Can I just clarify: what is “Focus 2016”?

Mrs Gee: “Focus 2016” is something that the director general—every year she puts it out, and that is “Focus 2016”. You can get it off the Department of Education website and it just draws attention to what she expects from her staff, leaders and schools within that year.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Is there any difference, in terms of “Focus 2016”, in what the director general is expecting from IPS schools as a direct manager, to non-IPS schools as non-direct? It is the same document for secondary and primary?

Mrs Gee: Yes. So is the department’s strategic plan; the new one was released at the end of last year. It is 2016–19, is it, Karena?

Mrs Shearing: Yes.

Mrs Griffiths: It is 2016–19, yes.

Mr Gillett: Just to go back to what Dr Jacobs said, there is a body of research out there from people much cleverer than me that talks about the difficulty in aligning student performance with school management and autonomy. What I am heartened by is, of all the things you can get wrong in a school and all the things that you can look to one side, the one thing you can never ignore, and only poor principals would ever do this, is good things for kids in classes. I think that is really what IPS has given us the opportunity to focus on and fund. There is the other side of it, and you did touch on it, about that accountability for the other things, such as the performance of your teachers which, in the past, has been principally done by the centre. The management of funds—now we are far more accountable for that, and yes, we will get into all sorts of trouble and beyond that when I go to the department and say, “I need another \$550 000 because once again I made a mistake on my budget”, I would not however expect any principal to have that issue with the intent of supporting kids to learn and to have outcomes that are anything other than positive.

The CHAIR: Just one final question: are you hopeful that the IPS system will deliver better outcomes for students?

Mrs Griffiths: Hopeful, very.

Mrs Gee: I think you have to be really careful on what you label as “outcomes”. We have to be really careful whether we are looking at academic outcomes and how we measure them.

For example—I mentioned this in our submission—WA’s NAPLAN results have improved very substantially over the last few years. Is that because we have OLNAs in place and the kids are trying harder in year 9 because they do not want to sit for OLNAs? Is it because we are doing better and have more IPS and so we are running better programs in the school? Is it because it is the unrelenting focus on Aboriginal education that our director general had in her last year’s focus document? What is it that causes that is really hard to pull the threads apart and say one thing. What we can say is that IPS does allow for our resources to be directed where they are most needed by people who are very smart. They have been educators for a long time and you will find that most principals now are really very, very savvy with their leadership teams on where the money and the resources need to be directed. I guess that is what —

Mr Gillett: I was just going to say —

Mrs Gee: No, you be quiet. I have not finished what I was saying. Outcomes are also important: Do we have less suicides? Do we have better attendance? Do we have more kids who are happy in school? Do we have more kids who actually leave and go into jobs? It does not actually mean only are our NAPLAN results better; it is a lot of threads.

Mr Gillett: My point was the same!

The CHAIR: We must wind up, sorry, Mark! We have three minutes before we interview the next group. Thank you for your evidence before the committee today. A transcript of this hearing will be forwarded to you for correction of minor errors. Any such corrections must be made and the transcript returned within 10 days from the date of the letter attached if you believe that it needs correction, but if it is not returned within this period, it will be deemed to be correct. No new material can be added via these corrections and the sense of your evidence cannot be altered. Should you wish to provide additional information or elaborate on particular points, please do that with your supplementary submission to the committee when you return the corrected transcript. Thank you again for your time.

Hearing concluded at 3.09 pm
