

**EDUCATION AND HEALTH  
STANDING COMMITTEE**

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

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE  
TAKEN AT PERTH  
MONDAY, 27 JUNE 2016**

**SESSION ONE**

**Members**

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

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**Hearing commenced at 9.33 am**

**Ms CAROLYN SMITH**

**Secretary, United Voice, examined:**

**Mrs PHILIPPA CLARKE**

**Research Officer, United Voice, examined:**

**Mrs DEBBIE BAKER**

**Head Cleaner, Warwick Senior High School, examined:**

**Mrs TERRIE SUMNER**

**Education Assistant, 2.4 Mainstream, Department of Education, examined:**

**Mrs NAOMIE TRELOAR**

**Education Assistant, Department of Education, examined:**

**The CHAIR:** On behalf of the Education and Health Standing Committee, I thank you all for your appearance before us today. The purpose of this hearing is to inquire into independent public schools. I am Graham Jacobs, the chairman of the committee. On my left is Janine Freeman, on her left is Rob Johnson and on his left will be Murray Cowper, who has just stepped out for a second. On my right are Alison Sharpe and Alice Jones, who are the secretariat. Hansard will be recording this for the public record. This committee is a committee of the Legislative Assembly, the lower house of Parliament. It is a formal procedure, but hopefully not too formal, and does command the same respect given to proceedings in the house. Even though we are not asking you 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. As I said, this is a public hearing and Hansard will be making a transcript of the proceedings for the public record. If you refer to any documents during your evidence, it would assist Hansard if you could provide the full title for the record.

Before we commence there are a number of procedural questions. Some of them are a little silly but I have to ask them anyway. Have you each completed the “Details of Witness” form?

**The Witnesses:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** This is the silly bit: do you understand the notes at the bottom of the form about giving evidence to a parliamentary committee?

**The Witnesses:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** I always worry about that, because if you did not understand it, why would you sign it? Did you each receive and read the information for witnesses sheet provided with the “Details of Witness” form today?

**The Witnesses:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** Would each of you please state the capacity in which you appear before the committee today? Then I might ask the relevant person, Carolyn or Philippa, to give us a bit of an opening statement or a bit of an overview of UV. Maybe we could start with Philippa and just move across.

**Mrs Clarke:** I am a research officer at United Voice.

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**Ms Smith:** I am the secretary of United Voice.

**Mrs Baker:** I am the head cleaner at Warwick Senior High School.

**Mrs Treloar:** I am a special needs education assistant.

**Mrs Sumner:** I am a mainstream education assistant, currently on leave without pay.

**The CHAIR:** We do thank you for your written submission to us as well. Would someone like to make a bit of an opening statement? Is that you, Carolyn?

**Ms Smith:** Yes, that would be me. First, we would just like to thank the committee for the chance to come and speak to you today about the issue of IPS. I just want to mention that we are going to talk about a number of examples. They are real examples, obviously. Mrs Baker is going to talk about her own school. Mrs Treloar and Mrs Sumner are both here in their role as education assistants, but they are currently on six months leave without pay and have also been working within the union office, so they will bring a wider, I guess, group of examples. They will not be mentioning school names on transcript, because they are employees of the department and they have to return to the department, but if you are interested, we are happy to provide those details.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you for that.

**Ms Smith:** Obviously, United Voice represents support staff in schools, so cleaners, gardeners and education assistants in early years of school, in mainstream, in special needs and Aboriginal and Islander education officers. We see our members as playing a really key role in the delivery of education. Obviously, children learn better in clean and ordered environments; that is obvious. In the classroom our members, as I said, play a really key role in ensuring that children receive good outcomes. We have given you a written submission. I am going to take you through our key recommendations and generally why we think they are important, and then I think the really important people are going to speak, and that is the people who actually work in schools and can talk to you about what they have seen, what they have heard and what they know about good education.

I think education is arguably the most important service that government provides. It is a little bit of a toss-up between health and education!

**Mr R.F. JOHNSON:** I think Health would argue with you!

**Ms Smith:** Health would argue, and if I was here representing our members in Health, I might say the same thing about health!

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** There might be a few policemen there as well!

**Ms Smith:** Certainly, it is the second largest call on the state government budget, and I think we could absolutely say that it is an investment in our future both individually in each child who is in school, but also it is an investment in having a functioning society and a functioning economy. Those things do not work if we do not have a good education system. Education also plays a really key role in terms of fighting social disadvantage—a kind of core belief that where you are born and where you are raised should not be the answer to what the rest of your life looks like. They are really our core beliefs about education and, we think, are society's beliefs about education.

[9.40 am]

We have five recommendations, and I want to run through briefly why we have those recommendations. The first is to ensure a quality education to commit to implementing the recommendations of the Gonski review and also to reverse the budget cuts to schools that we have seen in this term of government. Quickly about Gonski, obviously aside from Western Australia, Queensland and the Northern Territory, all other states signed up to our six-year funding agreement to deliver the Gonski reforms. We believe that Western Australia should have and should sign up to receive that funding with the Gonski reforms. The Western Australian government introduced the

student-centred funding model under the direction of Professor Richard Teese. We agree with the student-centred funding model, but we have concerns about it being introduced, one, without the Gonski money, and also with it being introduced in the context of the reductions to the Education budget. I think it is \$245 million. I think Richard Tees, himself, expressed concerns at the time about the introduction of the student-centred funding model at the same time as there were reductions. Having said that we agree with the student-centred funding model, we have some concerns about the autonomy and lack of oversight that both IPS and student-centred funding create in a school; I will go to that in our recommendation 5. Our first recommendation is about funding: we think you cannot provide a quality education without the Gonski funding, and with the cuts we have seen.

The second recommendation goes to a justification. We believe the government has not been honest about the results of IPS, and particularly the commentary that independent public schools will improve student outcomes. There is no evidence to prove that autonomy improves outcomes. It might be popular—it might be popular even with parents—but when we say this is such a huge amount of money that the state spends on education, we would say there is a responsibility on government to ensure that that money is focused on good outcomes and improving outcomes for students. We would say, too, that we believe the introduction of IPS is either deliberate or gives the potential for privatisation and commercial intervention. That is certainly something we have seen around the world in schools. This state has had a fair bit of contact with Serco as a private provider of public services in the health system, and I am sure the committee is aware that they provide school services in the UK; we see similar concerns about the services they provide in schools. We are concerned about IPS and the student-centred funding model because, whether deliberate or not, we think it opens the door for privatisation and commercial intervention.

Just going back to the issue of whether autonomy improves outcomes or not, there is a 2013 report of the education department —

**The CHAIR:** It was a Melbourne study, was it not; they commissioned that?

**Ms Smith:** That is right. The report found there was little evidence of change, and the report itself said there is no substantive increase in student achievement after becoming an IPS. An independent report from the Grattan Institute also found that the level of autonomy in a school is not consistent with how they perform internationally. We would say let us be honest about IPS, let us not sell it as a system that creates better school outcomes because there is absolutely no proof that that happens, and we have some concerns about some of the other repercussions of IPS.

Our final and third recommendation goes to our specific concerns. Our third recommendation is that independent public schools be bound by central staffing processes and be required to employ suitable surplus education staff. There are two issues I want to talk to around central staffing process. The first is staffing allocation. I would say that when I am talking about this that, I am talking about IPS, but I am also talking about the student-centred funding model. What has happened is, with the student-centred funding model we essentially have, by default, an one-line budget, so by default a similar situation as we see in IP schools. Previously, staffing allocation was determined quite centrally for cleaners, for gardeners, for special needs EAs and Aboriginal and Islander education officers. Now schools receive funding according to the individualised profile of the school, but there is absolutely no requirement on the school to spend that funding according to the population of their school. So, a school could have children with special needs; there is no requirement under the one-line budget to have a special needs education assistant to assist that child.

**Mr R.F. JOHNSON:** But they do get funding for that line?

**Ms Smith:** Yes, they get funding.

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**The CHAIR:** What you are saying, Carolyn, is that they can get it but they can spend it on what they like?

**Ms Smith:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** So it might not go to what it is probably supposed to?

**Ms Smith:** That is right. Aboriginality is a key bucket of money, if that is how the department describes them. There is significant research to show that an Aboriginal role model in the school makes a key difference to Aboriginal education outcomes. There is research to show that the role of Aboriginal and Islander education officers is really important as that role model and cultural bridge; there is no requirement to employ. So, you could have a school with a significant Aboriginal population, and not one Aboriginal employee in the school.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** Carolyn, under the Department of Education evidence—they have given evidence—they said during the hearing that there is accountability to make sure the money is directed to the students who have generated those funds, and that it is specified in the funding agreement. There are also acquittals in the annual report.

**Ms Smith:** Yes. We think this has become a really bureaucratic and non-transparent process. There is an acquittal; if, for example, outcomes in Aboriginal education have gone down, you might have to put that in a report and someone might say, “Why is this?”, and you say why. There is a reporting process, but it is not a very transparent reporting process. What we previously had was, essentially, a formula to say X number of Aboriginal students turns into X number of Aboriginal and Islander education officers; that is now not a requirement. There was a formula that was used that was similar, I guess, to what teachers have in terms of class sizes; that formula is not followed. Similar to Aboriginal and Islander education officers, there is no requirement to have special needs education assistants. We will talk about some practical examples of what this means.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** That started off in IPSs, but now it has gone across to other schools?

**Ms Smith:** Yes, that is right. Really, they are IPS in everything but name; they have a one-line budget and the principals are allowed to spend the money as they see fit. That is a real devolving of responsibility and accountability from a state government, essentially to a principal. I understand the theory that IPS is about unlocking innovation and different ways of doing things according to what the school needs. That works potentially if you have got a fantastic principal, but if you have got someone who comes with certain ideas that they want to test, we are not sure if a school is a place for an individual principal to be testing their own theories of educational outcomes. We have anecdotally seen a change in the number of special needs EAs and the number of Aboriginal and Islander education officers. I was talking to an AIEO yesterday. Her family works in this industry. She is an AIEO, as is her daughter and as is her son, and she was saying, “When my daughter’s contract came up, she was not replaced. She was replaced with a white person.” Again, we see those anecdotal stories for special needs EAs as well. Our first issue is that there is no central oversight of staff allocation. It is a decision that each principal makes on the basis of what they think will provide better outcomes.

[9.50 am]

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** Carolyn, where did that occur, in regional parts or in Perth city?

**Ms Smith:** That was a Perth school.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** Do you know whether anyone else applied for that position?

**Ms Smith:** The young woman would have reapplied for that position. It was not that the position was not filled; it was that when her contract came up as an AIEO, she was replaced with an EA—an education assistant. This was not that someone did not put their hand up and they could not find someone to fill that position so they had to replace it; it was clearly that the school had made a decision about how best to service a fairly significant Aboriginal population.

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**The CHAIR:** Of which they got a special allocation for.

**Ms Smith:** Yes, that is right. They get certain money. I am not saying that the school ignored the Aboriginal students. The principal made a decision that an AIEO was not the best way to support those students, for some reason.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** You say the problem with that is there is no transparency?

**Ms Smith:** No.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** There is no way that the education department can go in and say, “Well, we’ve allocated money to assist Aboriginal people; you’ve chosen not to employ someone who is Aboriginal to work with these kids. Why is that?”

**Ms Smith:** Yes. I draw a parallel with the health system. You go into a public hospital, you have a certain illness, and there is an agreed central process about how that illness is treated. It is not the doctor saying, “I read something yesterday and I reckon I might give this a whirl with you.” I do not know the formal words, because I am not a doctor, but perhaps you could tell me?

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** There are clinical practices

**Ms Smith:** There are clinical practices; thank you, Janine Freeman.

**The CHAIR:** There are clinical governance rules as well.

**Ms Smith:** Yes, thank you, there are clinical governance rules and similarly, I guess, there were similar governance rules for education that if you had a child with a certain disability or a number of children, this is how much support they needed in the classroom. We have now devolved that down, without any rules; just you have to report at the end of the year whether it worked or not—that is our concern. That is about the staffing allocation. The second issue we want to talk about is the issue of redeployees. This really affects our members who are special needs education assistants in particular. I might just explain a little about how our members’ jobs work. Our members who are essential needs education assistants, obviously their work follows the children. You have a child with cerebral palsy who needs essentially full-time care in a classroom. I am looking at the special needs EAs—they will correct me if I am wrong. That will determine, or should determine, the number of special needs EAs in that school. This led to a situation years ago where many special needs EAs were not made permanent because the child would leave the school in six years’ time. That was obviously not a great situation for the workers in the schools, or providing good services, because if you are on a series of rolling fixed-term contracts, you eventually look for another job. We negotiated, and the department agreed that it was better to have people permanent because we all realised that it averaged out. As a child with cerebral palsy graduated in year 6, another child perhaps at the next school would start with a similar level of disability. That means that for more than any other worker in the system, our members are quite mobile. At the end of the year, it is kind of who has come, who has gone, and what level of disability do they have. It is a complex system but it works out in the end. It might mean that a couple of EAs need to leave that school and go to the next school or go to a school five kilometres down the road. They used to be redeployees, and they would have the first go at the next job of a similar type. The IP schools are not required to take anyone from the redeployee pool. Particularly in the first couple of years of IPS, principals get a bit excited about being able to choose their own staff, “I don’t want to choose from the redeployee pool; I want to interview someone and have them.” We have heard that people who are related to the registrar sometimes get a job. Let us be honest, sometimes a little bit of that happens in schools, and we now have a situation and I will just chase the actual numbers here —

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** You say 200 to 300 staff are waiting redeployment in yours?

**Ms Smith:** Yes.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** But the Department of Education, in their evidence, said that the redeployees are now less than 100.

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**Ms Smith:** They could have the most recent figures. It was at the end of the school year when we asked for those figures. I think we were halfway through the school year, and we got those figures towards the beginning of the school year. I am not going to challenge their figures—they are the employer. The figures come about March. That is 100 people who really should be doing real work when the department certainly would not argue that they recruited 893 education assistants. That is what they have told us between April—in that year. That is a bad situation for those workers, obviously, to be on a redeployee list.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** And it would have meant maybe that some of those workers would have taken a redundancy or —

**Ms Smith:** Yes, a slightly different population to special needs EAs took redundancies. Some of them may have. It was more ethnic assistants who took the redundancies. Ongoing, it is just a crazy way to run a system. What is kind of ironic—we say this in our report—is that the department has advised us that IP schools have sought an exemption from the Public Sector Management Act and the requirement to take redeployees from the education department, all well and good, but they can be required to take registered employees from other departments. It is not a good situation.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** Sorry, can you just say that again? So, they have got an exemption not to take their own employees, but they can be required to take employees from other departments?

**Ms Smith:** Yes.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** You can end up with an EA that used to be a PCA?

**Ms Smith:** Yes.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** And you have been required to do that as an IP school?

[10.00 am]

**Ms Smith:** Yes, because they do not have an exemption across the entire public sector; they just apply for an exemption in schools. We certainly think that is ridiculous. There may occasionally be a scenario where a school wants to do some very particular program and they need a particular EA. They might have an autistic child, and they want a very specific set of skills. We understand that; we believe they could probably find that in the redeployment pool, but perhaps there is an argument, but mostly people are going to do the same job they were doing at their school down the road, and it is just the IPS schools saying, “No, we just want to have our own independence, and be our own people.” So we think that is a kind of ridiculous situation. We think that argument potentially can be made more strongly about teachers. I still do not agree with that, but certainly with special needs EAs, after a few years in the system they will have worked with a wide variety of children with a wide variety of disabilities, and almost all of them will be able to go to another school and do what is required. And this is an issue that hits our members proportionately much higher than any other school population, because of the way special needs EAs are so linked to individual students and changes in student population. Our members experience, at the end of most school years, is, “What is going to happen to the population? It is likely that one or two of us might have to move, if there are significant changes.”

Our fourth recommendation —

**The CHAIR:** Carolyn, while you are looking that up, how many EAs are released from the system under this new arrangement?

**Ms Smith:** In terms of taking redundancies?

**The CHAIR:** Yes.

**Ms Smith:** This is the first year where we have really seen a kind of—a really high number—we have seen redundancies this year. Up until now the population of education assistants has consistently grown year-on-year, because there is really good evidence that an EA in the classroom,

or an Aboriginal and Islander education officer, really is a significant increase to educational outcomes, so I think IPS schools have just been growing over the last few years, and at the same time the population is growing, but we are seeing this outcome this year. So we have—if it is 100, it is 100. Certainly it was much higher than that for a good proportion of this year. That is 100 people that the government is paying their wages, and they are not in the jobs they should be in. It is not a great way to run a system.

Our fourth recommendation is around the excessive use of fixed-term contracts in the public education system, and particularly in IPS schools. This issue goes back, in IPS schools and all schools, because of the one-line budget. It goes back to a situation where principals are responsible for their own budget and so some of them, without necessarily a massive amount of financial—you know, you get to be a principal not because you are an accountant, but because you are a good school leader. We are finding a situation where the use of fixed-term contracts—it sounds a bit dramatic—has exploded. We have really seen a massive increase. Our members have an industrial agreement that limits the use of fixed-term contracts to cover leave, to cover maternity leave and short-term special projects, with the idea that actually an education system is better with permanent, happy employees. But we see a situation where the use of fixed-term contracts has grown massively and we think it is because principals are nervous about their financial situation; they do not want to make decisions that will tie them. Again and again we talk to new starters and we see people on rolling fixed-term contracts across the system. We could, one-by-one, chase those. We think they are not consistent. We think they are in breach of the industrial agreement, but put yourself in the shoes of an education assistant who is on a three-month fixed-term contract. When we say to them, “We think you should be made permanent”, and they say, “Look, I agree, but actually I just want to keep my head down and hope that I’m made permanent next term.”

In terms of fixed-term contracts, the figures we have got from the department is that there are 366 cleaners, 115 gardeners, and 1 314 education assistants on fixed-term contracts. Just to give you a sense of how much that is increasing, since January 2016, we have seen 176 cleaners on fixed-term contracts, 68 gardeners and 658 education assistants, in that period of time, and we can send you those figures. What we are being told by education assistants, by cleaners, by gardeners, but also by registrars and by principals, is that, as the school has responsibility for the one-line budget, principals and registrars are less and less likely to make people permanent because they do not know what next year will bring, and they might want to buy that new electronic whiteboard, and just have one less EA next year, or electronic whiteboards for every classroom. As I said, our recommendation is that this should be investigated.

Our last recommendation goes to the transparency of funding. We believe that the government should acknowledge that the one-line budget provides autonomy without accountability to the government, for both IPS and student-centred funding models. Ms Freeman has pointed out that the department’s evidence about accountability being around reporting—the reporting is not transparent; it does not give that accountability, and just going back to what we said, we are seeing the effect, particularly on special needs education assistants and Aboriginal and Islander education officers in terms of their employment.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** In those schools, where they are making those decisions, are they not making a decision to have an additional staff member, squirrelling away the money, and then suddenly coming out at the end of the financial year and splurging on, you know, the whiteboards and the fixing up, or making a nice place so that the board has a nice meeting room, or those sorts of things? Is that the—did you want to —

**Ms Smith:** We will talk about some examples, and I am actually probably going to hand over to the experts in the room about some of those examples. Some of them would have you concerned about educational outcomes. We might start with —

**Mrs Baker:** Mine will be quicker.

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**Ms Smith:** Okay, so why do we not start with you, Deb?

**Mrs Baker:** I am sorry, but once we get into this there will probably be far more questions.

Good morning again. I am Debbie Baker, I am the head cleaner at Warwick Senior High School in the northern suburbs. I have been asked today to talk about lost staffing hours, colour-coded maps and training of cleaning staff. I have in my time as head cleaner worked at two independent public schools. The first I left as I was refused moneys for the cleaning budget, as the money was to be spent on the school bus. I then left, and when I started at Warwick, it was not independent, and I enjoyed my job. We became independent last year, at the beginning of 2015.

[10.10 am]

In late 2014, in the last term whilst I was on leave, one of my cleaners left her position with us and was not replaced. I came back to work and sought out a reason as to why this happened. Even today I still do not have an answer. I was told by the registrar that it would not be discussed, the hours were gone, never to be given back to my department, and not to go on about it; and, if another cleaner left, then she may not be replaced either. I was shocked, not even to be consulted as the head cleaner of our department. Overnight, I lost 50 cleaning hours a week, 100 a fortnight—hours the school could not afford to lose. Those lost hours, of course, had to be shared between the other cleaners, and the areas that they cleaned on our colour-coded map that is provided to each school so as to work out that the areas are fairly allocated to cleaners, had to be adjusted.

I would just like to show you—I will just take a break here. Before the schools went IPS, every school had one of these colour-coded maps to work on for each person and their hours and how many staff we could employ. Each is 300 square metres in size, and 270 square metres of that is cleanable. The reason that the department came up with this colour-coded chart for us as guidance was so that we did not overwork our staff—each staff member had the same amount, so no-one could complain; and it made it easier for us to attract cleaners, which is really difficult at the moment in our schools. If I could hand that up, and if you have any questions about how that operates, I might be able to answer.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** How many cleaners do you have at the school?

**Mrs Baker:** Currently, nine plus myself.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** So there were 11; now there are 10?

**Mrs Baker:** Yes.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** Typically, what hours do they work? Is it a 40-hour week?

**Mrs Baker:** I work a 40-hour week. I have several who are working two shifts a day, at six hours—that is the most they can work—and a couple who are working 15 hours a week.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** What are the total hours?

**Mrs Baker:** Sorry; I do not have the figures for that, only what I lost. I have not focused on that this morning, but I can find that out.

I had very unhappy workers who could not complete all their work in three hours and had to let some of their other duties fall by the wayside. We are still struggling today, but unfortunately no other cleaners have left to date. The colour-coded maps are just a guideline now and have affected cleaning at all our schools. When we did enterprise bargaining, we asked the education department to please put them back into the schools, and they said no; it is up to the principals to decide what areas get cleaned and do not get cleaned. We have found that the front of our school gets cleaned, but the back is given no priority—only where the parents are going and coming.

In regards to training of my staff, head cleaners are now required to help new cleaning staff members go online and do the induction course. So far I not done it and I am not qualified to do it, and I fear if I take on this responsibility, it could leave me open to litigation if a workplace accident

occurred. I can sit and watch them do it but as most of our cleaning workforce is multicultural and English is their second language, I am not confident they understand the requirements, which is always a concern for us as far as health and safety goes in the workplace. I believe a clean working environment is important to students' learning in schools. Currently, a lot of money is being spent on upgrading our library. I am not saying that it did not need doing, but we seem to have money for everything else. I have seen other cuts within the school with our gardeners and ACE programs and money being allocated to different things that people are not happy with. Thank you very much for inviting us today and listening to my concerns, particularly just with that.

**The CHAIR:** Deb, were you at a school when it became IPS? Were you saying that?

**Mrs Baker:** I actually was at Ashdale secondary, which was one of the very first IPS schools that were opened. Mr Barnett came out and opened it himself. There was a cluster of four—Ashdale Secondary College, Ashdale Primary, Madeley Primary and Landsdale. They were the first little cluster that opened.

**The CHAIR:** Can you tell us about your knowledge about staff consultation when a school is deciding whether to become an IPS?

**Mrs Baker:** We were all given a piece of paper, not at this school, and we were all asked. First of all, all the teachers were in a meeting and given the information about an IPS school and how that would affect them. Then I believe it was a requirement for all of us to be asked our opinion, so we met at the library and the principal handed out the sheets.

**The CHAIR:** What sheets?

**Mrs Baker:** A piece of paper explaining what IPS was and what they were hoping to do with it over the years and how it would be better for our school.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** Was that Ashdale?

**Mrs Baker:** That was Ashdale Secondary, the first school. I have worked in regional, but this was my first one in the city.

**The CHAIR:** Did you get any information about how it would affect you?

**Mrs Baker:** I did ask. No-one else asked, but I was the only English sort of person there running the department, and I asked how it would affect us, and I was told there would be no change and it would not affect us at all but we just needed to tick the boxes and get it done so that they could get this thing happening. I did have concerns then. I did voice them to the union. I believed it was another form of privatisation, in my opinion, and I did not like it. I did leave when I was begging for plastic bags and toilet rolls for children. I just did not think it was good enough.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** With Warwick, did they talk to staff then when they went IPS?

**Mrs Baker:** I was not involved, and I got nothing.

**The CHAIR:** Was it IPS when you joined?

**Mrs Baker:** No, it was not. I loved the working environment there. My budget was good.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** You just said it was not?

**Mrs Baker:** No. I left because I wanted to go to one that was not independent, because I liked the atmosphere—people were happy; they did not seem stressed—so I went there particularly for that reason. Then they went IPS. It has not affected my budget as such, but it has affected the overall feelings and happiness within the school.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** And the staff numbers and the staffing hours.

**Mrs Baker:** Yes, and the staff numbers.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** You were away on holidays.

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**Mrs Baker:** I was, but I was not given any opportunity or any consultation, and I do not believe any of my staff were asked at that school.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** Okay. At Ashdale, there was consultation, and at Warwick there was no consultation?

**Mrs Baker:** Yes, because that was one of the very first IPS—but not at Warwick; we were given nothing.

**Mr R.F. JOHNSON:** Mine is a general question. First, I want to say that I think it is essential that people in our schools, not only the teaching staff but particularly the students, have a very clean and healthy environment to work in, and I do not wish to diminish what you do in any way, but, for me, a slightly higher priority is the education assistants—those who help our disabled and disadvantaged children, whether they be mainstream, or whether they be Aboriginal children who are suffering from various problems.

**Mrs Baker:** Definitely. That is why I thought I would move mine forward a little bit. It is important, but I think that you would have far more important things, perhaps, with that area.

**Mr R.F. JOHNSON:** I would hate to see any diminution in relation to not only the cleanliness and hygiene of our schools, which is imperative but, more importantly, if I might say, is the care and assistance for those disabled children, particularly to be able to keep up as best they can with the mainstream children. That, to me, is absolutely essential, and any diminution of those education assistants would be a retrograde step and would disadvantage a lot of our already disadvantaged children.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** Can I just ask you about the equipment. The budget is the same? You are not getting told you have to re-use things?

**Mrs Baker:** No; it was just the hours. It has not made anyone really feel secure in their job positions at the moment.

[10.20 am]

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Deb. Maybe we could move on to education assistants.

**Mrs Sumner:** Yes, I will slip in here. I am just going to give you a brief overview of some of the points I would like to talk about. One is the IPS review. I will also speak about staffing and the discussion I have been involved in with the principal, and some funding for professional development. I will skip through that and go through it.

In my opinion, the level of transparency and the misuse—I think—to an extent, when it comes to the IPS review process. I work in an IPS that has already been through a review and from where I stood at my level, I believe it is not as transparent as you might think. Compliance, I believe, is ticking boxes, because often we do not go down and speak to the people who actually do the job. In the whole process, I understand that it has to happen because everybody is accountable. I do believe that it is often a staged affair, as some things are in schools. I understand that it is a lengthy process and I believe that staff members were prepped and the execution often is pre-prepared, so it is not often business on the day. It was not open to all staff for comment, the whole process, although it was select people. Those of us who had lengthy discussions on the IPS implication at the site we work at are exempt from current transparent processes. We had conversations, but none of it was followed through, I believe. We were told after lengthy discussions of the process, applying for IPS. From my observation, there were some staff members who were somewhat reluctant to go through the process at the beginning—this is what I am trying to get at—at that stage, and it was in our best interests, we were told, and then after that there was no discussion needed. So when we did the process, even though members of the staff were not happy with it and did not think it would be in the best interests of the school, it just kind of stopped and that is what happened. There was no other consultation.

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**The CHAIR:** They did not want to rock any boats, you mean?

**Mrs Sumner:** No, absolutely, from then on.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** Were they even listened to, or was it just a fait accompli?

**Mrs Sumner:** In my opinion, yes, absolutely. That is the point I am trying to make—that it is a staged event. The mere fact that we were requested to download the business plan regardless of any opportunity or objection that we had to any of it, and in the case, at the review, if we were randomly asked on the day, but it was very stressed that that was going to be very unlikely because the people that were chosen in the review process were there for a reason, and that was to tick those boxes.

The second thing I was going to talk about was operation of availability without an education assistant in early childhood centres and preprimary. I had a conversation with the principal about the opportunity that he was able to operate without an education assistant in the early childhood centre, as this is obviously a cost-saving measure because in a preprimary situation there are no ratios, they are zero to K under the national quality standards. From then on, there is no ratio in a school for those children. I just wonder how that is possible; I do not understand how there can be a cut-off from there if it is all about quality education. It should be about children and education, not dollars.

Education assistants are vital in early childhood, and teachers would justify this position 100 per cent about having an education assistant with them in early childhood. Again, it is all dollars and cents, not necessarily student outcomes —

**The CHAIR:** Sorry, Terrie, can we just go back to early childhood?

**Mrs Sumner:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** So what you are saying is that there are some ratio requirements for education assistants in that space, but after that, no? Is that what you are saying?

**Mrs Sumner:** Yes, under the national quality standards, it is from zero to K; from then on it is at a school level, so they decide.

**The CHAIR:** Okay. So when that time comes, there lies the potential to go, “Okay, no EA.”

**Mrs Sumner:** Especially in my situation, where I am a level 2, so I am not working specifically with special needs children; we are classed as a mainstream education assistant supporting a teacher to deliver the program.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** So what you are saying is that they do not need an education assistant at kindy, and they will only need one —

**Mrs Sumner:** No, they do.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** They do need one at kindy?

**Mrs Sumner:** Absolutely, because they have ratios from zero to K under the quality standards.

**The CHAIR:** To K, but after that?

**Mrs Sumner:** After K, no.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** At preprimary they do not need it.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** Who funds the zero to K?

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** That is early childhood.

**Mrs Sumner:** Yes.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** Usually at early childhood level it is childcare centres.

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**Mrs Sumner:** Yes, so once it goes to K, that is the school part, but there is only ratios at a national level.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** Once it is kindy it is school, but private kindy —

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** The disability commission would fund it, I should think, if it needed extra money.

**Mrs Sumner:** So managing behaviour without ratio is extremely difficult. Now we are talking about children who are undiagnosed and, let us face it, society has changed. We often have many, many different issues in there and because there is no ratio it could not possibly work. Common time with teachers has been taken away so we are unable to now discuss child progress in those centres plus have consultation about what is going on in the program we are teaching because that time has been reallocated; we do not have common time, it is all hands-on. Anybody who has worked at the coalface, I will tell you right now, there is no time for consultation from the time the doors open until they close, if that is within my working frame of time, because it is all hands on deck with 28 children in a room.

My final thing is the funding of professional development. The process surrounding national quality standards was delivered to teaching staff when it was all introduced, so it is all the new big thing—tick a box, the same as before; compliance. It was delivered to the whole of the teaching staff, so they left and went on PD. When they arrived back we were handed a book: “Off you go, you should know how to do this.” No implementation. Once I addressed that and said that I did not think it was quite the right way to handle it, and I was told, “There is no money. We can’t afford that.” They sent the teaching staff off. However, to meet the national quality standard, every person who is on that site must tick off for you to move to the next level. How do you do that, if you have not been trained in what the process is? Then what happened was, after more consultation the principals within our cell decided, with consultation from myself and teachers at my site, that we could attract the national quality standard people to come in at no charge to speak to the education assistants. Teachers were given two days’ personal development to implement that whole process; we were given half a morning to come into the school, so for me, I do not think that is acceptable.

**The CHAIR:** So what you are saying is, when the school was able to get the service free for you guys —

**Mrs Sumner:** Then it was on, yes. So, half a morning.

**The CHAIR:** But if it was not free, it would not be for you guys.

**Mrs Sumner:** No, and it was only the fact that I pretty much demanded that —

**The CHAIR:** And then it was free, and you only got half a day anyway.

**Mrs Sumner:** Yes, half a day. Any other questions on that? Otherwise I will hand over to Naomie.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** To give me a broader picture, how many education assistants are in the education system?

**Mrs Clarke:** Thousands.

**The CHAIR:** It is 893.

**Ms Smith:** No, there are thousands of education assistants, because where a school has a special needs centre, that is essentially run by special needs education assistants with some teachers.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** So you are talking about 6 250 members employed in a range of roles in government schools—education assistants, Aboriginal and Islander education officers, home economics assistants, cleaners, gardeners, and canteen workers. That is just your members —

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**Mr M.J. COWPER:** I am just trying to work towards a breakdown on that. My wife works with special needs kids. What is the breakdown of education assistants in the mainstream, those in special needs, those with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and so on?

[10.30 am]

**Mrs Sumner:** There are different roles. In 2004, there was a whole new situation where we rolled out different roles, and that is step by step. There is a level 1, which would be mainstream; level 2 as you go through that process; and once you work with special needs, you are appointed to a level 3 position and they come with increments depending on the role that you play in the school. Then, every year, you go up an increment service.

**Ms Smith:** We can certainly get you that information—that breakdown of the overall numbers—and how that breaks down between —

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** So there has been some discussion. I have heard mention about the roles of education assistants. Once upon a time, they were there in support of the schoolteacher and now they are playing a fairly significant role.

**Ms Smith:** A key education role.

**Mrs Sumner:** Para-educators; absolutely.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** That is continuing to evolve, as I understand it. In essence, what we have are actually teachers here, so we have got a very thin veil that exists between education assistants and actual teachers.

**Ms Smith:** We would not disagree with you. The State School Teachers' Union might say differently.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** The question then, I suppose, is the rhetorical one and I do not expect your answer to this one. I think you know where I am going with it.

**Ms Smith:** I think one of the things our members tell us—I do not think it is just a “the world is getting worse” narrative—is things are getting harder in schools. More and more schools are playing a role that perhaps parents played.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** It is societal, yes.

**Ms Smith:** Yes. We are also seeing young people coming to school having come out of families with significant drug and alcohol issues.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** And is it our role to be providing breakfast for them, for instance? That is now evolving into a core function of society, as opposed to something that was previously done in a family environment.

**Ms Smith:** I think there is a question about who picks it up, but I think the reality for our members is to ensure everyone in the classroom is getting a decent education, particularly with the mainstreaming of children with special needs. If the autistic kid has not got a special needs education assistant with them, it affects not only their educational outcomes, but also everyone's educational outcomes in the classroom. More and more we are seeing—I do not know if it is a higher proportion or kids who just normally would not have turned up for school, but that is what members are saying: they are seeing more special needs and higher special needs. Maybe that is a good time to go to you, Naomie.

**Mrs Treloar:** I have actually been a special needs education assistant for the last 13 years. I have worked with a range of children with different diagnoses, from autism, cerebral palsy, foetal alcohol syndrome to oppositional defiant disorder. I was made supernumerary at the end of 2013 at my school. I was the only full-time special needs assistant at my school. We did not actually lose any students, but the school decided it was time to cut. We went from three special needs EAs down to one.

**The CHAIR:** You were IPS?

**Mrs Treloar:** We were IPS, yes. Over those three years since I was made supernumerary, I have not been working as a special needs assistant at my school; I have done a variety of other jobs. But I have also seen the amount of support that the special needs children receive has been cut. Children who have extreme behaviours due to autism and being nonverbal get an hour of assistance a day, but there is more than one student in that classroom with special needs. I would go in there for an hour between 9.00 am and 10.00 am and I could have five children who have got different diagnoses or have not been diagnosed yet and are in the process, but I am the only special needs person in that class.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** Are you paid as a special needs assistant when you go in there, because you are supernumerary?

**Mrs Treloar:** I am still paid as a special needs EA.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** But if you were not there, they would be sending in just an EA.

**Mrs Treloar:** This is a preprimary class, so they had a mainstream EA as well who also was not in there full time anymore. The mainstream EA's hours had been cut. From, I think, 1.30 in the afternoon until three o'clock, there was no assistant in the class, so the teacher was then having these five students, plus the rest of the students. But, yes, the special needs children were getting one hour a day.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** What was the rationale of cutting it?

**Mrs Treloar:** At the school I was working at, the education assistants were spread amongst all classes, so all classes got some time, but it may only be half an hour or an hour a day.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** So what do you think the issue is? Is it with the system or is it with the board that makes those decisions?

**Mrs Treloar:** I believe the fact that special needs funding does not have to be spent on special needs children anymore is a huge problem, whereas in the past I have had children who have received full-time funding, so I have been one-on-one with that student the whole day. The schools do not need to put that funding for that child.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** The point that Carolyn made earlier is that there are some very good principals out there who have an identification as to what that school needs and then others come in with a little bit of a different view. It could be argued that if a principal was in tune with his school community, then that situation would not exist. I am just trying to say: is it the system that is broken or is the way it has been interpreted by the boards the problem?

**Mrs Treloar:** At my school, the principal has got the final say on how the money is spent and it is entirely his decision. We are seeing that at other schools. I have had discussions with other special needs EAs where their school has gone through the variation-of-hours process, so they have lost time; they have lost special needs EAs, yet the school has hired a media consultant for a 0.6 FTE—that is three days a week—to increase their enrolment numbers to make them more popular than the school down the road.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** Is that right? I thought if you were a good school, that would be the selling point. Come to our school.

**Mrs Treloar:** That is it. I was at a school a few weeks ago talking to EAs where, I think, five teachers are being flown over to Melbourne to do PD, yet they have also gone through the variation of hours and lost education assistants, but the school is paying for these five teachers to go over east. But the children are the ones suffering in the classroom because they are not getting the support. We are actually seeing special needs kids fall further and further behind because they do

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not have an assistant there making a change to the curriculum so that it suits them. They are not getting that differentiation in the classroom, because the teachers do not have time to do it either.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** Do you have any specialist autism schools in your area?

**Mrs Treloar:** In my area? No. I am not actually aware that we have a specialised autism school in WA.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** Autism WA are running one in our school down south. What that has resulted in is we have actually got people attracted to the area. We have now got a contrary problem. We are not trying to attract people; we are trying to keep them away, because the school population is now over 800, albeit we have just had a new school built nearby which has taken another 650 kids off us. Our biggest problem is that we are too popular with our programs, including the early childhood stuff we are doing with autism as well. I hear what you are saying as far as it is not working in some areas as well as in others.

**Mrs Treloar:** We have schools spending money on the electronic signs out the front.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** Yes; there are lots of electronic signs up everywhere, are there not?

**Mrs Treloar:** It seems to be a rite of passage that if they become IPS, they put a sign out the front. If they are in a not-so-great area, they are changing the name of the school. Lockridge high school is now Kiara College and Mirrabooka high wants to change to Dianella secondary college.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** That is not an IPS, though.

**Mrs Treloar:** That one is not IPS yet?

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** No.

**Mrs Treloar:** Giant pencils is another one we are seeing, so that it is easy to recognise the school as you drive by. They are putting six-foot-high pencils in the front area of the school.

**The CHAIR:** What does that say?

**Mrs Treloar:** It says it is a school. The sign is saying that the school is not good enough anymore.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** Is literacy that bad?

**The CHAIR:** I was wondering whether it said IPS, but I could not see how a pencil would say that.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** So the annual reports that they do, if they are sending five staff over to Melbourne, is that reported in the annual report of the school?

[10.40 am]

**Mrs Treloar:** Yes. But, I mean, the review period happens every three years. Something that happens this year, that gets reviewed in three years' time, you cannot go back and change it; it has already happened.

**Mrs Sumner:** That was my point. It is not transparent enough to say how that allocation of money—there was no allocation for education assistants on the very same thing, delivering the very same process.

**The CHAIR:** Naomie, Carolyn, I know this is probably hard, but what I would like to know, and it is probably not easily achievable: in the IPS framework, in the IPS space, is there any way we could put a figure on the amount of lost hours in educational assistants that has the experience that Naomie was describing?

**Ms Smith:** It is such a moveable feast, and I think the department could define that for you. That is very hard for us to get, because you see changes to student numbers—you have to kind of compare it as a proportion of student numbers. You might say, "Well, this school hasn't lost funding", but actually they have gained a whole lot of students. Or we might see a change in funding, but that



might be about a loss of students. Balancing that is quite difficult. I think it is information that the department could give you, but they are then reviewing themselves.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** In the health system there is the activity-based funding, so it brings it down to per patient, per activity, per cost—is there not the same sort of thing where you can say a cost per student where you can say what is going on in each school, something like that, like a tool that takes away those fluctuations?

**The CHAIR:** Variables.

**Ms Smith:** Yes. Just going back to your previous question about would the school have to report about how they spend—look, I would not swear on a stack of Bibles about this, but our understanding of that reporting is they will just have to report what had been spent, the lump sum, in terms of PD. That would be professional development, this amount. They would not put in brackets “We sent five people over east”. So, it ends up looking quite good. That, I think, goes back to what we are saying about we do not think the funding is transparent and is accountable. Back to you, Naomie.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** Can I just ask about ethnic assistants? Do you want to tell me what has happened with ethnic assistants? I have a personal interest in that, given the area I represent.

**Mrs Treloar:** My school is in your area.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** But my school did not send anyone off to Melbourne?

**Mrs Treloar:** No.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** Good.

**Mrs Treloar:** From what I understand, the majority of ethnic assistant positions no longer exist, unless they work in an intensive English language school. There was an ethnic assistant at my school—again, a full-time EA. She made the decision to change to a mainstream EA, rather than take a redundancy package. She has also been supernumerary since 2013 and the two of us have not been moved anywhere in that time because the IP schools do not have to take us and it is cheaper to employ a brand-new person into the position at a level 1.1 than it is a level 2.4 mainstream. At the school I was at, we had over 45 different languages being spoken but no ethnic assistant was required anymore.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** In terms of going out and about, how does that work when working with those kids, but also working with the parents of those kids in getting them to understand?

**Mrs Treloar:** It is a real struggle. It is very, very hard to communicate with the parents, and then you are bringing the problem of some of those students do have special needs, and trying to explain to them the process that they need to go through to get a diagnosis when there is no-one there that we can actually use as a translator anymore.

**Mrs Sumner:** Also, just on the ESL, when the hours have been cut and if new schools are opened in the area, often they would be shared within those cells. So, if they are permanent, those hours would be taken up, so they would school hop—X amount of hours at this school, X amount of hours there to cover it because the hours are minimal at each school.

**The CHAIR:** We will have to wind up very shortly. Naomie, you are very experienced at your job, it seems. Can you tell us about the conversation you had when you were the person who was picked on, had to go, see you later. What comeback did you have? You said you had 13 years’ experience.

**Mrs Treloar:** I had no comeback—absolutely none. The decision was made. We were given a set of criteria that we had to answer to. It was classroom-based criteria. However, at the time at my school I was running the IT system, so I was our IT coordinator; I did all our system upgrades and kept the computers running. I was the attendance officer, so I actually had minimal time in the

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classroom anyway, and I had to fulfil the selection criteria to do with being in the classroom and what value I added to the school, so I was unsuccessful in the position.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** Have they employed an IT officer now?

**Mrs Treloar:** No, but I have heard it has cost them quite a bit since I have been on leave, because they have had to get people in to do it.

**The CHAIR:** You can sort of push around the criteria to get a particular result you want.

**Mrs Treloar:** Exactly. Whoever they want, they can get by—when I went through it, it was the principal, the registrar and a member of the teaching staff. I had never worked with that member of the teaching staff so she knew nothing of what I did in the classroom anyway. The registrar really is not aware of what I do in the classroom. The principal is aware mainly because I tend to deal with the children with severe behavioural issues, so the principal and I get to have a pretty good relationship, but it was not a face-to-face interview. It was whatever I could put on paper and hand in.

**The CHAIR:** I think we will have to wind up. Thank you for your evidence before the committee today. A transcript of the hearing will be forwarded to you for the correction of minor errors if you see minor errors. And those will be returned within 10 days from the date of the letter attached to the transcript. If you do not return the transcript, we will deem that you think it is correct. New material cannot be added via these corrections and the sense of your evidence cannot be altered. We would really like you to provide the additional information that you have undertaken to provide. I think it was figures around fixed-term contracts and total hours working—Deb, that would be good—and the overall numbers, Carolyn, of EAs and the breakdowns, if we could. You have given us the colour-coding, thanks, Deb. Can you send those back with your transcript?

Thank you very much again for your time today and being frank with us and adding to our knowledge in the inquiry. Thank you very much.

**Hearing concluded at 10.48 am**

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