

Principal Research Officer.

Education and Health Standing Committee.

Legislative Assembly Committee office.

Level 1/11 Harvest Terrace.

West Perth. WA. 6005.



Dear M/s Sharpe,

I write in response to the call for Submissions on the Parliamentary Inquiry into Independent Public Schools.

In 2010 I was appointed the inaugural Chair of the first Independent public secondary school in Mandurah to receive IPS status -namely Mandurah Senior College which was then amalgamated with Mandurah High School in 2011 and rebadged John Tonkin College (JTC) under IPS. Therefore I believe I have the background and knowledge of the IPS system to answer some of the questions raised and which will be examined by the standing committee above.

I remained as Chair until 2014 standing down following a positive review of the School by the Department of Education.

Along with chairing the school Board I was instrumental in instigating regular meetings of Chairs of IPS schools, south of Perth as far down as Esperance who met to network and discuss opportunity with the IPS system or to air any concerns.

This group met three times per year and were often were addressed by the Director General of the Department or senior staff.

In my view the IPS system has been one of the most exciting innovations to be implemented in schools for some time but needs to be well managed to be efficacious.

My comments are as stated below.

Sincerely,

Jo Barker

Emeritus Professor Jo Barker.

25th April, 2016

Education and Health Standing Committee Independent Public School – Parliamentary enquiry.

1. The implementation of the initiative, support provided and the Delivery and Performance agreement.

The John Tonkin College(JTC) was granted IPS status in 2010 in the second group of schools to be awarded IPS. As the inaugural Chair I attended a Department run preliminary workshop for all Chairs and the system was fully explained. A well put together document outlining the structure, goal and objectives of the program and its planned outcomes was given to all present.

Board members were also invited to attend workshops and briefing sessions.

Further workshops over time were held for Board chairs and members, run by the Department. The level of these was seen as of lesser value as those with Board experience were not separated from those new to the task.

Prior to IPS being implemented at the college a Delivery and Performance agreement was forwarded to the school, discussed with the Principal and deputy Principal and then taken to the Board for full discussion on the role of Directors and their responsibilities under the agreement.

I believe that the carefully selected schools in the first and following cohorts for this program were well managed and the Department had planned the implementation of this program well.

The IPS process was the first for many years which we believe gave schools a degree of autonomy and opportunity to set their own direction

However an increase of 178 schools “in one go” in the last cohort has meant that many schools have struggled to understand the difference between a P@C Board and the opportunities that a well-structured and run Board can make to a school operating as a business under IPS.

I also believe the Department has struggled to give oversight to a large number of these schools to ensure that they are indeed running an IPS system under the Delivery and Performance agreement and not just as in the past, operating a P&C committee and paying lip service to the changes required under IPS.

It would be a great shame to see a very innovative system falter due to poor oversight and poorly set up and managed Boards

I would suggest that

1. All Board members should be expected to and required to complete an orientation and workshop on their role and expectation of the IPS Board processes before going onto an IPS Board.
2. The selection process for Board members needs to be streamlined so that members are chosen from the wider community for the knowledge and expertise they can bring to the development of strategy and the specific goals established for their school. Board members should not just be

P&C members and the school staff numbers on Boards needs to be kept to a minimum so that external and additional knowledge and expertise can be brought into the Board discussion and challenge thinking.

3. An orientation to the specific school Board run by that Board should be mandatory for all new members.
4. The choice of the Chair of the Board is all important and that person needs to have in my view, committee and/or previous chair experience and good community links to be able to support strategic decision making. The trust that is developed between a Chair and the Principals are the key to making a good IPS board work.

2. Ongoing role of the Department of Education and other agencies.

The Department has an ongoing role in overseeing that IPS is being properly implemented and run by the Board and that initial and ongoing training of a high standard is offered to participants, who are all volunteers and give many hours to support education in this State.

The Department in overseeing the IPS system have to walk a very narrow line as the autonomy given to IPS Boards; the operation of the one line budget; choice of Principal and the opportunities provided to link with industry and the community have given schools freedom to run their business in a way which has never been possible previously. The Chair is responsible to the Minister for Education, the Principal to the Director General of Education. The Department therefore cannot be seen to be interfering unless a school is going "off track. " This has not been easy for some of the senior staff of the department to cope with, many of whom may have had a hands on approach previously.

3. Monitoring of IPS schools and the transparency of the review process.

Under the Delivery and Performance agreement schools are reviewed on a 3 /4year cycle.

The Department has an important role to play in ensuring that in reviewing schools for the regular academic review of outcome and processes additional attention is paid to how the IPS is working and schools not adhering to the Delivery and Performance agreement should be offered training or cancelled out of the system.

For this system to work at its utmost, poorly acting Boards and non -progressive or unresponsive Principals and schools should not spoil it for those who are operating successfully

The review that was held at John Tonkin College in my time as Chair was focussed 85% on the school progress academically and only 15% on the difference being an IPS had made to the staff, student group and the wider community and how the Board was operating. This was in spite of the Chair and the Principal spending considerable time collating agendas, minutes and outcomes for the reviewers; inviting them to attend a Board meeting and meeting Board members.

A review report was prepared for the school and the Board ensured that the outcomes were placed into the newsletter we had instituted for staff, on the school intranet and through the P&C. The Board had a carefully worded editorial put into local newspapers as the Department has a policy on advertising which we had to adhere to.

Transparency of any review is essential and the general public should be able to readily access information on how a school is operating and the culture that it is developing and why and how it was awarded IPS. This information is essential for parents and the wider community and requires more than a table of academic results from the school to be published. This information is even more relevant in particular areas such as Mandurah, which has struggled with low educational aspirations and a socio-economic divide.

4. Impact on the engagement and performance of students in particular those with special needs.

John Tonkin College is fortunate in that it shares its facilities with a Career Enterprise Centre for students with special needs and this centre was awarded IPS status in its own right a year after JTC.

The Principals of both the college and centre worked in close co-operation and in discussion the Career Enterprise centre commented that IPS status had done major things for her centre, for example-

Having community members on their Board had increased their knowledge about special needs and the students' ability to cope with educational practises. This in turn had an impact on the wider community who became more aware of the work of the centre by having Board member who spoke up for the centre and its programs within the community. This then opened up increased opportunity for employment or ongoing training for students.

IPS also gave autonomy to the Centre to seek and access community based activities and partnerships with community organisations.

For the college population in general, gaining IPS at John Tonkin meant that the Board and school staff looked at ways to create a more inclusive student group.

The Board merged two schools with very different socio-economic and academic backgrounds and from two campuses, one at that time teaching to year 7 the other to Year 12. The Board focussed initially on working towards one college, one staff, one focus, one business plan and importantly one student group.

The change of name helped the community and the student and staff recognise and accept the merger of both schools to a college, with one set of goals and objectives and outcomes.

Students were provided with uniforms for the first time in 11 years which they helped select and this process worked well in giving the students a link to the college and increased pride in appearance.

A senior student mentor group was established and this group were also invited to meet sponsors/partners or community members during the year and to take roles at graduations and formal events.

Where possible staff and students should participate in the implementation of the strategic direction, goals and changes that have been established for the school and impact upon them. Or at a minimum ratify these before they are implemented.

Board members need to be part of a school campus and students and staff need to know who the Board members are and see them around the campus.

5. Outcomes of formal and informal reviews of schools.

The review process outlined previously requires reviewers who are not only well versed in academic programs, progress, evaluation and student outcomes but are also trained in the IPS system and

knowledgeable about the expectations of the school, community and partners as to how the school is implementing the system.

It is also important that the Board and school institute internal and external monitoring on the implementation and use the outcomes of any formal review process to make any necessary changes.

At John Tonkin we instituted a yearly internal review of Board processes based on a well recognised evaluation system used by CEO's in open industry, filled in by Board members and then discussed in an open workshop.

In addition, a review of the School's business plan was held internally each year to see if goals set had been met. A brief annual report was written by the Board Chair which was added to the annual report to the Department compiled by the Principal. These documents were placed on the intranet, and copies sent to major stakeholders.

Staff meetings during implementation frequently had agenda items related to the changes being implemented and the student group and P&C were considered important groups to notify and sometimes to invite their assistance to make changes to processes.

Principals met regularly with the Director of Education and a networking information giving meeting was held 3 times a year with Chairs to discuss the IPS system.

In the following years information received from a variety of sources as outlined above was used by the Principal and Board to make necessary changes to the Business plan to keep it relevant.

John Tonkin College was given support from the Department as required during the establishment of the IPS process and access to the Director General was readily obtained.

Outcomes of the formal review system are outlined under Item 3.

6. Process and extent to which the Department acts on and incorporates review outcomes into the IPS schools.

Once the formal review process is completed the Director General reviews the report and signs off on it. It is then forwarded to the school and Board for implementation of any areas requiring change. A review meeting with the Principal is held if required

John Tonkin College did not have any other formal input from the Department re the review at my time on the Board and this is an area which requires some further work from the Department.

A follow up by the initial reviewers who by the time they do the review are knowledgeable about the school would be an advantage. This would ensure that any changes to the IPS system needed are being implemented. Their report and the review would then have real validity.

As mentioned previously the Director General and senior staff attended and gave good information to Chairs at their 3 times a year meetings. Information on such items as the review system were discussed and listened to by the Department and where possible suggestions for improvement acted upon.

7. The impact on IPS on staffing arrangements.

The role of the IPS Board in assisting in the hiring of the Principal has allowed Boards to find the most appropriate Principals with similar objectives and views to the goals and directions set for the school. This has been a good move and makes staff selection more relevant to that practised in open industry.

However, the Public service rules on staffing can totally destroy this selection process for example should the person the Principal is replacing have no permanent job to go to, the new Principal can end up in an acting capacity for a number of years. It is very hard to get staff to accept change and new direction if their leader is in an acting capacity and can be demeaning and soul destroying for the staff member concerned.

The only other outcome JTC noted regarding staffing was that staff who were changing jobs would look for schools with a reputation for good IPS outcomes and management and academic levels. They would accept a position at a school and then get a better offer and either just not turn up on the dedicated day or if lucky, the school may get an email saying "sorry not coming." The impact of this on the teaching timetable and the staffing profile was immense. This matter has been drawn to the attention of the Department frequently but it seems is mired again in Public service dictum and is not totally due to the IPS status.

Conclusion

As stated previously the IPS system is innovative and is an exciting way to let schools increasingly manage their own affairs, set their own directions and be responsible for outcomes. Important areas - such as how schools can be marketed and the community in which it resides notified of the schools successes; the ability to partner with sponsors/partners who can benefit the school; to run their own budget and have increased autonomy in decision making; are all powerful and when done well have put schools on a very sound strategic direction and increased the community's appreciation of the education system.

However this very innovative system has the ability to go off track unless some of the managerial and board representation issues are reviewed. Additionally there needs to be measurable and tangible outcomes and schools challenged, who are just paying lip service to being IPS.

Emeritus Professor Jo Barker.