

7 April 2016

Ms Alison Sharpe
Principal Research Officer
Education and Health Standing Committee
Parliament House
PERTH WA 6000

Emailed to: laehsc@parliament.wa.gov.au

Ref: A550344

Dear Ms Sharpe,

Inquiry into the Department of Education's Independent Public Schools Initiative

The Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia - Western Australia Branch (AHISA WA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Education and Health Standing Committee Inquiry into Independent Public Schools.

In addition to the general terms of reference, this submission acknowledges the opportunity to contribute to the topic: 'The impact of Independent Public Schools on Independent schools, students, teachers and the broader school communities.'

AHISA would welcome further engagement with the Reference Committee if this is deemed of value to its deliberations.

Mr David Gee, Headmaster of Wesley College is acting as AHISA WA Branch Chair while Ms Jenny Ethell is on leave from Perth College. Mr Gee can be contacted via email at David.Gee@wesley.wa.edu.au. AHISA's CEO, Beth Blackwood can be contacted at AHISA's National Office in Canberra at beth.blackwood@ahisa.edu.au or (02) 6247 7300.

Yours sincerely,

(Mrs) Karen Spiller

AHISA National Chair 2015-17
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(Mr) David Gee

Acting AHISA WA Branch Chair
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Inquiry into the Department of Education's Independent Public Schools initiative

The Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia - Western Australia Branch (AHISA WA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Education and Health Standing Committee's inquiry into Independent Public Schools.

AHISA WA's submission is in three parts:

- A. General comments
- B. Response to the invited topic: The impact of Independent Public Schools on independent schools, students, teachers and the broader school communities.
- C. Response to Terms of Reference, specifically: (d) The impact on the engagement and performance of students, in particular those with additional needs.

About AHISA

AHISA is a national professional association of autonomous school Principals, with six state/territory Branches.

The membership of AHISA comprises principals of 420 independent schools with a collective enrolment of some 426,000 students, representing 11.7 per cent of total Australian school enrolments and 20 per cent of Australia's total Year 12 students.

AHISA WA serves 51 AHISA members, who lead schools in urban and regional areas.

The primary object of AHISA is to optimise the opportunities for the education and welfare of Australia's young people through the maintenance of collegiality and high standards of professional practice and conduct amongst its members.

A. GENERAL COMMENTS

AHISA's vision is to be 'a leading professional association that promotes the educational welfare of children by developing and supporting school leaders, and embedding the concept and values of autonomous school leadership and excellent practices in the independent schools sector in Australia'.

This vision suggests alignment with the underlying philosophy and progress towards greater autonomy for State schools. Indeed, AHISA WA was instrumental in supporting the IPS movement in the State in its initial stages. For example, one of the first meetings of potential IPS leaders was hosted by Scotch College at which the Headmaster at the time, The Rev Andrew Syme, welcomed the initiative and shared experience and advice as an autonomous leader.

It is AHISA's interest and endeavour that all Australian children receive a quality education, and to this end AHISA supports the movement towards increased autonomy and local decision making for State schools as a positive educational initiative. Independent Public Schools in WA also extend the educational options available to parents in the education of their children.

Definition of terms

In Australia, the term 'independent school' has been generally used to describe schools that are independently governed, unlike government-owned schools and systemic non-government schools where many operational functions are centralised. The Independent Schools Council of Australia (ISCA) describes the autonomy and accountability of independent schools in the following terms:

All recognised government and non-government schools in Australia operate within the bounds of state and territory and Australian Government legislation which together impose requirements in relation to financial operation, accountability, the curriculum, assessment and reporting. What distinguishes independent schools from other non-government and government schools is their independence of operation within these boundaries. Apart from systemic schools, where the system authority has a management role, independent schools are set up and governed on an individual school basis, connected directly to their community and answerable to their own governing board or management committee.¹

An independent school in this sense has greater autonomy than a self-managing government-owned school.

At the federal government's School Autonomy Forum, held in Canberra on 19 August 2015, Professor Brian Caldwell presented his most recent research on school autonomy and student achievement. In this research document, he notes:

A concept such as autonomy, in the full sense of the word, is misleading because a school in a system of public education is not fully autonomous. It is better to refer to a relatively high or relatively low level of autonomy, being careful to specify the functions over which schools have secured more authority and responsibility.²

Professor Caldwell has long been an advocate for self-managing schools, and describes school-based management as:

... the systematic decentralisation to the school level of authority and responsibility to make decisions on significant matters related to school operations within a centrally determined framework of goals, policies, curriculum, standards, and accountability.³

AHISA contends that higher levels of autonomy as evidenced in its members' schools support the alignment of school and community resources with strategic goals, create the conditions for schools to be 'agile' and innovative, support the capacity of Principals to drive and lead school

improvement and allow school communities to express and define their ethos and aspirations.

The nature of independent schools and the role of autonomous school Principals are therefore entirely different from the models of management and leadership prevailing in self-managing systemic schools.⁴

B. THE IMPACT OF INDEPENDENT PUBLIC SCHOOLS ON INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS, STUDENTS, TEACHERS AND THE BROADER SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

Impact on enrolments

In 2014, Independent School Queensland commissioned a qualitative and quantitative market research study titled 'Parent perceptions of schooling options'.⁵ The study, which involved a quantitative survey of 555 parents in Queensland and 393 parents in WA, analysed awareness of, and attitude towards independent schools and Independent Public Schools (IPSs). Findings include:

- Cost and affordability are practical considerations in schooling choice. Assuming cost was not an issue, independent schooling was the preferred option for most survey participants. IPSs were seen as a viable option for families with smaller household incomes seeking quality education opportunity. Those with higher household incomes typically had a preference for independent schooling.
- The use of the word 'Independent' together with 'Public' appeared to confuse the market regarding how a school can be both a public or government school and independent at the same time. While parents commonly referred to independent schools as 'private schools', they did have a clear understanding of what differentiates independent schools from other schools: autonomous; high standard of education and teaching; academic performance; disciplined environment; quality facilities; good reputation; offering opportunities for students.
- Consideration of independent schools increases – and that of IPSs weakens – for parents when enrolling a child in a secondary school.

Although undertaken while IPSs had not been in operation for long, particularly in Queensland, the study indicates that the independent sector's market share may be at risk among those parents aspiring to private schools but who have limited financial capacity.

A report in *The Australian* in May 2014⁶ attributed an increase in enrolments in State schools in WA to the attraction of IPSs to parents. However, without analysis of growth areas of WA's school population or the capacity of independent schools to meet increased demand, it is difficult to determine if the increase in enrolments in WA State schools is due to a shift in school preference.

ABS data show total enrolments in independent schools in WA continued to increase in the period 2011-2015, from 60,528 to 65,385 full-time equivalent students, representing a growth of 8 per cent over that period.⁷

It is likely that the downturn in the oil and mining industry in Western Australia has had some impact on enrolment choices since the ISQ survey was undertaken in 2014. Additionally, the Year 7 move from primary to secondary schools in WA may have added to the financial burden for parents aspiring to an independent school education. However, the continued increase of enrolments in independent schools in WA indicates that the findings of the ISQ survey prevail – that while parents who aspire to an independent education for their children may choose an alternative option in the face of financial restraints, their preferred choice remains an independent school.

Impact on teaching workforce

With continued strong growth in independent school enrolments in WA, there is no evidence of a workforce impact on the sector from IPSs. While overall school enrolment growth may exacerbate shortages and competitive pressures to attract qualified staff in some subject areas – typically, languages other than English, maths and science – anecdotal evidence indicates independent schools remain a workplace of choice for many teachers.

Broader impact

As suggested by the ISQ research, the greatest impact of IPSs on school communities has been to confuse the public's understanding of what constitutes an independent school. However, as the ISQ research also shows, while some of the 'brand power' of the term 'independent school' may have rubbed off on IPSs, to their gain, parents are still able to identify what is distinctive about independent schools.

The term Independent Public School is inaccurate and misleading. This is fully described in the Association of Independent Schools of WA (AISWA) submission to the Inquiry, which AHISA supports.

We draw to the attention of the Inquiry that IPS school leaders do not have the full autonomy of Principals of independent schools. For IPSs, the WA Department of Education remains the overall employing authority and ensures compliance with state (and eventually nationally) endorsed curriculum and public sector standards. IPSs have limited autonomy and therefore do not have the power to fully self-determine their operations. They are obliged to meet teacher awards (the *Department of Education State Agreement*) and workplace entitlements, and are subject to a range of department policies and accountability requirements. Government-owned, they have no separate legal status.

By contrast, independent schools, as the AISWA submission describes:

- have legal status in their own right, are separately registered by the Minister of Education and must have a constitution that outlines the structure, roles and responsibilities of the governing body
- have a governing body that is responsible for the strategic planning for the school, the selection and support of the Principal and the financial viability of the school
- can determine their own Enterprise Agreements (EAs) or work under the conditions of the *State Independent School Teachers' Award (1976)* or the *Federal Educational Services (Teachers) Award (2010)*
- develop their own culture, ethos and values system reflective of the school's philosophical and/or ethno-religious base.

Until the introduction of IPSs, the term 'independent' was used to denote non-systemic non-government schools, embracing small community schools, schools with particular educational philosophies such as Montessori and Steiner, and long-established faith-based schools, including Catholic independent schools. Previous initiatives in other States and Territories to devolve various management responsibilities to government-owned schools have not been accompanied by a change in school descriptor. In WA, and now to a lesser degree in Queensland and the Northern Territory, clarity of definition has been muddled by use of the word 'independent' to describe more autonomous State schools and by continued promotion of the term by the federal government. This confusion is apparent among international student families as well as Australian parents.

Both the WA Government and schools in the independent sector market seek international student enrolments. The terminology of 'independent government schools' and 'independent schools' adds unnecessary confusion to the marketing mission, especially in countries such as China where the whole notion of 'independent education' is already a foreign concept. This confusion is to the detriment of all schools in WA, but particularly independent schools. In the international education market, WA schools do not simply compete against each other but against schools in other states and territories.

On its website, the Western Australian Department of Education reports that in 2016 'more than 70 per cent of our teachers and students are in schools that are maximising the opportunities provided by Independent Public School status to meet the distinctive needs of their students and school communities', and notes the opportunity for up to 50 further schools to become Independent Public Schools for 2017.⁸ Using the same figures, *Business News WA* reports 55 per cent of WA's State schools are IPSs.⁹

While the success of the IPS programme should be recognised and commended, the question to be raised is: at what point is being an IPS the norm and not the exception for a State school in WA? With an increasing majority of WA State schools having IPS status, is there a continuing

need to distinguish them as *Independent* Public Schools? The confusion caused by linking the term 'independent' to State schools, and the consequent frustration for parents of children enrolled in IPSs as well as independent school and sector administrators as described in the AISWA submission, could be resolved through evolution to a position where no such distinction needs to be made between the various State schools.

C. RESPONSE TO TERMS OF REFERENCE

(d) The impact on the engagement and performance of students, in particular those with additional needs.

AHISA is not in a position to comment on all terms of reference for the inquiry given that they relate specifically to the experience, outcomes, perceptions and history of those working within Independent Public Schools.

AHISA would like, however, to comment on the significance of the engagement and performance of students in relation to the evaluation of IPSs.

In the May 2013 comprehensive review of WA IPSs conducted by the Centre of Program Evaluation in the Melbourne Graduate School of Education at the University of Melbourne, in consultation with Shelby Consulting and Murdoch University, there was little evidence of changes to student outcomes such as enrolment or student achievement. The evaluation report¹⁰ notes such outcomes are unlikely to be observed during such an 'early phase of the IPS development' and refers to other research which suggests that 'as student learning occurs as a cumulative process, students will only begin to demonstrate learning gains from autonomy reforms after at least five years of exposure'.

The evaluation report notes that 'improvement in student achievement ... cannot be the only indicator considered in the success of autonomy initiatives'. This is certainly true where goals for devolution of management in public education systems include greater parent and community engagement and increased teacher workforce engagement. However, AHISA supports Professor Brian Caldwell's view that 'even though other driving forces may have been at work, a critical criterion for judging the effectiveness of reform that includes school-based management is the extent to which it leads to or is associated with the achievement of improved educational outcomes, including higher levels of student achievement, however measured'.¹¹

Improved student outcomes should be a core benchmark against which the success of IPS schools should be measured, and the extent to which this has now been achieved in WA IPSs should be an illuminating component of this inquiry.

Professor Caldwell's most recent research, as part of the International Study on School Autonomy and Learning, indicates that the link between school autonomy and student gains may be

contextual. He further notes:

The most powerful evidence on mediating factors linking school autonomy and student achievement is on the work of principals and other school leaders in building professional capacity through staff selection, professional development and appraisal; setting priorities on the basis of data about performance; and communication of purpose, process and performance.¹²

The evaluation of WA's IPSs also recognises the role of Principals as agents of change in the adoption of greater autonomy:

IPS principals felt empowered and believed that they were able to empower their teachers and better cater to students' specific needs. They were motivated by both the freedom and responsibility for selecting their staff and receiving their budget as a single figure over which they had control. Principals claimed high levels of change in their role, feeling more accountable and autonomous, and more empowered to make changes and lead their staff in improving the teaching, resources and climate of their schools. With greater autonomy, principals argued that they were also more motivated and invested in the success of their schools, thus encouraging a stronger sense of entrepreneurship and engagement as school leaders: for example, this notion of mindset can be seen in the four areas such as the principal's self-belief, the belief in autonomy, feeling of support and their skills of adopting suitable flexibilities. As would be expected, the principals exhibited different levels of these attributes – the stronger the attribute, the greater the depth of implementation.¹³

The evidence suggests that the gains from school autonomy are inextricably linked to the efficacy of the Principal.

AHISA draws to the attention of the Inquiry the professional isolation of the Principal's role and the importance of support mechanisms for autonomous school leaders. It is support for Principals of IPSs that will deliver improved outcomes for students and school communities.

CONCLUSION

AHISA WA appreciates the invitation to contribute to the WA government's Inquiry into the Department of Education's Independent Public Schools initiative.

AHISA WA commends the WA Department of Education for its initiative in establishing schools with greater autonomy and ability to respond to local community needs.

AHISA is concerned that the use of the word 'independent' creates confusion for parents in distinguishing the difference between Independent Public Schools and autonomous, independently governed schools.

AHISA suggests this confusion could be resolved by discontinuing use of the term '*Independent*

Public School' in a situation where the majority of WA State schools have gained that status.

AHISA believes that ultimately any self-managing school reform initiative should be seeking improved educational outcomes for students and that the key to achieving these outcomes will lie with the quality of support offered to Principals.

NOTES

¹ As published at <http://isca.edu.au/about-independent-schools/>.

² Caldwell BJ (2014) Impact of school autonomy on student achievement in 21st century education: A review of the evidence. Research paper forming a contribution to the International Study on School Autonomy and Learning (ISSAL). Accessed at <http://educationaltransformations.com.au/wp-content/uploads/School-Autonomy-and-Student-Achievement-Evidence.pdf>.

³ Caldwell BJ (2005), *School-based management*. The International Academy of Education. Education Policy Series, No 3. Brussels/ Paris: The International Academy of Education/UNESCO, The International Institute for Educational Planning. Accessed at <https://smec.curtin.edu.au/local/documents/Edpol3.pdf>.

⁴ AHISA has published a Model of Autonomous School Principalship, available at <http://www.ahisa.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/Principalship-Model-Oct2011-Final1.pdf>.

⁵ Independent School Queensland (2014) Parent perceptions of schooling options. Accessed at http://www.isq.qld.edu.au/files/file/News%20and%20Media/Publications/ParentsPerceptionReport_21102014_email.pdf.

⁶ Taylor P (2014) WA chalks up public school success story. *The Australian*, 23 May 2014; accessed at <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/education/western-australia-chalks-up-a-public-school-success-story/story-fn59nlz9-1226927602269>.

⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016) *Schools Australia*, publication no. 4221.0, pivot table data.

⁸ As published at <http://www.education.wa.edu.au/home/detcms/navigation/about-us/programs-and-initiatives/independent-public-schools/>.

⁹ Pickles S (2016) Affordability, opportunity key for schools. *Business News WA*, 25 January 2016; accessed at <https://www.businessnews.com.au/article/Affordability-opportunity-key-for-schools>.

¹⁰ The Centre for Program Evaluation (CPE) at the University of Melbourne (UoM), Shelby Consulting and Murdoch University (2013) Evaluation of the Independent Public Schools Initiative. Report. Accessed at [http://www.aitsl.edu.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/evaluation-of-the-independent-public-schools-initiative-\(full-report\)-\(1\).pdf](http://www.aitsl.edu.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/evaluation-of-the-independent-public-schools-initiative-(full-report)-(1).pdf).

¹¹ Calwell (2005), op cit, page 7.

¹² Calwell (2014), op cit, page ii.

¹³ CPE (2013), op cit, page 7.