

15/4/2016

Principal Research Officer  
Education and Health Standing Committee  
Legislative Assembly Committee Office  
Level 1/11 Harvest Terrace  
WEST PERTH WA 6005

Dear Sir,

I wish to make a submission as a Board member (and current Chair) of the Roleystone Community College, a K-10 High school that became an IPS school in 2015. I have been a member of the Board since 2012 when the College was formed from an amalgamation of the Roleystone Primary School and Roleystone High School.

#### **BACKGROUND**

We are a small (800 odd students) Community school and we on the Board represent at the school the Roleystone Community. The Board consists of representatives from all the schools stakeholders, namely the Education Department Executive (Principal), RCC staff members (4), RCC parents (3), and Roleystone Community members (6). We all have strong interests in seeing a successful school and bring different aspects to the table with our diverse backgrounds. I am a one of the "Parent" members of the Board, and my professional background is in the Mining industry where I have worked for large corporations and been a partner in a medium sized business. I currently consult for my own company as a Geophysicist for small-medium mining companies around the world.

#### **Path to IPS**

We initially pursued the IPS path as we understood it to mean that the school would have more autonomy, where the Principal could have much more direct control over the school. The Principal becomes much like a CEO of a company, with increased control over the organisation, such as the ability to hire and fire staff. Associated with these changes was the change in title and responsibilities of the community representatives with the School Council becoming (in name) a "Board". We had an expectation that we would help to make the school a success by being given regard to ensure that community expectations and standards were met. We understood that we do not have (as legislated under the act) authority over any government employee (i.e. all staff), but expected to be given proper regard by the Education Department Executive.

I had initial concerns with progressing to IPS after our first Chairman sought to resolve a grievance with the Principal. It related to the Principals conduct towards a Parent Council member at a Council meeting leading up to becoming an IPS. The matter was not dealt with through mediation by the RED to the satisfaction of the Chair, and as his relationship with the Principal become acrimonious and dysfunctional, he felt he had no other option than to resign (Feb. 2014). The council was disbanded by the Principal and he arranged for a new Council (now called a Board) to replace the

former Council. A new member sought by the Principal was elected as Chairman, and the school continued to progress towards IPS, gaining IPS status in 2015.

My concern was that the Education Department dispute resolution procedure had failed, when tested, to produce a result to the satisfaction of our elected Chairman who represented our community. Our Chairman rather, after trying to have the Principal meet community standards, had no option but to resign because a working relationship is required between the Chairman and Principal. This delivered a powerful message to us: that the Principal's behaviour is unaccountable. I hoped that as an IPS school we may be given more regard as a Board.

#### Post IPS – Principal “Resigns”

Shortly after the school became an IPS, in June 2015, the Principal announced that he was leaving for a new job in Kununurra after our next Board meeting in a couple of months. At that meeting I was nominated by the Board to sit on the Principal Selection Panel for the new Principal and in correspondence relating to this position subsequently found that the position being advertised was only temporary. We found that the Principal has been given a free right of return to the College (if he chooses) after 3 years. As such the new position is considered only a “Temporary” one for 33 months.

No-one on the Board or any staff had been told by the Principal of his free right to return. Our second Chairman resigned, and we were left with the RED having to attend a special Board meeting to explain the situation to Board members.

#### Efforts to have the Education Department address our concerns

The Board regarded the circumstances of the departing Principals contract, and the lack of information from the Education department during this process as unacceptable. The Principal position is not a casual position for the uncommitted, but is the most significant role in the College and is a key role in maintaining standards. The Board should have been informed **and its opinion sought** regarding permitting the Principal to leave with a three year right of return. The Board in this case would have rejected any consideration of giving the Principal a three year right of return as it serves no interest of the College. Rather, the uncertainty it brings even damages the College in many ways that were listed and sent to the Executive Director of Workforce.

Following discussions with the RED a meeting was requested between the Director General with myself as a Board representative and the President of the College P&C to discuss the Colleges position. Despite multiple requests she rejected our request for a meeting and showed no interest in hearing our issue.

We are left in a situation where our next Principal could well be chosen not based on any merit, but simply through incumbency.

Community expectation would be that our next Principal should be chosen through a Merit Based selection process with community involvement, as our new “Temporary” Principal was chosen. We are very satisfied with the process and outcome of the “Temporary” Principal selection process.

#### CURRENT POSITION OF CHAIR

I have little confidence that the Department of Education will give the Board regard on an issue that our Principal will not support. We are reliant on information regarding the College to come via the Principal, who will filter it as they choose.

We find that there needs to be no consultation with the Board in the performance or appraisal of the IPS Principal on the rare occasion (every 3 years) that their performance may be assessed by their line manager, the DG. If the Principal moves before the 3 year assessment comes up then they may perhaps pass longer periods of no assessment, or avoid it altogether. This is in stark contrast to all other staff members of our IPS school who undergo annual performance appraisal and ongoing personal feedback by their line managers.

We have no expectation that we will be timely and accurately informed on the nature of the selection of future Principals beyond the trust we have in our current Principal. There appears to be no avenue of information from the Department directly to the Board, and no regular feedback is sought by the Department on the performance of the Principal from the Board.

With a good Principal the voice of the community will be regarded, but our processes and procedure should not be reliant on just having a good Principal with a personal disposition and approach towards community engagement and feedback. With a distant line manager, and rare performance assessment, the Board of an IPS school is even more dependent than a non-IPS school on the willingness of the Principal to give regard to the community's voice. The Board/Community is left vulnerable to the Principal. There needs to be better safeguards to ensure accountability of the Principal to the School Community via support from the Education Department and Director General.

If the Education Department want their IPS Boards to consist of active, energetic, and capable community members then they need to be more responsive and treat them with sincere regard and ensure they are consulted and informed directly. Otherwise these capable volunteers will withdraw, resign, and leave our community and public school system the worse off.

I would be willing to meet with the Committee to discuss this further if they wish.

### **SUGGESTED CHANGES**

- That the present terms of the Independent Review System for IPS schools be reviewed and amended to include a member(s) of the Board on the Review Panel. This is an important review that examines all aspects of leadership, governance and curriculum. As the Board is now an integral part of school planning it is important that it be at the heart of the review and decision-making process when a school is being reviewed. They are in no way less capable of conducting a "desk top" review of a school than existing panels. They would bring a valuable community dimension to the review process contributing insight into the process from the perspective of the community and education at the local school level. This is an integral part of the IPS review. The Board holds a unique position of being detached from the "curriculum delivery" role and would bring valuable community insight and a dimension that is missing from the current WA IPS system.
- That the Chairperson of the Board be consulted, with the Principal by the Regional Director, on all relevant matters pertaining to educational planning, education, school policy and practice showing equity in communication. Matters that should be excluded are those that are necessarily of a confidential nature pertaining to any child or teacher that is of a legal nature.
- That the present system of Merit Selection undergo review and change to improve it and remove elements of patronage. This could be done through the inclusion of at least two Board members to sit on (and occasionally Chair) selection panels of senior positions at the

school (Deputy and Principal level positions). The system otherwise advertises that it is up to the Principal to select the best fit for his/her school.

- That the process of grievance management between the Board and Principal be reviewed and changes made to ensure that the community Board is satisfied with the outcome.
- The school Board must be informed and advice sought when any change to the Principals contract is being considered.
- The DG must give more regard to concerns raised by the Boards of her IPS schools. We are like the canary in the coalmine, and will make her aware of issues years before they might show up in school statistics.
- Principal performance must be assessed, with input from the board, more frequently than every 3 years.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Paul Mutton'.

Paul Mutton

Chair of the Roleystone Community College Board