

**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 TWO

Members

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

Hearing commenced at 10.56 am**Dr SCOTT FITZGERALD****Researcher, Curtin University, examined:**

The CHAIR: Thanks, Scott. We might make a start. Murray Cowper is taking a short break. He will be with us in a moment. On behalf of the Education and Health Standing Committee, thank you for your appearance before us today. The purpose of the hearing is the independent public schools inquiry. I am Graham Jacobs, the chairman. On my left is Janine Freeman and on her left is Rob Johnson. Murray will be with us in a moment. On my right are Alison Sharpe and Alice Jones, the secretariat. Hansard is kindly recording this for the public record. This committee is a committee of the Legislative Assembly, the lower house of the Parliament of Western Australia. It is a formal procedure but hopefully, Scott, not too formal. It does command the same respect as the proceedings of the house itself in relation to witnesses not having to provide an oath or affirmation but understanding that any deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as a contempt of Parliament. If you make any reference to documents, it would assist Hansard if you would give us the full title of those for the record.

Before we commence, there are a number of procedural questions; forgive me for asking these, but I need to. Have you completed the “Details of Witness” form?

Dr Fitzgerald: Yes.

The CHAIR: Do you understand the notes at the bottom of the form about giving evidence?

Dr Fitzgerald: Yes, I think so.

The CHAIR: Did you receive and read the information for witnesses sheet provided?

Dr Fitzgerald: Yes.

The CHAIR: Would you please state your full name and the capacity in which you appear before the committee? Maybe, Scott, you could just give us a little bit of a precis on yourself, the work you do and where you are from, for the record.

Dr Fitzgerald: Yes, sure.

The CHAIR: Thank you.

Dr Fitzgerald: I am Dr Scott Fitzgerald. I work at Curtin University in the Graduate School of Business. My background is I am an organisational sociologist by training. I am interested in changes in public sector management and organisational changes in general terms of managerial practices. My interest in this area is I used to teach a little bit on educational systems in Australia but this came out of a report that we prepared on the Economic Audit Committee’s suggestions from 2009. We were looking at that and in that document, there was a suggestion that the IPS program was providing a model which could be followed elsewhere in the government, which we thought was interesting at the time, given that the report came out in 2009 and this was the same year that the IPS had been initiated. We thought it was interesting that it had already been claimed as a success, so we looked into it a little bit further and compared what was described as an original policy position, if you will, in terms of education. We looked at that and compared it to other forms of autonomy drives both within Australia and internationally. Since then, the research has continued. It has been funded mostly by funds coming out of the University of Sydney Business School—colleagues over there—and we are completing a comparative research project looking at the push to devolve aspects of the education system in New South Wales and compare it to WA.

[11.00 am]

The CHAIR: Scott, you said there that the IPS system came out and it was very early claimed a success. What criteria were used to claim it as a success?

Dr Fitzgerald: From memory, the criteria were not clearly explained. It was just a model by which—I think, from memory, the terms were “getting greater community involvement” within.

The CHAIR: Okay.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: And did it?

Dr Fitzgerald: Not at those early stages, no.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: And now, does it get greater community involvement?

Dr Fitzgerald: It depends. It varies from school to school. There is a huge variation and —

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: So the contrast between IPS and non-IPS, does it get greater community involvement or does it just depend on where you are located in the community you always had it in?

Dr Fitzgerald: That is the feedback that I have got from the interviews that we have conducted. The interviews we have conducted said it depends where you are located, the sort of community involvement you get. For example, the move to a school board is a key aspect of the changes. In the interviews, the principals were pointing out that there was huge variation in terms of the participants in the school boards and the amount of work they had to do to get those participants to be involved and then bring them up to speed to what is required in terms of the board, even though, technically, that board has not actually changed from the school council. There is still simply a lot of work involved.

The CHAIR: Just to step back a little, can you just tell us about the structure of your work and your inquiry around this concept of IPS?

Dr Fitzgerald: The structure of it?

The CHAIR: Your work in that area and how did you structure it, like was it a survey thing?

Dr Fitzgerald: Okay. The original reports we did were based upon—because it was so new, we did a few interviews with people closely involved. We talked to someone on the selection panels for the original 34 and got some background information about how they were selected. Then, for that first round of research, it was basically comparative policy work. So we looked at what occurred in Victoria, the UK, the US and Sweden—we did not put it in the report, but we compared that—at that time. Since then, we have done numbers of interviews on different sites. The majority started off with principals because principals were seen to be the key, kind of, fulcrum point in terms of making this change for their large capacity to generate changes in schools. But since then, we have done additional interviews with the whole of schools. We have done them with educational assistants, teachers and principals just to try to see if there is a different viewpoint within an individual school about the benefits of IPS. Also, we have done interviews with schools that were not part of the IPS program to see how the IPS program was impacting upon the local public schools or the residual public schools, or whatever term you want to use.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: The residual public schools!

Dr Fitzgerald: Whatever you would like to call it.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: The poor bastards over the road!

Dr Fitzgerald: Yes.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Is that for *Hansard*?

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: You just said you did the background on how they were selected in the original schools. How were they selected in the original schools? Was it just out of a hat or what was it?

Dr Fitzgerald: There were 100 schools that applied, but there was strong pressure to apply. Then the informant that we had—of course, not surprisingly, you want to make sure this program works, so there was a strong emphasis on schools that would shine in the first period.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: So there was strong emphasis—there was strong pressure for schools to apply.

Dr Fitzgerald: Yes, out of those 100 schools—this was the way of the future and they should apply. Then out of those 100 that were kind of tapped on the shoulder—this is what the informant told us—there was that 34 that were selected based upon the likelihood of success, which makes sense from a policy point of view. You do not want to start the ball rolling in the wrong direction.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Have you done any comparison for those schools before and now after?

Dr Fitzgerald: Have we—no.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: In terms of educational outcomes.

Dr Fitzgerald: No.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Do you think that that is probably a good exercise to take?

Dr Fitzgerald: Yes, in terms of education outcomes, but it is very difficult. To start off with, in terms of the statistical analysis, it is quite difficult, but also in terms of seeing any real shift. The report that was commissioned by the department, by the University of Melbourne, pointed out that it is unlikely that any changes will take place in the short term, so rather than trying to look at those differences between now and then, we were looking at similar programs internationally that have been in effect for a much longer period of time.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: How have they compared internationally in, say, the UK and over east, wherever they have done it before—how do they compare the before and the after?

Dr Fitzgerald: Some schools do better under this system, particularly if they attract better performing teachers. In many cases, also, they attract better performing students, so greater and more capable students. There have been schools that have performed worse under this system, and particularly once the system becomes much more broadly enacted, you see what in the term before was residualisation. So when we were looking at what happened in Victoria, there was a shift to those schools; if people get into them, they are much better performing schools—they try to—and that would leave schools behind that had teachers that were faced with greater challenges, perhaps did not have the same capacity, had less support from the local community quite often. I mean, these are usually lower IPSEA banded schools.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I have one school in the area that went for IPS twice or three times and was declined, and it is not in a low socioeconomic area necessarily, and that has had a real effect—there was a real sense of not good enough sense of self. Even though they perform well and all of that on all the other measures, they did not get into IPS and there was a real sense of that. When you speak to people in your surveys and they have applied and they have not been put in, what are the ramifications for the school community around that?

Dr Fitzgerald: Precisely what you said. The feedback was in terms of lowering the esteem within the community and a real concern about what would this do in the long term.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: What about for the teaching staff and the leadership staff?

Dr Fitzgerald: Once again, what you said was spot on, so in terms of a real kick in the shins, not being seen to be at the right level and a kind of confusion quite often about why.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Why.

Dr Fitzgerald: Why it was not the case.

The CHAIR: And the likelihood to create a two-tier system.

Dr Fitzgerald: Yes. WA has already had a two-tier system to some extent. There has always been, of course, the leafy green schools—I mean, that is the phrase we quite often use in our interviews—and the regional and remote schools or low socioeconomic schools, but there was a concern expressed by the interviewees, as I put in the report, that this would just reinforce inequalities. I think I put in my submission that that was noted also by the Auditor General, that there was a real risk in terms of the shift in the staffing policy that would just reinforce those inequalities.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: The report that was done for the education department by Melbourne uni, I have been told that the final report was not the same as the original report. Did you only see the final report or did you see some of the —

Dr Fitzgerald: No, I did not see the final report. I was quite surprised. I read the report and then the department had a YouTube video that went with it. The YouTube video seemed to be much rosier—the kind of key outcomes—than the actual report itself. When you delved down, there did not seem to be much evidence in it. I was surprised, for example, that it was good enough to have a report where the principals said they felt like they had more autonomy. It would be interesting to see what measures they could actually use to see what autonomy was in place, given the huge increase of administrative load and box checking. I did not see the report—the earlier report; I only saw the final report.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: You talk about the Better Schools program that started in 1987. Can you give us some background as to why there was this push? Given you have that academic background, why was there this push for greater autonomy? What was the emphasis on that? Where was it coming from?

[11.10 am]

Dr Fitzgerald: In about the 1970s there was push amongst educational theorists and policymakers that greater devolution would benefit schools because it would, as the policy speaks about, bring schools closer to the community and get away from some of the problems perceived with the bureaucracy, so a kind of social democratic critique of a kind of a centralised education department, which was kind of in part an outcome of the size of the state we have and the difficulties that the education department faces. Then you see a shift in the early 1980s, coming through to the late 80s. That whole argument gets wrapped up in what you describe as “new public management”, the notion that the government should be made much more efficient and run along more competitive lines. So a lot of the language that you see in other areas of the public service were then applied to the documents, the policy in terms of Better Schools. So the Better Schools document was there in, I guess, the 1980s. There were a number of shifts under Pearce et cetera to try to push this but it was always faced with incredibly difficult challenges. Under Colin Barnett as education minister there was an attempt to bring in some pilot schools. This did not go anywhere at the time as far as talking to people involved; people were already overwhelmed at the time with changes taking place to the education system, so that was put on hold. It was only in 2009 that we have seen this come through. There has been quite a long period of transition towards this. That is why I put in my submission. I thought it was interesting that one researcher from WA was saying that, in an ideal world or from a particular viewpoint, this sort of devolution makes perfect sense but because of the practicalities, it would never take place in WA, but in fact it has. Some of those challenges that it poses now for the regional and remote schools are becoming evident and were expressed by the interviewees that we talked to.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I was always told that because of the success at Sevenoaks college, independent schools had been such a successful model. Have you looked at Sevenoaks and how it operates in terms of why it has been considered to be a successful model?

Dr Fitzgerald: We did conduct an interview with the principal there, not so much about why it was considered to be a successful model but for his viewpoints upon IPS at the time. His point of view was that this —

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I thought it was a woman principal.

Dr Fitzgerald: Yes. I did not conduct that interview, sorry—the principal.

The argument is, basically, this is not really going to extend any quality. Quality was evident in the system already and you needed to let the best schools shine. I think it comes down to a position about overall equity within the system and the responsibility of the public education system as opposed to the ability of certain schools to perform. When we did do interviews with principals, we had a focus group. There was one saying, “Look, we understand that this might cause a two-tier system but there’s an elephant in the room and the elephant in the room is the private education sector and we want to compete with the private education system. We feel bad about what this might do to those less well-off schools, but that is our major focus.”

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Has it developed a two-tier system? For the purpose of *Hansard*, your report says that.

Dr Fitzgerald: Yes, I believe it has in terms of things such as, particularly, staffing issues at the moment and the report from the people working in the remote and regional schools that we talked to.

The CHAIR: Scott, in your paper, in your interview with the Western Australian Primary Principals’ Association president, Mr Breen said —

I’ve come to conclusion, nothing has changed except the district office and the central office have been decimated because of a \$180 million have been taken out of recurrent funding ... All of those duties, all of those accountabilities have been handballed to the principal, delegation to the principal, that’s the problem.

I would just like you to comment on that. The other thing is, added to that, there has been some unsubstantiated information that I have gained that they may have devolved the duties and work around curriculum as well. Do IP schools have the power to determine curriculum and how do they, in fact, determine curriculum or is that still centrally templated?

Dr Fitzgerald: In the interviews we conducted, it appears to be, broadly, centrally determined. Some of the complaints coming from the principals were that they believe that the benefits of autonomy in terms of curriculum assessment were not being devolved to them. That was what Stephen Breen said to us on a few occasions. That was the occasion when we actually formally interviewed him, but that WAPPA had gone from a keen supporter of autonomy because they believed that this would allow principals to be much more effective in the local schools to being against the process because what they believe was being sold to them was not what was delivered, so they thought, as Breen says there in terms of huge devolvement of administrative work without the ability to really get out there and be those educational leaders that every principal we talked to aspires to—to be a great principal. They liked the actual rhetoric that is involved in the IPS program but all of them were concerned about how they were going to manage this in terms of their workload.

The CHAIR: In your paper again it states —

I’m a curriculum-based person and I don’t get enough time to get out there and be with my staff and my students and that bit I miss ... It’s become much harder because there is so much required of you ... It’s almost like I suppose like a CEO kind of role more than a principal’s role ... it’s become so complex and even the principals at the moment are trying to get a grasp on what is it that they do, what needs to happen.

Where does curriculum fit in for an IPS principal? He says, “I’m a curriculum-based person and I don’t get enough.” That implies that he has to work on curriculum. Does that mean he works on curriculum in the devolved space or does he work on curriculum as per the education centrally undeveloped space?

Dr Fitzgerald: I think it is the undeveloped space. It was the idea of implementing curriculum in a focused and responsive manner and they were saying that they could not really. The argument is you can tailor the curriculum within limits to what your school needs but they did not see, first, that there was devolvement a great deal in that area and, second, that the other requirements of their role meant they did not have time to even consider that.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Have all schools used the curriculum in a manner that is responsive to their school needs or do IP schools get more of that capacity? I thought they all had to implement the curriculum but they could implement it in such a way that is responsive to their schools.

Dr Fitzgerald: We have looked at it. All schools have a capacity to tailor curriculum. This idea that there is a greater capacity in terms of curriculum did not seem to be borne out, particularly because of the wider workload too. What was interesting about that interview was that principals started off to be incredibly favourable towards IPS in terms of “This is the model.” It was almost that they had the speech prepared already in terms of why IPS would benefit their school and when we continued to talk about them, there was a kind of reflection on it saying, “Well, actually, no; much more of my role is like being a CEO.”

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: In your paper “Putting the Public First” you argue that the principle underlying the IPS is this new public management, which you have said before. Is the new aspect of new public management being critiqued now out there in other areas as not having delivered that non-bureaucratic aspect of things and just more responsibility?

Dr Fitzgerald: Yes. It has been critiqued in other parts of government but also other education systems. There is the argument here in terms of the phrase we use, I think, it was “loose/tight control”, so there is appearance of greater autonomy and responsibility but that comes with an audit kind of culture, so much more compliance has to take place. One of the things Stephen Breen has said but also a lot of principals we interviewed was that they believed in the student-centred funding model overall and they could see why it worked but many of the schools felt that they were not getting adequate funding.

[11.20 am]

Mr M.J. COWPER: What has changed?

Dr Fitzgerald: What has changed?

Mr M.J. COWPER: Yes.

Dr Fitzgerald: Well, many school lost money.

Mr M.J. COWPER: Every school has always thought that they are not getting enough money.

Dr Fitzgerald: True, but the difference here was that principals were saying that they felt now they had to try and come up with solutions and they were made responsible for what programs —

Mr M.J. COWPER: Something had to be done, because they would keep blowing out the budget. They would set a budget in the education department and it kept blowing it out ridiculously. At the end of the day, every time they blew out the education budget, that was one less hospital or school or police station that could be built.

Dr Fitzgerald: Sure, but who makes the decision, then, about bringing the budget into line? I mean, is this the responsibility of the principals, who are primarily educational leaders, —

Mr M.J. COWPER: It has got to right through the organisation.

Dr Fitzgerald: —or is it the organisation?

Mr M.J. COWPER: It is right through the organisation.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: So the issue that you are trying to say, Scott, is that instead of it being the leaders in the organisation, they were devolving it to the principals?

Dr Fitzgerald: You might say “Toughen up,” but what they were saying is they felt it was unfair that they were left holding the can.

Mr M.J. COWPER: But in any organisation where there is cultural change or organisational behaviour change, there is always going to be push back. Look, I am not here to defend the IPS. I am saying: Would not that be an expected thing that you would see when you are investigating something like this? How much of it is actually people not wanting to change?

Dr Fitzgerald: I think people did want to change. They are saying, “We would love to change. We would like to take the opportunity that is within this program and really run with it”. Also, there is a report I tabled—I am not sure if it has been reported, but there was research done by another Curtin academic, Brad Gobby. We were looking at different schools. There was one principal who said, “Look, I think this is a fantastic program, but I just don’t have the capacity, I don’t have the resources to actually do the things that I want to do that I know my local community can benefit from.” So, yes, you could make the argument that no-one likes change, and change management processes always run into problems. But, in this case, the feedback was that they felt as if responsibility for funding cuts should be taken further up the line and they should not have to manage it at their level. Perhaps it coincided, too, with the one-line budget and there was a feeling of being overwhelmed.

Mr M.J. COWPER: Just look at the residual that existed in non-taking of long-service leave and the impact on the budget right there. It was blowing out at \$80 million a year, and every year it was growing and growing. So I suppose the line had to be drawn somewhere.

Dr Fitzgerald: Right. But now principals seem to be managing who goes on leave in a way in which to protect their budget, rather than responding to the needs of their staff or a wider policy perspective. This seems to be rat cunning on behalf of principals to make sure that their budget comes in on line. That might be beneficial to —

Mr M.J. COWPER: Rat cunning is all part of having a good business strategy as well.

Dr Fitzgerald: Yes. We could go on about this all day long, but I would argue that the responsibility of the principal is not to be a business manager—this is what you have a department for. In terms of the overall running of the budget and bringing the budget into line, that should be a responsibility right up the line.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Just going back to that issue around that they have autonomy—it is autonomy in terms of here, you are given your budget, but it has become more control in terms of auditing, so it has become more procedural, so they have less actual control in terms of that, but they have just been left with the decisions about how you implement budget changes. Could you just tease that out for me about the auditing aspect of it? What sort of autonomy have they gained?

Dr Fitzgerald: The response is that they had gained autonomy over staffing decisions and where they could use aspects of their budget—so do they hire extra educational assistants, or what do they do with it?—but in terms of the autonomy they would like or were hoping for in terms of curriculum or assessment, they had less autonomy.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: We have just had United Voice come in here, and they are saying that that autonomy has meant reduction in education assistants and in special education assistants, and that has got serious concerns in terms of workload, and also reduction in cleaning staff, so workload issues, but also educational outcomes. Do you want to talk about the impact of that, and is that what you heard when you were interviewing people, and on educational outcomes?

Dr Fitzgerald: Yes, in terms of the support that principals have to make decisions about—are they going to employ educational assistants; will they change the staffing structure in terms of having deputy principals take on certain loads? This seems to be driven not so much by the requirements of greater student outcomes but also, as I said before, for budgetary pressures. It also came back, in terms of budget pressures and bringing into line, the way they were concerned that the central

support that they had relied on previously had vanished and whether or not this had been the outcome of budgetary concerns running a more efficient and lean education sector. In other areas, such as New Zealand, where they have had a push to independent public schools or autonomous schools, there is research from people like Catherine Wylie, who has said, “Look, if you’re going to make this work, independent schools actually need more support from central; there needs to be more support programs, more people to call up and ask how this is working et cetera”, rather than less.

The CHAIR: In relation to that central control, and just following on from Janine’s comment about the single-line budget and autonomy, we heard from United Voice—and we also know this—that schools get special allocations for low socioeconomic or Aboriginality or disability; so you get an extra allocation for those particular cohort of students in your school. You talked about central control, but have you got a comment about central auditing, in that how do we know, when the school principal gets a special education allowance for that particular student cohort, that that goes to that cohort and does not go to upgrading the library?

Dr Fitzgerald: There were some comments made about that by our respondents, about that they had been a bit clever with the budget and that they would actually take money that was allocated for one area and put it in other areas. They said it was in fact something that was always done—there was some flexibility in terms of these budgets, but the move to a one-line budget was putting greater pressure on them to try to make ends meet. In terms of the audit, no; beyond that, there was not much said by the interviewees. Also coming back to educational assistants, I should emphasise that the research we were doing was primarily—we did not talk to educational assistants; we talked to teachers and principals. This part of the research is really looking at the relationship between teachers and principals in terms of both educational leadership and also a management point of view.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: In terms of talking to the principals and the aspect of the reviews, can you go through, when they get the Department of Education Services coming in and doing the review —

Dr Fitzgerald: The ERGs?

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: No, not the ERGs, just the reviews for the independent—how effective do those principals see those processes as, or do they just see it as a box-ticking exercise? What sort of exercise do they see that as?

Dr Fitzgerald: Some of the principals that were more supportive of the IPS program or thought the IPS program was great saw it as a wonderful opportunity to reflect upon where the school was going and what was happening. There were more cynical views, however, expressed that really this was impression management techniques and that it was really left to their own devices as long as they met what they said they were going to do in the three-year plan, and there was pressure on to make sure that the staff knew what to say in that regard.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Were there any people being honest about the fact that they may have coached staff, or anything like that?

Dr Fitzgerald: No; not in our interviews, no—not that far. But people did express the importance. Everyone was made aware of the importance of this process and what was expected.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Do you think it will be appropriate for all WA schools to become independent public schools because of the difficulty we have now of this two-tiered system?

Dr Fitzgerald: Yes; in terms of independent public schools, I am not sure why other schools in the long run—if there is enough support, I should say, given to schools to bring up capacity, then it would make sense to me that you have a system that extends to all schools, particularly because there are difficulties around staffing, for example. As I said in my submission, some schools are required to take on transfers, and there was, not a flattering comment, but there was a comment

made at some interview about the lemon dance and the way they had to take these people and try and manage them and they did not always fit the school, and the benefits of IPS in that regard.

[11.30 am]

That seems to be, once again, not an issue that should be dealt with at school level in terms of performance reviews of individual teachers and building up the capacity of teachers. You should not ring-fence certain schools and say, “You don’t have to worry about that problem.” The other thing that was interesting is the amount of support for leadership training et cetera—I put that in the submission. It seems that there is money available for leadership training if you are an IPS. This might be tied to federal money that has come in, but it seems to me that all schools are dealing with a one-line budget now and all schools are dealing with a much more complicated staffing process. To me it seems obvious that these should be extended to all schools.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: That just made me think about something and now it has gone. In terms of the principal–board relationship, what came out of your surveys around that? You said before some of them had to work really hard and things like that. Did you want to expand on that?

Dr Fitzgerald: Yes, that was in the initial interviews in particular. We were talking to principals about how this was going to benefit their school and they were saying this change—the phrase was like “the market perception of the school”—and they were able to get other people onto the board that perhaps they did not have before. When we pushed them on that, they said there was always the capacity to get representatives outside of not just the P&C, but anyone, on the board, and we were talking to them about some of the challenges. Some of the larger more socioeconomically advanced schools had got great recruits to boards. Others, as I was saying before, were faced with the problem of having to cajole people onto the board and then to instruct them how the boards ran. There were always complaints about a misunderstanding, quite a common misunderstanding, about the relationship between the board and the principal, the board and the staff, and the board and the curriculum, so there was a real need to push —

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: The board was spending money.

Dr Fitzgerald: Yes, there was a need to push back and say, “Look, you know, thank you for your input, but you can’t actually make any decisions about this at this stage.” This was the research that came out of Curtin University. A colleague of mine David Gilchrist did some research for the department on school boards. I think he did five schools overall. There seemed to be strong support for IPS, but they noted that there was a huge variance in terms of the understanding of what the board’s role was, what the board was supposed to do, and they pointed out the fact that the legislation has not changed in terms of councils and boards.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I remembered my question and I just want to go back to this. When you were talking about how you have got that two-tiered system where IPS do not have to take the “lemons”—the “lemon dance” —

Dr Fitzgerald: I do apologise, that is an awful phrase. Sorry to anyone who is, you know —

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: It is all right. If someone quoted it, I am happy. There is also the fact that the management of redeployees has to really be taken by the non-IPS schools. We heard this morning that IPS had an exemption from taking redeployees from the education department, but they do not have the exemption from the whole public sector. So, you can have a cleaner who was cleaning an ag department office who has been redeployed and an IPS school would have to take such a redeployee if they wanted to come into that school. Are you aware of that?

Dr Fitzgerald: Yes, I have heard of that, but it was not a real focus, as I said before, because we are looking at the impacts on teachers. But, yes, so it is governed by the wider public service management.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: If you had a teacher who had been teaching and employed by—I do not know—are there any other teachers employed in any other part than the department, they could have come back in and gone into an IPS school as a redeployee?

Dr Fitzgerald: Sorry, could you —

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Is there a teacher anywhere else in the departments, but not employed by the education department—let us say the ag department employed a teacher to run its education program—and they were redeployed, is it your understanding that IPS would have to take those redeployees over and above a redeployee employed directly by the education department?

Dr Fitzgerald: It is an interesting point, but we did not look into it.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Okay—no worries.

The CHAIR: In the question of, I suppose, autonomy versus abandonment, something I have heard both here and outside the committee was that when it came to evaluation of a school and, in fact, if a school ended up having a review, but an ERG, it was put to me that, basically, that school did not get any coaching, support or information on how they can correct the things that needed to be corrected in their school—things they needed to do. So if an IPS went in to an ERG, they do not get any central support on how they should correct the deficiencies that they have.

Dr Fitzgerald: We did not speak to any IPS schools that have been ERG-ed, so we did not get any comments along those lines, but we did get comments about lack of support and direction from the central department in many areas. “It is an abandonment”, I think was a comment that came from a number of interviewees about how they were left to their own devices. The ERG came up in terms of a non-IPS school when we were interviewing. I am not sure how much I should reveal about which IPS schools and non-IPS schools we talked to, because it is supposed to be confidential, but basically there was a concern about the way in which this ERG took place, which further put them behind in terms of their competing IPS school in their area. They were concerned that they were not given much time. The ERG information was put online, the principal involved had not been at that school for very long and had not had time to turn it around. They thought this was a further way in which their school would be pushed back, so they were up against it. They felt that they were a good school, they could improve, but with the way in which the IPS was working, they felt that they would be further challenged because more and more students were trying to get to the IPS school.

The CHAIR: In relation to principals and professional development, there is this organisation called the Institute for Professional Learning. Regarding the IPS schools and the principals of the IPS schools, in your surveys and your discussions, is there much ability for principals of IPS schools to attend those professional learning sessions? Do they get support to do that? Is there the ability to do that?

Dr Fitzgerald: Yes, there were discussions about that and the way in which the department was running two three-day programs. They were seen as beneficial. Some principals we spoke to had come into their roles and said they had not been given this training. This training at that point was offered to, I think, the second cohort of principals we were talking to, so they felt like they had fallen between the cracks there. But there did seem to be, yes.

The CHAIR: So the first adopters got it, but the second adopters did not get it?

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: No, the second adopters got it, not the first.

Dr Fitzgerald: The first adopters got it and the second adopters got it. This was principals who it seemed had transferred into IPS schools. The school was already an IPS, but they had been given the upskilling, as it was. There was the same problem with one-line budgets. They said, “Sometimes you fall between the cracks and you’re not really sure.” They said the problem was that they would ring the department and there was no-one there to give them support. The solution offered to them

was to get information from the networks, but quite often they said they did not know who else to call in the networks and other people in the networks were equally as blind about what to do. There was a kind of feeling that they had all muddled through together. It did seem to be that there was a variation between the capacity of the networks to help people out in terms of the formal training or formal feedback. But, yes, leadership training was offered. What was interesting, perhaps I can say, was that one thing that was not offered in terms of leadership training was dealing with staff and staffing issues. The consistent feedback we got both from non-IPS and IPS from the teachers at least was that there was a huge increase in terms of expectations, regardless of the socioeconomic background of the school.

[11.40 am]

So, a huge increase in terms of student outcomes, and a constant feeling of pressure. We asked principals, particularly IPS principals, “What did you do to help your teachers with this? What do you do?” We had things like, “I tell a few jokes. I bring cards in some days.” So, in terms of that argument about being an effective line manager, there did not seem to be much capacity there. When pressed, principals, understandably, would go back to what they felt they knew best, which was their educational vision, but in terms of being a line manager and responsible for taking care of the wellbeing of their staff, there did not seem to be much capacity there. In terms of leadership training, that seems to be a key point that needs to be looked at.

The CHAIR: As far as line management through the school and through the principal, previously non-IPS we had the central office and staff there, and they were line managing you as a principal. What seems to happen now—I would like you to comment on it—is that the principal of an IPS is not line managed by any of that but line managed by the director general of Education.

Dr Fitzgerald: Yes.

The CHAIR: How does one person like the director general manage up to 483 schools, so far, that have gone IPS? How does one person line manage all those principals of all those IPSs; what, with a meeting twice a year?

Dr Fitzgerald: Yes. One principal in particular was incensed by this, and was wondering what people were getting paid to do because where was his support. The point was that there were 445 principals all being line managed by the director of the department. I think the number of directors had been more than halved, from 25 to 10, and they were saying that, once again, there was this feeling of abandonment. They report to the line manager, and if there are any problems they are kind of given general feedback but not any follow-up on it, and then they are basically left to their own devices. It was mentioned by several principals, but one in particular saw this as a dereliction of duty in terms of line management and that the department should be giving more support and more guidance.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: The education department’s evidence to us has said that they have never suggested a direct link between autonomy and student outcomes. You have said they ran a little video after the report from Melbourne, and you have, in your papers to us, said that there is that central claim that IPS and student achievement is associated. So, I suppose on what basis do you consider that it is the central claim of the education department, considering they are telling us it is not?

Dr Fitzgerald: If you go back to look at some of the first public press statements about this whole program, the central claim was that this would lead to greater student learning outcomes. It has changed now. It says it provides the basis and provides the conditions by which this takes place. There has been massaging, perhaps, of the language there. But this program was picked up at the federal level, too; it was argued that the WA program should be rolled out nationally. Once again, it was argued that this would bring about greater student outcomes—student learning outcomes in particular. That is why we looked at international evidence, and there clearly is not evidence that

this form of autonomy will lead to student learning outcomes. Across the system overall, possibly some schools will achieve higher outcomes, particularly if they have more able students moving into them or better teachers moving into them, but as a whole you will just see that in terms of the average; across the whole, we have not seen any evidence in other jurisdictions of this taking place. There are reports from organisations such as the OECD, which cannot be claimed to be radical organisations against new public management. They argue that there are different forms of autonomy, and autonomy in terms of assessment and curriculum leads to better outcomes. So, the finished model that people tend to bang on about is where there is a professional respect for teachers, much more training going into teachers and there is the ability for teachers to make greater decisions about the needs of their students. What seems to be taking place here is about the staffing and budgets. There was a great quote I think I put in from quite a laidback laconic regional principal who had seen it all before. He said they had been talking about devolution autonomy since the 80s and he was waiting for it, and here it comes and it really was not what he was hoping for because it was just about staffing and budgets. He kind of had an attitude that he would get through somehow, but it was not what was being sold.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: You say that some of your research related to international studies.

Dr Fitzgerald: Yes.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: The UK, I think, in particular. I was heavily involved in education in the UK. Education there is, of course, administered and has the authority of local authorities, rather than the national government of the UK.

Dr Fitzgerald: The LEAs, yes.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Absolutely, yes. Of course, they decide what system of education they want, whether it be comprehensive schools, whether it be grammar schools and whatever or secondary modern schools, and even the primary schools are administered by boards of governors. I think I sat on about 10 schools as a governor—chairman of 10 schools. They had the autonomy, to a great extent, to have the input into who they wanted as a principal, which you probably found in your studies. I do not know whether it has changed since I left the UK some —

Mr M.J. COWPER: It was 100 years ago!

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: It was 29 years ago—it feels like 100 years ago! But I do not think things have changed much there. I cannot put my hand on my heart and say that that system is really any better than what we have had here in WA in particular. I would be interested to know what your findings were in relation to that.

Dr Fitzgerald: We were looking at the academies in particular, moving away from comprehensive. There were similar complaints. In the research we looked at, one phrase was “bastard leadership”; that this was the idea of being autonomous and being a captain of your own vessel on the high seas, but in fact, once again, having to be, in terms of being constantly surveilled by Ofsted, limited in what you could do, but also in terms of—what was interesting was the way competition between schools over there to attract students led to pernicious outcomes. The research said there was a higher level of exclusion from schools—both students getting expelled, but also students not getting in. There were examples of the concern about having to compete on the leaderboard tables over there, in that different curriculum make-ups were being brought in, and some of what were seen as equivalent units or courses were brought in that were not as challenging but got students through. There was a real concern that the academies over there were not really leading to better educational outcomes, but leading to, once again, greater inequality. Certain schools did better; other schools seemed rather excluded or students got through but were not given the same level of education that perhaps was expected.

The CHAIR: Dumbing down so they get better marks?

Dr Fitzgerald: Yes, that is —

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: It depends on the demographics of course.

Dr Fitzgerald: Sure.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Some of the inner London schools did not do so well as some of the outer London schools. There are 32 London boroughs and 32 governments, if you like, in relation to education, and they all differed. They were all different.

Dr Fitzgerald: I think in that original report we put out, I was talking there about the impact upon the internal relations within the schools. The OECD talks about the need for a cultural collaboration within the schools, and there is that language of “distributed learning”, so everyone takes responsibility for improving schools. But Knight, I think was the name, was talking about the model needed to be somewhere between Clint Eastwood and Dirty Harry; it needed some sort of shake-up and these principals needed to really get out there and turn things around. We are living in a time that is exciting and innovative apparently, but I am not sure that all parents would be happy if their principal is a Dirty Harry figure.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I very much doubt it!

The CHAIR: We probably should wrap up shortly.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I am just interesting to know what sort of further research you think should be done in terms of this, and whether there is anything in particular that needs to be focused on.

[11.50 am]

Dr Fitzgerald: We are looking at further research. We are comparing what is taking place here and in New South Wales in terms of attempts to devolve certain aspects of responsibility. In particular, we will be interested in the relationship between principals and teachers and the way in which the principals can be given the sort of support so they can in turn support teachers to be more effective. There is a report that came out by Hamilton Associates; I am not sure whether you are aware of it. It is on the Education website—they are nodding—and they talk about the importance of empowerment and empowering principals to make decisions. Having taught organisational behaviour in a business school for donkey’s years now, empowerment sounds good, but it depends what—you know. Empowerment has certain different outcomes.

Mr M.J. COWPER: I suppose it goes with responsibility.

Dr Fitzgerald: Yes. To whether this actually makes people feel once again that they have some greater say, or whether they have actually been given resources and support. There is research being done by people like Caldwell, and this Hamilton report too looked at the better performing schools and tried to get insights, but I think that research needs to be also guided by international research and what has happened elsewhere.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Scott.

Dr Fitzgerald: Thank you.

The CHAIR: I just have to read you this little bit of blurb, I am sorry. A transcript of this hearing will be forwarded to you for correction of minor errors. Any such corrections must be made and the transcript returned within 10 days if you deem that they need corrections. New material cannot be added by these corrections and the sense of your evidence cannot be altered. Should you wish to provide additional information or elaborate on certain points, we would love for you to do that. You made reference to Brad Gobby; he has got a Curtin paper—and David Gilchrist.

Dr Fitzgerald: David Gilchrist—that paper is available on the department’s website as well. It is a report into the school boards.

The CHAIR: And the Gobby one?

Dr Fitzgerald: Gobby—they are research articles in general. I can make them available to you if you like.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, that would be great. We can get the Hamilton research here and we can get the Caldwell stuff on the website.

Dr Fitzgerald: Yes. Caldwell is on the federal Department of Education website, I believe. Brian Caldwell has his own website.

The CHAIR: Alison says she has got it.

Dr Fitzgerald: You have got it?

The CHAIR: Sorry! Thank you again for your time.

Dr Fitzgerald: Okay. Can I just ask a question?

The CHAIR: Certainly.

Dr Fitzgerald: I am kind of interested how long this inquiry is taking place. It started over a month—have you been interviewing constantly since then?

The CHAIR: We have three inquiries on the go at the one time, and the big one we had was obviously the Aboriginal youth suicide, which Parliament actually commissioned us to do. We have three things running at once. We have got a fair significant body of work.

Dr Fitzgerald: I was just wondering how much would come out of this whole process.

The CHAIR: Hopefully, this will come out before the end of the year as a report.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: The report is expected in August. We have had a number of people give witness evidence, although mostly it has been done by written submission. The staff have got a big July and we have a big July and August; there will not be any holidays for us.

Dr Fitzgerald: Okay. Well, thank you for your work, because it is more grist to the mill for our research, too. It is great to read what other stakeholders have to say about the process. I look forward to seeing the report.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: All those submissions are online?

Dr Fitzgerald: Yes. I will send the ones of the opening submissions and the opening interviews with some of the major stakeholders.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: They are available there as well for you.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: There are some that are closed as well, so you will not see those.

Dr Fitzgerald: Yes, sure. I will probably see them in the report, what they have to say—some inklings without identifying.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Depends how close we can go.

Dr Fitzgerald: Thank you for inviting me.

The CHAIR: Thank you.

Hearing concluded at 11.53 am
