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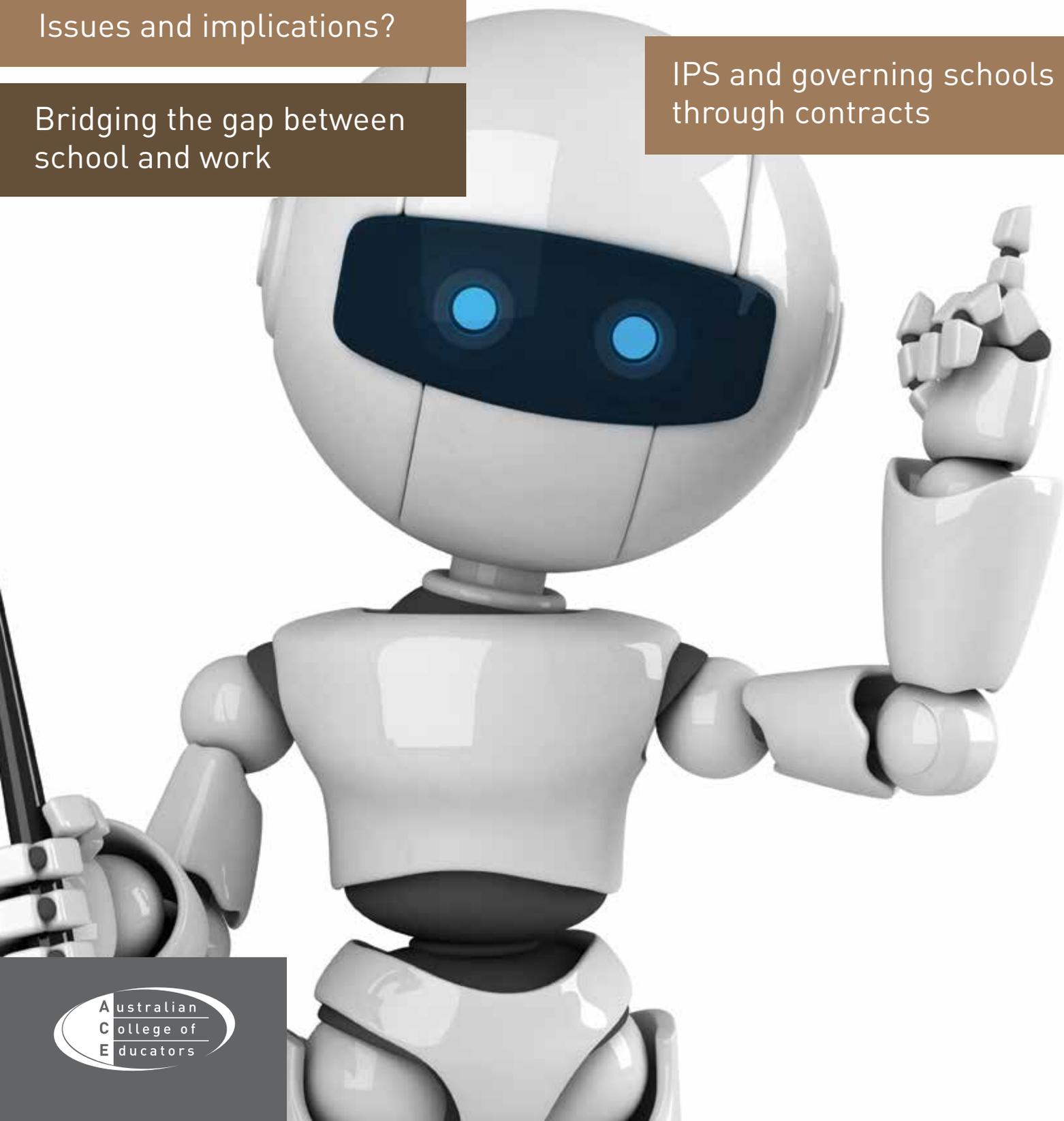
Issue 2

The ACE forum for policy, research and practice in education

The Autonomous School:  
Issues and implications?

Bridging the gap between  
school and work

IPS and governing schools  
through contracts



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school autonomy  
on student  
achievement



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# The Autonomous School

Welcome to the second edition of *Professional Educator* for 2015. It has been gratifying to receive such positive feedback from our members about the quality and relevance of the journal in recent times. Special thanks go to Paola Ghirelli our Manager of Communications and Publications and our Publications Working Group (listed on the page back of this edition) now chaired by Dr Glenn Savage. Glenn has taken over from Dr Norman McCulla, former Chair of the Working Group and ACE Board Member (2013-2014). Glenn wrote the editorial for our previous edition focussed on the Australian Curriculum while I was overseas in Germany. I will be presenting a paper on the respective states of the German and Australian education systems at our National Conference 'Educators of the edge: Big ideas for change and innovation' to be held in Brisbane (24 & 25 September).

ACE has recently established a Working Group under the Policy Committee to examine the issue of school autonomy. There is a popular belief that by granting public schools greater autonomy it will somehow lead to greater innovation, flexibility and thereby improved school, teacher and student performance. School autonomy is one of the 'big ideas' currently influencing education policy in Australia, but as I pointed out in my Walter Neal Oration to the ACE WA Branch in October 2014, the concept of school autonomy needs to be

questioned (Dinham, S. (2014). 'The Worst of Both Worlds: How the US and UK are Influencing Education in Australia', Walter Neal Oration).

Governments in the US, the UK and Australia have championed school autonomy along with general deregulation of education and exposure to schools of the 'free market' and choice. Often international evidence is claimed to support the notion of greater autonomy but this evidence is difficult to identify. A key question that remains to be answered is 'autonomy over what'? There is some evidence from PISA that shows that where schools have greater freedom over how they utilise their resources and organise their curriculum, and this is balanced with various forms of accountability, students can perform better. The OECD concluded in 2011:

*In countries where schools have greater autonomy over what is taught and how students are assessed, students tend to perform better.*

*In countries where schools account for their results by posting achievement data publicly, schools that enjoy greater autonomy in resource allocation tend to show better student performance than those with less autonomy.*

*In countries where there are no such accountability arrangements, schools with greater autonomy in resource allocation tend to perform worse'.*

(<http://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisainfocus/48910490.pdf>)

In this edition Ian Keese discusses one form of autonomy, the 'Independent Public School' (part of Minister Pyne's agenda). Other articles include Brad Gobby's close look at IPS in Western Australia and what has been revealed to date that has pioneered the introduction of the initiative. Brian Caldwell takes a look at the effect of school autonomy on student learning outcomes; a personal tale of 'creating a school imagined and built by teachers' is told by Sophie Fenton and the SchoolTech program is explained by Bruce Houghton. Leoni Degenhardt writes about the issues around the notion of the autonomous school; Jillian Dellit give an overview of a unique resource in Australian education, the ACE archives and Erica Jolly's lively review of *The Wavewatcher's Companion* by Gavin Pretor-Pinney; 2011 winner of the Royal Society Winton Prize for Science Books, also joins the April PE suite of stories.

There is also an article on our new membership category of Associate Membership (AACE) introduced this year for teacher pre-service candidates. The teaching profession is changing, with new teachers commencing at an older age, more experienced and more likely to have an undergraduate degree than in the past. It is important that we recognise and welcome such new entrants, both to ACE and the profession more broadly.

**Professor Stephen Dinham**  
OAM PhD FACE  
National President

# Independent Public Schools: An overview



IAN KEESE, FACE

**Since the 1990s giving public schools more autonomy has often been put forward as a way of improving educational outcomes. What is the rationale for this, and how successful has it been?**

Autonomy was a policy of the Victorian Kennett Government in the 1990s, and an Independent Public Schools Initiative (IPS) was introduced in Western Australia (WA) in 2009. A similar program commenced in Queensland (QLD) in 2013. The current Federal Coalition Government proposed extending the WA model by creating a \$70 million Independent Public Schools Fund to provide grants directly to public schools to assist them in becoming more independent.

No school is fully autonomous. All schools—Public, Catholic or Independent—have to meet expectations about beliefs, values and student achievements from their respective communities, as well as multiple requirements from the state including: registration, following the Australian Curriculum, and participating in external examinations. Increased autonomy is counter-balanced by increased accountability, as is the case with the WA model.

Uniformity in schools also results from a common use of teaching materials such as textbooks, and from the contributions of subject associations through conferences and publications. Across all schools and all systems what the majority of schools (apart from those that deliberately set themselves up as 'alternative schools') have in common and the ways in which they function is far greater than how they differ. One of the most significant differences between schools is not in how they are run, but in the availability of resources.

Whether a school is in the Independent, Catholic or Government system, a key factor in a school's ability to create structures that best meet the educational needs of its students lies in the strength of its leadership team, and the support they engender from its staff. A good public school principal knows the strength and weaknesses of the system and how to use this to their advantage. Less proficient principals will sometimes try to blame 'the system' for shortcomings in their own administration.

Autonomy also can mean separation and competition as opposed to cooperation, favouring some students and communities at the expense of others, and further heightening disparity and inequality. In an introduction to Maxine McKew's book *Class Act*, Professor Field Rickards states: 'Whereas the Finnish have created a system where the 'best' school is the closest one, we are a long way from being able to say this in Australia.' The correlation between increasing diversity in our school systems and declining performance on international comparisons is not coincidental. A Melbourne Graduate School of Education (MGSE) submission to *Making the Grade; Autonomy and Accountability in Victorian Schools* stated that:

*Most systems that have increased devolution have led to more unequal schools... New Zealand devolved much to schools as a consequence of the 1989 Tomorrow's School mandates and since that time NZ has dramatically increased the inequalities in student outcomes.*

## Assumptions underlying autonomy

Underlying the Federal Coalition Government's policy are two assumptions. In support of their policy they argued that the way Independent Public Schools would run would be in ways that 'more closely resembles that of a non-government independent school' – the obvious belief here is that these schools are inherently better and Government schools need to catch up.

The policy also argued that 'senior members of a school community are far better equipped to know what is best for their school than government bureaucrats.' 'Bureaucracy' is an emotively-loaded word. There are enormous advantages, both educationally and financially, in being part of a system. This is clearly shown in the development of the Catholic school system since the introduction of federal funding in the late 1960s. To efficiently direct and use the new funding, what had been individual parish schools became part of larger regions. By modelling the Government school system, all Catholic schools gained in educational resources and management skills.

Similarly when you compare educational spending on one dollar per student basis, adding public and private expenditure (that is what parents pay in school fees on top of what the government provides) and take into account the socioeconomic status of families, the public school system provides similar results to the Independent system at a lower cost. The Australia Bureau of Statistics calculated that in 2004, the average expenditure per student for Independent schools was \$12,100 compared with \$10,000 per Government school student and \$8,300 for Catholic schools.

No state educational bureaucracy is perfect, but the extent of the support a system provides to a large number of schools cannot be underestimated. Giving public schools more autonomy also can mean a reduction in Government support. The introduction of autonomy in public schools in Victoria in the 1990s was accompanied by a reduction in regional support.

## Evaluating school autonomy

In a liberal democratic society the ultimate measure of success of any educational system is the extent to which it meets the educational needs of all students. While it is great when individual schools or systems celebrate their success, what we should be aiming for, is for all students to succeed and especially those who begin with socioeconomic disadvantages

International comparisons are fraught with difficulty. As already pointed out autonomy is never absolute and there are multiple factors that limit it and these will vary from country to country. School leadership is a key factor for any form of transformation.

One also must distinguish between autonomy in curricula and assessment on the one hand, and autonomy in managing resources. The WA model focuses on the latter. The PISA 2013 report concluded that while there are some benefits where schools are granted more autonomy in curriculum and assessment, 'in contrast, greater responsibility in managing resources appears to be unrelated to a school system's overall performance' (PISA, 2013: p 52).

## The WA Independent Public School Initiative

The WA Independent Public Schools Initiative has been in operation for four years. A study by MGSE, completed in May 2013 indicated, as would be expected from the relatively short time it had been in operation, that there was no evidence yet of improved student outcomes. Perceptions of principals involved however were very positive, maintaining that the initiative

*...has considerably enhanced the functioning of their school, created the opportunity to access more benefits, and that it will lead to increased outcomes for the whole school community.*



However, one must take into account that these are in fact *perceptions* without solid evidence to back them up. These principals were most probably already innovators and were selected from a larger number of applicants.

One also must take into account that schools involved in the trial were in fact given support not available to other schools through the School Innovation and Reform Unit, which included operational support through:

*Coordination with other business areas in central office, problem solving, board training, professional learning, communication, policy review, advocacy and stakeholder management (p 13).*

In terms of line management, unlike principals of other public schools who are accountable to regional directors, principals of Independent Public Schools are directly accountable to the Director-General, meeting with them in small groups twice a year. All of this gives principals direct contact with central office, a deeper understanding of how systems work and increased prestige.

Of course, there is a downside to this for schools that are not part of the trial, and do not have these advantages. This was especially felt in schools that applied to be part of the trial but missed out. Some of these had perceptions that they were not considered 'good enough' (p. 57). However, again these are perceptions; at this stage there is no evidence that educational outcomes for schools not in the trial suffered.

This does raise the question of what happens with any proposed reform that targets some schools over others. Are there winners at the expense of losers? It is sensible for the WA Government to do a trial first but, if it is successful, will it be possible to give that same support to all the other schools?

### Public School Independence in other states

The QLD Coalition Government established 26 Independent Public Schools when it came to office, with another 54 schools beginning in 2014. Labor has now formed a minority

government. In their pre-election policy they made an indirect reference to the IPS model by stressing the crucial role of the principal:

*Labor will ensure a fair and transparent state-wide staffing system and a rigorous process for principal selection in light of the introduction of IPS (p22).*

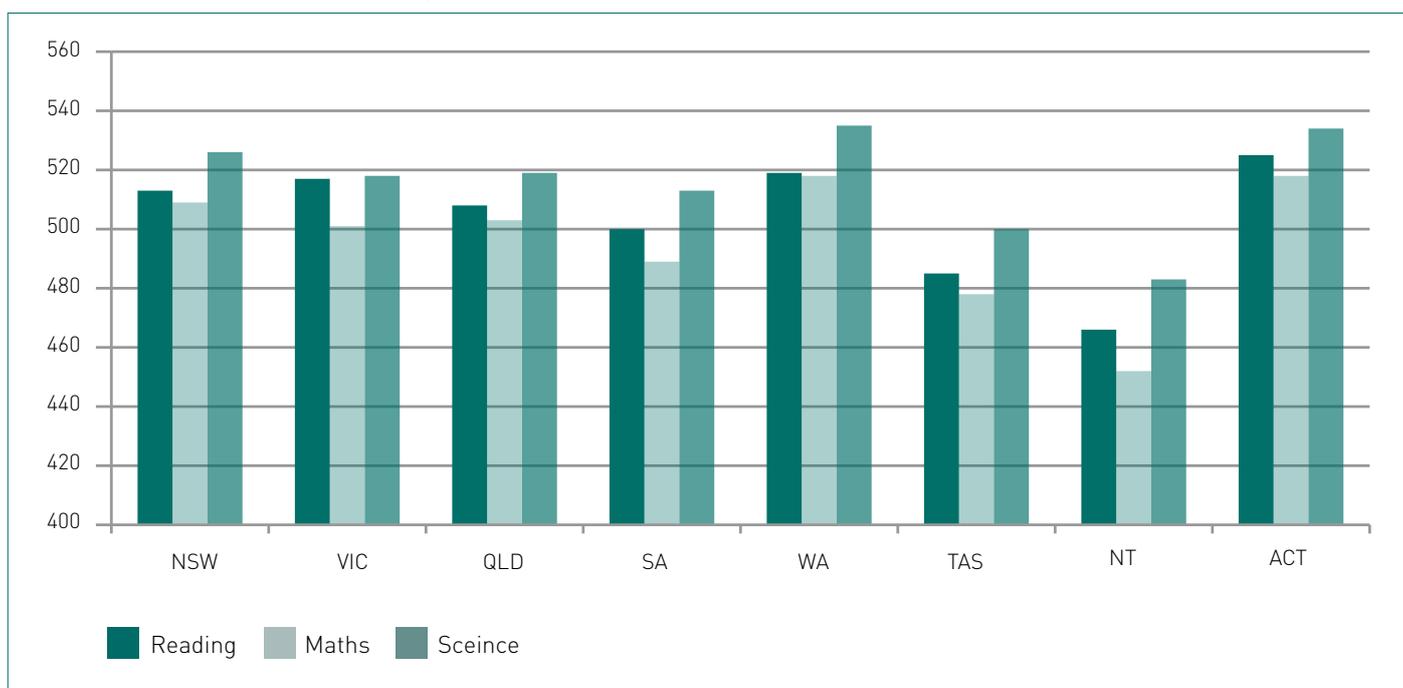
At the same time they promised to develop funding and school management models that 'give individual schools the flexibility to access resources' with a focus on supporting students with challenging behaviours.

In NSW Education Minister Adrian Piccoli rejected the idea of creating two types of public schools. In February this year, Minister Piccoli signed an agreement with the Federal Government for \$23 million to be distributed to all schools to top-up existing programs connecting schools with their local communities, which was an aim of the original coalition policy.

The Northern Territory (NT) is going ahead with funding to create six independent schools while Victoria is continuing with its present model. South

**Figure 1**  
**PISA 2012 Reading, Mathematics and Science literacies by state.**

Source: ACER, PISA 2012 *How Australia measures up*



Australia (SA), Tasmania (TAS) and the ACT have decided not to introduce separate state independent schools.

### A tale of two systems

For more than 20 years, the NSW and Victorian Education Departments have taken pride in what they see as their different management of schools, with Victoria priding itself on autonomy, while NSW has claimed benefits of its more centralised system, to the extent of rewriting Australian Curriculum documents in its own style. However, from my experience with secondary schools in the two states, there is little difference in practice.

Figure 1 breaks down the 2012 PISA results by state and territory, and shows a pattern that has been consistent over previous years. The differences between Victoria and NSW, however, are not statistically significant. While many factors need to be taken into account in comparisons, if autonomy has a stronger influence in what happens in schools in Victoria than in NSW, it certainly does not provide evidence that autonomy in Victoria

has made any significant difference to student outcomes.

In the case of WA it is worth noting that, prior to the introduction of IPS, the educational performance of WA, despite its particular geographical challenges with many schools being relatively isolated was comparable with that of the ACT. The reasons for this deserve further investigation, perhaps East Coast researchers on the way to Finland could avoid jetlag and learn significant lessons by getting off at Perth! We also must be aware that if politicians try to use PISA results for 2015 as 'evidence' for success for the ISP; we must go back to the historical record which reveals similar results for WA in PISA 2009.

### Conclusion

Public schools need to be free to respond to their local situation. Public schools can also gain significantly from external support; the special role of the central body is to ensure that all students, and particularly those who face disadvantages in a variety of forms, have an equal opportunity to succeed.

The success moves towards greater autonomy which must be measured by improved outcomes for all students and efforts put into its introduction must not be seen as a substitute for the implementation of the recommendations of the Gonski Review.

**Former Secondary School History Teacher, Ian Keese is Chair of the ACE Policy Committee. Ian acknowledges the contributions of Glenn Savage and Bronwyn Pike in responding to an earlier draft.**

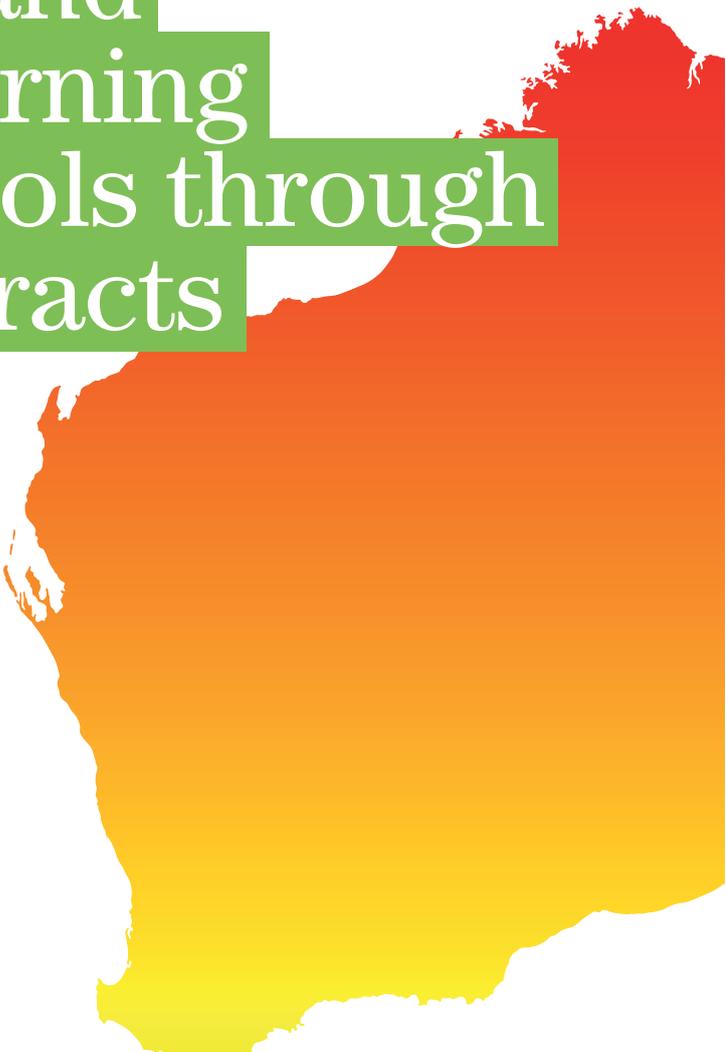
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*MGSE Evaluation of the Independent Public Schools Initiative*: <http://www.aitsl.edu.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/evaluation-of-the-independent-public-schools-initiative-%28full-report%29-%281%29.pdf>

*PISA 2012 How Australia measures up*: <http://www.acer.edu.au/documents/PISA-2012-Report.pdf>

# IPS and governing schools through contracts



BRAD GOBBY

Western Australia's (WA) history of centralised bureaucratic governance of state schools is ceasing with the unprecedented freedom accorded to principals by the state's Independent Public Schools (IPS) program. While piecemeal attempts at school and principal autonomy characterise aspects of school reform in WA from the late 1980s, it has taken over twenty years for a decentralising reform to systematically set the state education system on an inexorable path to localised governance.

## What is the IPS initiative?

Adopting New Public Management principles where decision making occurs closer to the point of service delivery, the IPS initiative involves the Department of Education entering into a 'contract' with schools (represented by the principal) and a school's board. This Performance and Delivery Agreement sets out a school's performance and accountability requirements, along with the resources and support supplied by the department. Schools must create a business plan to operationalise the agreement.

The agreement gives principals the freedom to manage and lead their schools by assuming a range of responsibilities within a limited set of arm's length centralised controls. These responsibilities include managing a one-line budget, recruiting and employing staff, determining a staff profile, and managing school maintenance and small contracts. Autonomy is not imposed because schools apply to become an IP school, and principals choose which responsibilities to assume. There is, as one bureaucrat observed, an irony in the department promoting autonomy and freedom whilst using the power of centralised departments to impose it.

Given the freedom and responsibility accorded to principals, IPS was fated to be popular with them. WA's confrère of principals have clamoured to be part of it, with demand outstripping supply. In its first year, 34 schools were awarded IPS status out of 100 applications. By 2014, 441 schools were IP schools, with IP principals now leading schools that teach 70 per cent of all public school students in the state. The popularity of the initiative is due to principals' unswerving belief that IPS enables them to 'get things done'. One principal comments, 'you're only limited by your creativity and your ability to bend things the way you want it to work' (Gobby 2013 p.281). But can IPS deliver what it 'promises'?

## Why autonomy?

The only evaluation of the IPS program is a Department of Education commissioned report (MGSE 2013). Based on the program's first three years, the evaluation was largely positive in its assessment. Although there was an increased administrative load on schools and many principals feared other principals were ill-prepared and therefore required support, IPS appeared to foster principals' motivation, engagement and entrepreneurship. Principals believed that the responsiveness of teaching to student needs had improved somewhat or a lot, however, the evaluation could not identify effects on student achievement or behaviour. This conclusion might be expected of incipient reforms, although

the wider research on school autonomy is instructive.

While many governments across the globe argue decentralisation improves system performance, numerous studies paint a more variegated picture of system and school performance. Wobmann et al. (2007) associate improved student achievement with only specific features of school autonomy, and recently England's Education Select Committee's Academies and Free Schools report concluded that academies have not raised overall standards. School and system performance is dependent on a constellation of factors that make a straightforward reading of the evidence problematic. In short, the benefits of autonomy to student learning are equivocal at best.

In spite of the paucity of evidence supporting the educational benefits of school and principal autonomy, there is

an unshakable faith in autonomy as a panacea for the ailments that befall the education system. The IPS model has been adopted in Queensland and Federal Education Minister Christopher Pyne has committed \$70 million for a national principal autonomy initiative.

In Australia and overseas, much of this faith has taken shape from a profound anti-bureaucratic discourse that lambasts the value of state bureaucracies and bureaucratic management. It is as if bureaucracy is the crucial problem afflicting education, and its remedy is giving principals the right kind of power so they can make a difference. But, school autonomy is not an inevitable solution to a self-evident problem insofar as it is unclear that bureaucracy is the problem, or that autonomy improves teaching and student learning. How, then, might we understand the emergence of autonomy?

To answer this question, we need to look beyond education because school autonomy is not a reform derived from the field. The local governance trend is a result of broad political, social and cultural currents. These have undermined the authority of state bureaucracies in their attempts to reform how public goods and services are provided, and by implication how government is conducted. WA's Economic Audit Committee's *Putting the Public First* proposes a restructure of the provision of human and social services in ways not unlike IPS. The belief is that public organisations are often inefficient, inflexible and unresponsive to users of services, which it views as being capable of being ameliorated by contracting schools to deliver a service and principals to deliver outcomes (known in policy theory as 'contractualisation'). This imposes on contracted persons and organisations an entrepreneurial and

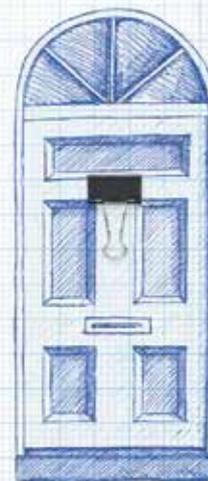


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▶ competitive identity that is responsive to their environments, and accountable for performance (Du Gay 2000). In other words, autonomy is linked to new ideas about conducting government. Such reforms generalise an economic form of government by proliferating the entrepreneurial form and enterprise as a pervasive style of conduct.

Given these origins, it is logical to ask whether this form of government, when translated into the education domain, results in improved educational outcomes? There is little evidence to support that it does. But in a sense, asking this question invites us to measure IPS and autonomy reforms against a yardstick it was never intended to be measured against. Indeed, WA's former Education Minister, Dr Elizabeth Constable, said: 'Even if student performance didn't improve a huge amount, you wouldn't close down IPS because of the non-education benefits to staff' (Gobby forthcoming np). IPS is delivering on its purpose to reform school sector governance according to what is the 'right' (neoliberal) way of governing, and whether this improves educational outcomes is a subsidiary point.

### The dangers

While education stakeholders embrace autonomy, they should also begin to consider the dangers of governing schools (through principal autonomy) to competitive, performance-focused and

enterprising ends. One IPS principal enthusiastically said that he viewed his school as a business, himself as a CEO, and his students as the school's shareholders (Gobby 2013). For some, this corporate analogy signifies a principal who is invested in the outcomes of his school by valuing his students and their needs. To the ears of others, however, his comment may signal a dangerous neoliberal reshaping of the provision of education through which the mission of schools and their activities are corporatised, and the quality of education dependent on schools' market position and the knowledge, skills and entrepreneurial capacity of their principals.

Perhaps the department is sympathetic to this concern. A distinctive feature of IPS is that IP schools are only partly autonomous. They cannot fully self-determine as they are obliged to implement the Australian Curriculum, are bound by teachers' awards and workplace entitlements, and are subject to a range of department policy and accountability requirements. Moreover, IP schools remain part of the system, in fact, the program foregrounds 'the system'. This initially served as a defense against early political and public attacks about the initiative's potentially deleterious effect on the public education system. But, emphasising IP schools' connection to the public system protects against the risks of autonomy, where the pursuit of schools' individual interests

potentially supplants those of the entire education system (Gobby forthcoming). Acknowledging this risk, the Director-General enjoins entrepreneurial principals to act 'in the interests of the whole system and the wider educational community' (DOE 2012 np).

As a contractualist reform, IPS is beset by an irresolvable tension between governing the system and the self-government of schools. Taming competition, entrepreneurship and their effects will have to be an ongoing endeavor—that is, unless autonomy becomes a vehicle for more extreme forms of market-based, privatisation reforms as occurred in the UK and the US.

**Dr Brad Gobby is a Lecturer in the School of Education at Curtin University.**

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# The effect of school autonomy on student achievement



BRIAN CALDWELL, FACE



**Educational transformations and the University of Melbourne**

**It is important to make clear at the outset that there are no autonomous schools in Australia. None have been proposed in the past and there are no plans to establish them. All schools that are in receipt of public funds are accountable for the use of these funds, thereby immediately constraining the extent of autonomy. This applies to Catholic and Independent Schools as well as Government schools. Even those designated as 'independent public schools' or, in Victoria in the late 1990s 'self-governing schools', are/were part of a public school system and shall remain so. All such schools were and will continue to be built, owned, operated and funded by government.**

While of general policy and academic interest, developments in other countries on charter schools, free schools and academies are not relevant to

Australia. These schools depart from the characterisation in the above paragraph; those who argue that extending autonomy in Australia will lead to them are being disingenuous. The reality is that there is no appetite for doing so and there is political bipartisanship on decentralising some functions and centralising others. There is little to distinguish the Empowering Local Schools initiative of the former Labor Government and the Independent Public Schools policy of the current Coalition Government. Both favour more authority, responsibility and accountability for some functions at the local level, and most funds have been targeted at building local capacity to make good decisions that, along with other strategies, will lead to improved outcomes for students.

The concept of autonomy has crept into policy discourse of late. Existing terms such as self-managing schools and school-based management describe the same phenomenon and are used widely around the world. The common interest is the extent to which there is impact on outcomes for students.

I have been involved in research, policy and practice on self-managing schools for four decades and co-authored five related books. The importance of linking self-management to student achievement was stressed in *Beyond the Self-Managing School* (Caldwell & Spinks 1998) which proposed 100 'strategic intentions' on the basis of evidence at the turn of the century. Ten of these were concerned with explicitly linking self-management to learning outcomes:

- 1 The primary purpose of self-management is to make a contribution to learning, so schools that aspire to success in this domain will make an unrelenting effort to use all of the capacities that accrue with self-management to achieve that end.
- 2 There will be clear, explicit and planned links, either direct or indirect, between each of the capacities that come with self-management and activities in the school that relate to learning and teaching and the support of learning and teaching.

- 3 There is a strong association between the mix and capacities of staff, and success in addressing needs and priorities in learning, so schools will develop a capacity to optimally select staff, taking account of these needs and priorities.
- 4 There is a strong association between the knowledge and skills of staff and learning outcomes for students, so schools will employ their capacity for self-management to design, select, implement or use professional development programs to help ensure these outcomes.
- 5 A feature of staff selection and professional development will be the building of high-performance teams whose work is needs-based and data-driven, underpinned by a culture that values quality, effectiveness, equity and efficiency.
- 6 There is a strong association between social capital and learning outcomes, so schools will utilise their capacities for self-management to build an alliance of community interests to support a commitment to high achievement for all students.
- 7 Self-managing schools will not be distracted by claims and counter-claims for competition and the impact of market forces, but will nonetheless market their programs with integrity, building the strongest possible links between needs and aspirations of the community, program design, program implementation and program outcomes.
- 8 Schools will have a capacity for 'backward mapping' in the design and implementation of programs for



- learning, starting from goals, objectives, needs and desired outcomes, and working backwards to determine courses of action that will achieve success, using where possible and appropriate the capacities that accrue with self-management.
- 9 Incentive, recognition and reward schemes will be designed that make explicit the links between effort and outcomes in the take-up of capacities for self-management and improvement in learning outcomes, acknowledging that as much if not more attention must be given to intrinsic as to extrinsic incentives and rewards.
- 10 A key task for principals and other school leaders is to help make effective the links between capacities for self-management and learning outcomes, and to ensure that support is available when these links break down or prove ineffective. (Caldwell and Spinks 1998: 217-218)

It is fair to observe that recent policies have reflected most if not all of these

strategic intentions that were formulated 18 years ago. However, it is important to continue to build the evidence base on the links between school autonomy and student achievement and identify and manage issues in design and delivery. I am a member of a seven-country team that is involved in a three-year research project in Australia, Canada-Alberta and Saskatchewan, China-Hong Kong, England, Finland, Israel and Singapore. The Australian contribution in the first year is supported by a grant from the Department of Education and Training of the Australian Government. A first step was to review the evidence, which may be summarised as follows:

- Evidence from analysis of results in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) tends to confirm that higher levels of school autonomy are associated with higher levels of student achievement providing there is a balance of autonomy and accountability.
- Deeper analysis reveals that there are differences in impact between

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developed and developing nations and, within each of these, there are differences among schools. The relationship is generally affirmed in developed countries, but for developing countries, higher levels of school autonomy may have no impact or even negative impact.

- The focus of autonomy should be on professional practice, with the aim being to make connections between the functions associated with school autonomy and actions that are likely to have an impact on student achievement. Exclusive reliance on structural changes for their own sake is unlikely to have an impact. It is important to align a range of strategies that research shows are linked to gains in student achievement.
- 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. Cultural factors may limit effects in some settings. These capacities can be built and made effective in settings where there may be only moderate levels of school autonomy.
- Differences between developed and developing countries in respect to the impact of school autonomy on student achievement are also evident within these contexts such that, within the former, there may be no impact or negative impact if schools do not

have the capacities that research has demonstrated are likely to facilitate the links. There is evidence that the impact of school autonomy on student achievement becomes stronger and more positive the longer a school has possessed and utilised a higher level of autonomy, reflecting the time it takes for the necessary capacities to be built and confidence to be gained.

Research teams are now involved in case studies of schools that can demonstrate the links. In Australia these are being conducted at the time of writing in primary and secondary schools in three jurisdictions. Findings will be reported in a mid-year round-table and in a symposium of the World Educational Research Association (WERA) in Budapest in September. Large-scale surveys and deeper case studies will be conducted in the second year of the project.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) routinely monitors through PISA the extent of autonomy on a five-level continuum: decision taken by a higher authority in full autonomy, decision taken by a higher authority after consultation with school, decision taken by school within framework set by a higher authority, decision taken by school after consultation with others, and decision taken by school in full autonomy. There are four domains across which a total of 46 decisions are distributed: organisation of instruction, personnel management, planning and structures, and resource management. A panel of people who are knowledgeable about policy and practice in their jurisdictions provides an assessment of the level at which decisions are made and the

mode of decision-making. Rankings of countries are included from time to time in OECD's annual report *Education at a Glance*. Australia was ranked 12 out of 35 nations in 2012 (OECD 2012: 500) for percentage of decisions taken in public lower secondary schools (just above the OECD average score). There are, of course, considerable differences across and within jurisdictions.

There is an inexorable logic in a shift toward autonomy for some functions if the aim is to respond to the needs, interests, aptitudes, ambitions and passions of every student. Each school has a unique mix of students; indeed each classroom has a unique mix. Serious progress is being made in personalising learning, teaching and support. We are on the right track if we build capacity at the school level to make decisions that achieve this aim and not be distracted by interesting arguments about privatising public education and the creation of charter schools that have no relevance to Australia.

**Brian Caldwell is Managing Director and Principal Consultant at Educational Transformations and Honorary Professorial Fellow at the University of Melbourne where he served as Dean of Education from 1998 to 2004.**

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A draft review of the evidence points, including an extended list of references, is available from [brian@educationaltransformations.com.au](mailto:brian@educationaltransformations.com.au).

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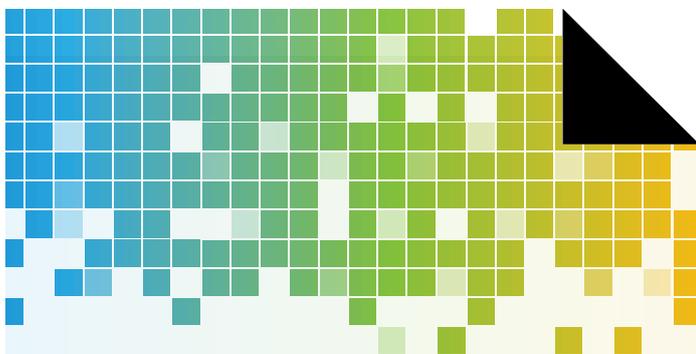
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# ‘What happens when a school is imagined, built and run by teachers?’

SOPHIE FENTON



**It was at the NEiTA lunch in 2014, that Dr Jeanne Shaw and I began a conversation that had us asking ‘why is it that lawyers and doctors can start their own practices, and yet it is a rare phenomenon today for a teacher to set up a school?’**

Education is a fundamentally human experience that is organic and ecologically nourished by the component parts of teaching, learning, along with emotional, intellectual and social development. Teachers take educational theory and put it into practice in the unique habitat that is the classroom. With a combined work experience of 45 years in the classroom, both Jeanne and I know many brilliant educators who have the most extraordinary understanding of the complexities and nuances that define our craft. And these people should be the chief actors in the space of education, as the experts in the field, just as lawyers and doctors are in their fields.

So we committed ourselves to the task of creating a school. One imagined, built and run by teachers. The result is the founding of Sandridge School in Port Melbourne. Jeanne and I understand that teachers have a significant influence

over how a person ‘sees’ and ‘is’ in the world. With a firm belief that at its core, the purpose of education is to create good citizens, Sandridge is based on the vision that ‘our world is the classroom’ and with a purpose ‘to provide education to children that fosters transformative citizenship and heart-centred learning’.

The school was born upon the motto that ‘no person is an island’. Our aim: to produce an intentionally academic school that is committed to citizenship, communal engagement and positive relationships. As entrepreneurial and humanist teachers, entrepreneurship and social impact drive our philosophy. Students are encouraged to value the community around them. If they have ideas to improve the world, whether commercial or social ventures, Sandridge will provide the support they need to see those ideas come to life.

Sandridge is a school ‘of and for community’. As a porous school, our students will spill outside the school gates; working with community NGOs, industry groups and utilising local facilities, so as to learn the function and value of community. The community will spill in, via these porous systems,

to enhance these relationships and also their connection to the school. The curriculum is characterised by mainstreaming complex and sophisticated thinking capacity in a way that generates high functioning leadership within young people. We have come to define this new kind of school as ‘an incubator’ for innovation in education.

As a new way of ‘doing’ schooling, Sandridge is an incubator for urban and community connected schooling. Situated in an urban-renewal area, without the traditional independent school trappings of ovals and swimming pools; Sandridge School is located in the heart of Melbourne, using local community facilities. It fosters societal as well as academic learning in students. It equips students to be entrepreneurial, resilient and creative change agents. It actively invites students to recognise and embrace work opportunities and to plan for successful futures as compassionate citizens.

Dr Maureen O’Rourke and EdPartnerships will establish an evaluation model for this new education paradigm. Professor Michael Bell (Flinders University) will research our new forms of educational leadership. James O’Shaughnessy and IPEN will partner with Sandridge School to evaluate the educational and professional outcomes of a school-based on positive psychology from its inception.

Sandridge will be an incubator for innovative teaching. All staff will engage in specialised teacher training, aligned with the Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE) program and the IPEN Positive Psychology network of professional development. Guided by Dr O’Rourke and Professor Bell, teachers will work as educational researchers, ▶



**Jeanne Shaw and Sophie Feston**



**Building for Sandridge School**

examining their own practice and the learning of their students, in situ, as part of daily practice. Working in partnership with tertiary teaching programs, the school will foster a genuine community of education where expert practitioners mentor, team with and formally train developing teachers.

As an incubator of compassionate, entrepreneurial and active citizenship, one of the key imperatives at Sandridge School is to radically transform how students learn. In the place of traditional work experience and community service, students will work in a realistic and practical sense with NGOs and industry to bring learning to life in a real context: grappling with challenges, working in partnership with multiple agencies and engaging in genuine projects as part of the curriculum structure. Students will engage in real project work conducted by Oxfam, UN Youth, AYCC and Oaktree. Sandridge will incorporate 'activators', like Laura John (the 2014 Australian UN Youth Ambassador), from the NGO sector inside curriculum and these activators will work alongside our teachers to educate students in the real world of business or social ventures, as practicing experts in the field. NFTE, Foundation for Young Australians (FYA) and Cashtivity will work with Sandridge to develop an entrepreneurial curriculum and connect students with 'activators' from industry in a way that equips them to engage with the future in a compassionate and productive way.

Campbell, Proctor and Sherington (2009) explored the paradox that as one of the most secular nations in the world, an increasing number of students attend religious schools in Australia. They

concluded that a key reason for this paradox was the fact that in Australia, almost all independent schools have a religious affiliation. Buckingham (2010) provides a succinct summary of the historical dominance of churches in Australia's independent school sector. According to The Independent Schools Association, roughly 15 per cent of independent schools offer secular education. However, these are mostly made up of alternative schools such as Montessori Schools, international schools or special schools. Australia is a secular state, with secular legal and political systems. With over 20 per cent of Australians formally declared as secular and over 80 per cent not actively religious in the 2011 Census, we believe that it should offer a mainstream secular independent option in education.

However, the desire to create an independent secular school has presented significant funding challenges for the establishment of the school.

Without government or church funding, we had to look to alternative sources to raise the capital to start up. As a not-for-profit organisation, a school cannot attract typical start-up investment. Philanthropic bodies typically support education initiatives geared towards the disadvantaged. In light of these challenges, we have developed a business concept to sit alongside our educational philosophy that closely aligns with the notions of innovation, entrepreneurship and imaginative initiatives for community enrichment. Jeanne and I have developed a hybrid model of partnership with local and state government, local developers and members of the community to collaboratively establish a new

educational offering. The acute need for schools in the area, a desire by local and state governments to shape the urban renewal area as a community hub, the willingness of the developer/vendor to embrace a holistic development agenda and the desire by local groups to see a historically significant building saved have enabled us to form a strong collaboration who are working together with us to see the establishment of this school realised.

There is still work to be done and negotiations continue in earnest, but by positioning Sandridge School as a critical piece of 'catalytic infrastructure' for Fishermans Bend, we have been able to develop a funding dialogue that has seen the emergence of a new model for developing urban educational facilities of the future. We are not there yet, but the signs are promising for Sandridge School - a school imagined, built and run by teachers.

Visit [www.sandridgeschool.org.au](http://www.sandridgeschool.org.au) to learn more about Sandridge School.

**Sophie is the co-founder and Deputy Principal of Sandridge School, Port Melbourne. Contact Sophie at [sophie.fenton@sandridgeschool.org.au](mailto:sophie.fenton@sandridgeschool.org.au).**

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# Bridging the gap between school and work

BRUCE HOUGHTON



In 2008 Woree State High School, TAFE Queensland and Skills360 Australia set off on a risky venture designed to improve the educational outcomes for students in the Cairns region. After years of varied results for school-age students in the VET area, the SchoolTech initiative was established to bridge the gap between school and industry to ensure that students received the necessary Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE) and at the same time achieve a relevant VET qualification.

Prior to the 2007 election, and at the time an Australian Technical College (ATC) had been planned for Townsville, the Cairns community (the Cairns Chamber of Commerce) became quite vocal about another ATC to be built in Cairns. Members of the Cairns community went to Canberra to meet with the then Education Minister, Julie Bishop. As a response to these actions, a partnership was developed between the regional High Schools and Tropical North Queensland Institute of TAFE (TNQT), now TAFE QLD North, to examine possible options for

a program that would cater for Year 11 and 12 students who wanted to complete secondary school and commence an apprenticeship or traineeship at the same time. In 2008, SchoolTech was conceived for the first intake of Year 11 students in that year. MarineTech, delivered through the Great Barrier Reef International Marine College, was badged separately to the initiative in 2009/10.

This unique program grew out of community demand, and today continues to be well supported by industry. ►



MarineTech, catering for the marine industry and receiving significant industry support, followed the year after using similar model. The three partners, Woree State High School, Skill360 Australia and TAFE North have maintained their commitment to the SchoolTech program and have over time provided significant staffing and resources to the initiative. Staffing and other costs for the program have been absorbed by the partners and no additional funds have been sought for the program since inception. The initiative also has been sustained by the ongoing involvement of industry and the high take up rate of apprenticeships from the program. Offering a specific alternative in the education and training market place, the SchoolTech program enables Year 11 and 12 students to commence their trade career while completing their must-have school certificate.

### The SchoolTech model

SchoolTech differs from other school-based apprenticeships and traineeships; it is a collaboration among schools, TAFE and Skill360 Australia (a Group Training Organisation). The program delivers secondary core subjects and trade subjects in the TAFE environment, rather than a mix of school and external VET. SchoolTech links students with an employer through which work placement happens from the start of their Year 11 studies. During Year 11, students undertake one day a week in industry for Semester 1, increasing to two days a week until the end of Year 12. The aim is that the students will complete an apprenticeship or traineeship by the time they have completed the two-year program. Consequently, the ongoing involvement of industry and employers has been a key component and a vital element of the program's success.

In the first year of operation in 2008, four trade options were available to students (Construction, Electrical, Fabrication and Auto/Diesel) with an intake of 56 students. By 2009, with student and industry support, the program grew by another 90 students with additional vocational areas introduced such as Marine, Cookery, Childcare and Indigenous Health.

MarineTech is a highly-successful initiative allowing students to gain insight into an industry that fundamentally supports the whole Australian economy. With continued port expansions and increased maritime traffic in the resources and tourism sector, there are numerous opportunities and career pathways for students to consider. The MarineTech program is practical and encourages students to apply Engineering, Science and Mathematics to daily tasks such as marine repairs, navigation and operational safety. Feedback from students and parents has been excellent with 62 per cent of MarineTech students transitioning to Marine industry-related work in 2012.

The primary benefit of the SchoolTech and MarineTech programs are that participants in the program and the industries gain from having job ready apprentices and trainees. There have been countless stories of young people who have flourished from being in this kind of adult learning space that suits their desire to learn in a different environment, and who have transformed their lives through the combination of work, trade training and a complementary educational program. The VET, education and industry partnership has a unique history over the eight years of this program.

There are many success indicators for this model of work and training. SchoolTech students are more attractive to industry employers as they undertake 140 days on the job usually with their employer and 100 days intensive vocational training within the two-year timeframe. Moreover, the SchoolTech students have completed the QCE at a rate that is well above the regional or state average, with 95–98 per cent of completing Year 12 students obtaining a QCE compared to 85 per cent regionally in North Queensland.

SchoolTech's other successes have included providing targeted and case-managed approaches that have delivered Indigenous completions aligned to the goals of *Closing the Gap*, the many participating students, often with poor academic performance, completely or

partially completing their apprenticeships as well as the numerous state and national awards received.

During the early years of the program, the skills shortage ensured that most apprentices were signed up to an apprenticeship during Year 11 or early in Year 12. However, since the global financial crises and the subsequent downturn in industry in the region, there have been a few more challenges resulting in a fall in apprenticeship sign ups. Despite the decline in the building and housing industries the program continues to be supported.

Students coming into SchoolTech, and as part of their applications, undertake a recruitment process involving an interview, literacy and numeracy testing to determine their ability, and commitment to their chosen trade/course. Parents have reported heart-warming success stories, including improved attendance levels and student achievement, as well as enthusiasm for learning once they have participated in the program.

As this is a Far North Queensland Region initiative, the SchoolTech program draws students from Independent and State schools and across regional centres. These schools have demonstrated a commitment to the program as their students are required to withdraw from the school and then re-enrol at Woree High School. As many schools in the region are not able to offer pathways to vocational education, SchoolTech provides an alternative option for these students.

Each student in the program has access to an extensive support team to assist them through to the completion of the course. This team provides social, emotional, behavioural, academic and career support for the students through a guidance officer, youth support counsellors, a school-based police officer, community education counsellors and community liaison officers. The Head of Senior School oversees the academic supervision program monitoring and tracking student performance towards their QCE, and offers support mentoring and coaching when needed. Also assisting the students, are work coordinators from Skills 360 and the Woree State High School VET coordinator.

This model provides for a feasible partnership between the students and teachers and both EQ teachers and TAFE teachers, all located in a building at the Cairns campus of TAFE North. This collaboration also provides the opportunity to ensure the programs complement the work and study undertaken across school subjects as well as their trade training. Students have been able to contextualise learning in their school subjects to support their trade training, for example, if a student is having difficulty with a Mathematical concept in their Electrical/Engineering trade class, the subject teacher can cover this in their class. This has resulted in significant improvements in student results and attendance with students voluntarily undertaking 140 day 'on the job' and up to 100 days of intensive workshop training in their chosen vocation.

Industry has welcomed this innovative program and has continued to provide support through work experience by offering apprenticeships to students. In the early years of the program Construction Skills Queensland (CSQ) provided students with work uniforms and work books and they continue to be a supporter of the program. Employers comment that they have the opportunity to work with students in the initial stages of the program through work experience to ascertain whether they will 'fit' their workplace and over time have the opportunity to ensure their learnings are consistent with industry practices.

Currently SchoolTech and MarineTech have worked in partnership with 125 employers to achieve the outcomes reflected in this program. Many of these employers have supported the program since its inception. Another measure of the success of the SchoolTech innovation has been the consistent flow of national and state awards as mentioned previously. From individual awards for students such as the Australian Vocational Student Prize, industry specific prizes such as the Manufacturing Skills Queensland State Awards through to national awards such as the Australian Training Awards: Australian Training Initiative Award; recognition from government and industry has been heart-warming and encouraging.



But life is never without its challenges; embargoes on Certificate II Engineering and Certificate II Construction, and with more recently Certificate II in Hairdressing not available in the employment category for school delivery, have impacted on the offerings available to students. All of which have resulted in the need to enrol students in programs that are not as closely aligned to their career focus, for example the Certificate II in Manufacturing Technology combined with Certificate I Engineering. And given that school students cannot undertake more than one funded certificate program, whilst still enrolled at school, there now have been funding issues created. The key issue for the embargo arose out of concerns from industry that students who had completed a Certificate II program were not undertaking sufficient work-based experiences.

There were also concerns around the expectations that students would be commencing their apprenticeship at Stage 2 and industry believed that their limited work experience and skills and the extra wage payable, as a second year, meant that this qualification reduced their employment prospects. It was, however, understood that the students in the SchoolTech program undertook considerably more work experience/ placement hours than those undertaking Cert II as part of the school program or studying at trade training centres. For example approximately 140 days by the end of Year 12, in addition to the one day a week in trade training (around 100 days). In comparison, first year apprentices spent approximately 30 days in trade training.

Whilst Cairns has seen a downturn in recent years in the construction and the

building industry, there have been recent signs of a positive turnaround in the economy of North Queensland. A number of significant proposed projects have been highlighted in the Cairns Major Projects booklet resulting in optimistic signs for the sector.

Construction contractors for major projects were excited about the SchoolTech model and believed this project would support some of the demand to grow their own workforce and employ and train apprentices.

**Bruce Houghton is the Principal of Woree State High School.**

*The contents of this article have been provided by Bruce from the SchoolTech Business Case (2014) Executive Brief written by Donna-Maree O'Connor, which have then been edited by Julie Rimes.*



LEONI DEGENHARDT, FACE

# The Autonomous School: Issues and implications?



The term 'autonomous school' is something of a misnomer. *The Oxford Dictionary* defines autonomy as 'self-government', or 'freedom of action'. Yet no school is completely independent of accountability to parents, to governing bodies or to government agencies. Rather, there are areas within which schools may have greater or lesser degrees of autonomy. This paper seeks to explore the range and extent of autonomy for schools, and the impact such autonomy might have. This exploration ranges across international as well as Australian contexts, with particular reference to the independent school sector, and the implications for leadership.

## What do we mean by school autonomy?

Across the world there is a shift towards decentralisation and the provision of greater autonomy to schools at the local and school level. The rise of academic and free schools in the UK, charter schools in the US, and the move towards

Independent Public Schools (IPS) in Australia are examples of this. What constitutes autonomy varies considerably, however, between countries, within countries, states and districts, and between schools. Four areas of school autonomy are identified by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2010, cited in Jensen et al., 2013). These relate to staffing, budgeting, student policies, and curriculum and assessment. In each of these areas there is wide variation across different countries on the amount of autonomy given to schools (OECD, 2013). There is also wide variation within Australia.

Australian Independent Schools have considerable latitude in the areas of staffing, budgeting, student policies, and curriculum and assessment. In common with all Australian schools, however, they are subject to a number of constraints, such as funding bodies and funding limitations (including employment awards); external curriculum and assessment requirements; and how

decision-making is undertaken, particularly the balance between the principal and the school board.

In Australian Independent Schools, the school board is responsible by law for the management of the school. The board gives delegated authority to the principal, who in turn is accountable to the school board. In fact, school autonomy can be largely seen as a question of balance between delegated authority and accountability. The movement of public schools to independent public school status requires higher levels of accountability and additional levels of expertise in a changing governance environment. This is an area in which the independent education sector has significant experience and expertise to share.

## What does the research tell us?

The increasing autonomy of schools is a contentious issue. The arguments against increased school autonomy include the following:



- The economic drive for devolution is perceived by some as the dismantling of public education in favour of a privatised and unscrutinised education model.
  - Along similar lines is the concern that the public or collective interest in education may be compromised in the trend towards more autonomous schools and greater parental choice, because families and self-governing schools will naturally pursue their own interests.
  - Others argue that there is insufficient evidence of positive impacts on student achievement, although other research points to improved student outcomes, resulting from greater school autonomy over time.
  - There is concern at the increase in teacher workloads, potentially resulting in loss of staff.
  - Increased school autonomy can be perceived as a shifting of responsibility for potential failure from government to schools.
  - School-based staffing becomes problematic for schools in less desirable locations, whether socio-economic or geographic, thereby deepening 'geographies of marginalisation'.
  - School autonomy can have adverse effects on student performance in countries lacking strong institutional structures. Further, how well decentralised schools perform depends on how far along in their reform journey they are. School systems with lower skill educators need tighter controls than those with higher skill educators (Mourshed, Chijioke, & Barber, 2010).
- Each school can respond to its specific context and circumstances rather than implementing central policies which may not fit the school.
  - More autonomous schools can experiment and innovate to meet their particular needs. This author's experience as principal of a 'reinventing school' reinforces this benefit (Degenhardt & Duignan, 2010).
  - More efficient outcomes can be gained by utilising local information and expertise, and keeping all funds administered by schools, as evidenced in the implementation of the Building the Education Revolution (BER).
  - Schools with greater autonomy hold themselves more accountable for their own performance, rather than 'blaming the system'.
  - Schools with more autonomy are better able to articulate their 'specialness' and core purpose, focusing the efforts and energies of all members of the school community.
  - Some research shows that students perform substantially better in systems where private school operation creates choice and competition. Further, government funding for public and private schools proves to be significantly performance-enhancing.

### Implications for leadership

The trend towards greater school autonomy is likely to continue. This trend places increasing requirements on principals. No longer can principals be simply site-based 'managers'. As well as effective management, schools with more autonomy require effective leadership, with a clear focus on strategic improvement and change.

Some will be less enthusiastic at the increased responsibility and accountability – and greater workloads – that increased autonomy brings. Others welcome the opportunity for thinking big and bringing about significant improvement for students, teachers and the community. Highly effective principals build a community, a sense of 'being special', and a positive culture focused on the core purpose and values of their school.

They also have significant impacts on student achievement. A recent US study reported that the impact of the principal on the achievement rates of students was as high as between two and seven months in a single year (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2013). The quality of school leadership, especially that of the principal, is the second most important school-based factor in determining student achievement (Dinham, 2007; Hattie, 2003, 2009)

The stakes are high. As the *Australian Professional Standard for Principals and the Leadership Profiles* (2014), states:

*School leadership has never been more important. Principals are responsible for developing and sustaining learning environments that enable all children to grow and become creative, confident, active and informed learners and citizens.*

School leadership is also demanding. Educational leaders face challenges and expectations that make demands on their time, expertise, energies and emotional wellbeing.

*Contemporary school administrators play a daunting array of roles. They must be educational visionaries and change agents, instructional leaders, curriculum and assessment experts, budget analysts, facility managers, special program administrators and community builders ... Principals also need a sophisticated understanding of organisations and organisational change. Further, as approaches to funding schools change, principals are expected to make sound resource allocations that are likely to improve achievement for students (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, & Orr, 2007).*

As far back as 2000, a British study (Forde, Hobby, & Lees, 2000) compared the leadership qualities of 200 head teachers against a group of 200 senior executives. The aim was to discover areas of strength and areas for development of the leaders of schools in the UK. One of the conclusions from this report was that 'the role of head teacher is stretching by comparison to business. Highly-successful business executives would be extremely challenged to exert outstanding leadership in schools. The

By contrast, there are many perceived benefits of increased school autonomy, several of which were identified by Jensen et al. (2013):

- Schools have local knowledge and can make better informed decisions about their school, for example in the selection of teachers who will be a good fit with their school's mission and whose expertise and experience complement that of existing staff and the needs of their students.

world has changed since 2000, and the requirements of the role of principal have increased, not diminished.

Fortunately, there are many supports for current and future principals. Among these is the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL). The AITSL-developed *Australian Professional Standard for Principals and the Leadership Profiles* (2014) provide clear guidelines for educational leaders - including those who are not yet principals - and assistance in negotiating the complexities of the role.

Contemporary school environments demand 'greater leadership density and capacity within schools'. Leadership opportunities present themselves at more layers in a more autonomous school, thereby building capability and developing future leaders. What is essential is the opportunity for high quality professional learning, especially that which nurtures the personal as well as the professional growth of current and emerging educational leaders. Without such support the role of principal is less likely to be sustainable at personal and systemic levels.

Leadership succession is a major challenge for contemporary schooling. Across the world there is a dearth of applicants for principal positions. Wise, well-informed, resilient and resourceful leaders are needed, who have the vision, the commitment, and the skills to meet the needs of young people in a constantly changing world. An interesting hypothesis is to speculate whether schools becoming more autonomous might actually draw more people to the role of principal. The potential to shape a school community and impact positively on the lives and learning of many young people and future citizens is an attractive proposition.

Across the world the move towards greater school autonomy is increasing. While the benefits of school autonomy are somewhat contested, the opportunities for schools - Government, Catholic and Independent - to develop a particular focus and clear community purpose is enhanced with increased autonomy. The opportunity for school leaders to make a significant difference in the lives and learning of students and their school

community through increased school autonomy is considerable. Leadership development which addresses personal and professional growth can assist current and future principals and school leaders to do this well and sustainably.

**Leoni Degenhardt is currently Dean of the AIS Leadership Centre, and Adjunct Senior Lecturer at the University of NSW.**

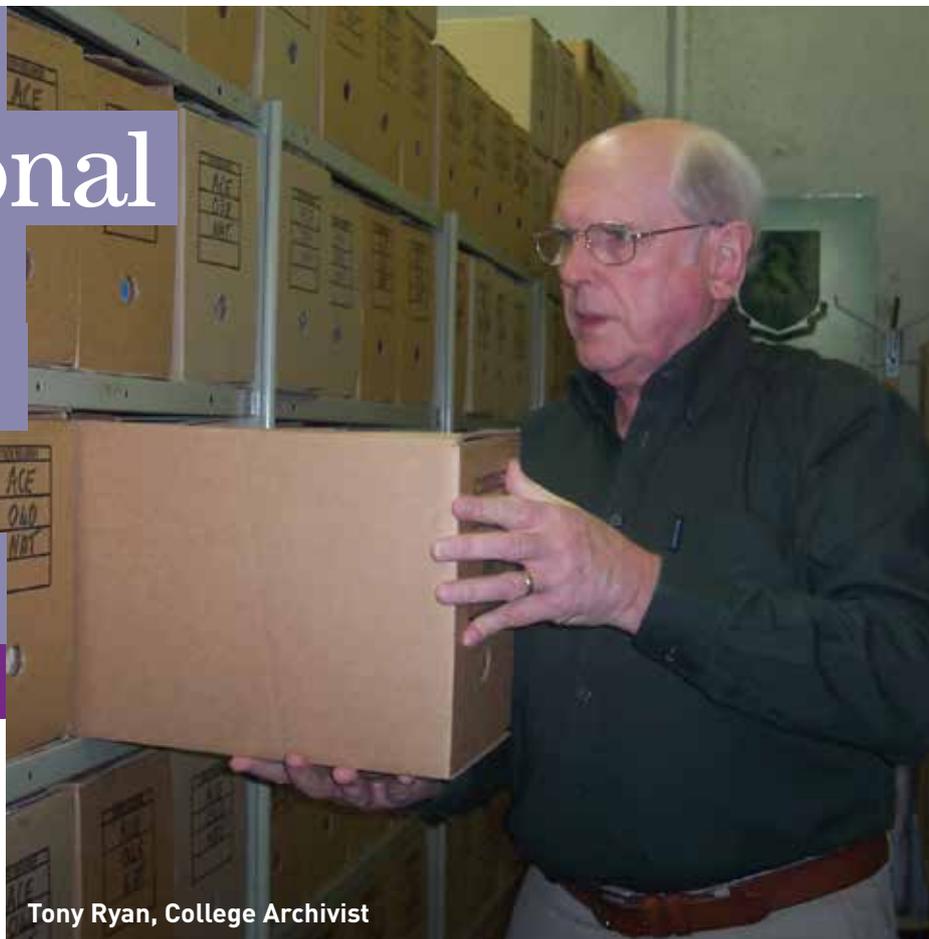
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# Fighting institutional amnesia: Archives as an antidote

JILLIAN DELLIT



Tony Ryan, College Archivist

If you spend your days in a classroom, channelling energy into structured and creative ways to predict, extend and use students' 10-minute attention spans, you may be forgiven for finding it hard to imagine a topic drier than educational archives. Even if you spend your days generating reports for ministers, planning professional development programs, writing curriculum or preparing the next generations of teachers, the very term 'archive' is likely to make your current task more appealing—or the need for a coffee more urgent.

Yet the Australian College of Educators' (ACE) Archives, a unique collection of minutes, publications, newsletters, research reports, submissions, photographs, conference papers, media releases, and the College's Oral History Collection is a relevant, useful tool—a true treasure. The records are comprehensive, covering national office, state branches and regional groups, from the lead-up to the foundation of the College in May 1959 to the present day. There are now 200 catalogued archive boxes and 2500 database entries.

The College Archives should be widely known, used and discussed. They provide a model for authorities, systems, other associations, schools, colleges and faculties to consider establishing and maintaining their own archives, involving and engaging students in history, in writing, media, information management and local understanding. Without archives we lose our history – and therefore our learning.

Archives are an essential history resource, and the history of education, including educational institutions and organisations, matters. Never has it been more important to use all our accumulated wisdom to shape our educational future.

In October 2011, in his Wyndham Medal address, Dr Brian Croke said:

*...why should the history of education matter at all to us? One good reason is that our current institutional amnesia is leaving us vulnerable in terms of educational policy analysis and development. For example, if we knew our history better we would not be so preoccupied with multiplying expensive but self-contained literacy programs, each burdened with the political expectations of instant advancement or permanent cure, like a series of childhood inoculations (Professional educator, Vol. 10, Issue 6, (2011), p.19-22).*

Education archives are few. That the College has, values and maintains archives, with policies, structures and voluntary labour, is extraordinary, farsighted and laudable.

## Oral History Project

With his interest in educational broadcasting, Tony Ryan, ACE SA Branch committee member (now College Archivist), kicked off an Oral History project by interviewing Dr Alby Jones and Dr Jean Blackburn in 1994. In that year, the National Library of Australia (NLA), recognising a significant gap in its collection in relation to educators, provided some funds to the College to produce interviews of prominent educators. In the ten years to 2004, when funding ceased, 29 interviews were conducted in all States and the ACT, edited and lodged with the Oral History Unit of the NLA. Most of these can be accessed in full online.

Although the NLA funding finished in 2004, Tony has continued to conduct interviews in a voluntary capacity recording a further 22 (averaging about 90 minutes each) with Australian educators around the country. Three of these: with the late Dr Adrienne Jericho (former Director of Lutheran Education Australia), Mr Allan Dooley (former Director of Catholic Education, Adelaide) and Dr Tony McGuire (former Assistant Director of Education, South Australia) will be deposited with the NLA in March 2015.

This work is pioneering and unique – and constitutes one of the few resources the nation has about educators and the contribution of education to our development as a nation. The 51 people interviewed have been educational leaders at branch or national level. There are, of course, many more to be interviewed. There are still more who could be identified and interviewed locally – for leadership contributions in schools, colleges, universities, communities.

Imagine if schools, colleges and universities built on this model and established, within their libraries, a collection of oral histories relating to their institution. Students could interview their local education community, exploring educational practice, philosophy and decisions. They could learn to index,

transcribe, publish and catalogue these with help from librarians and archivists. They could mine the interviews, analysing, connecting and telling stories based on them. They could write blogs, books and articles, building a continuing sense of local education growth and identity. They could be linked to state and national databases. The Australian Society of Archivists already has a School Archives Special Interest Group with active branches in NSW, Queensland, Victoria, WA and SA.

The momentum created by the College Oral History Project led, in 2002, to the ACE National Council recognising the importance of records and the logistical problems of local branch storage. Given the interest in the ACE SA Branch through the Oral History Project, the National Council requested the branch take on the role of managing the records on behalf of the whole organisation, approved a structure and process and the College Archives were born.

From 2002–2011 Tony Ryan was employed for five hours a week as College Archivist, to cull and organise the 120 boxes of records that initially arrived in Adelaide—and continued to come. With the support of the ACE SA Branch, he used grants, volunteer time, networks and his professional skills to build and maintain the archive. He became a member of the Australian Society of Archivists. Since 2011 he has voluntarily continued the work.

The archives are fortuitously located with the Lutheran Archives in Adelaide. Fortuitous, because it is hard to find a better contemporary demonstration of either the value of archives, or the professionalism of archivists, than the Lutheran Archives. Anyone who watched the Adam Goodes episode of *'Who do you think you are?'* will have seen the Lutheran Archives in action. Detailed, documented records of Indigenous education, letters between individuals and between individuals and authorities, along with the skill of an archivist, made Goodes' family history journey, and the program, possible (<http://www.sbs.com.au/shows/whodoyouthinkyouare/episodes/detail/episode/4846/season/6>). It is a remarkable story, tell-able only because of the education-related records of the Lutheran Archives.



SA teachers visiting the Archives

The College Archives currently contain two categories of material hard-copy records of ACE's routine business and specially generated material that draws on and adds value to the business records. The material is stored, organised and catalogued using standard methodology and tools. It is accessible to educational researchers, as are most archives, by arrangement.

The records constitute not just a resource for the history of education, but also for Australian social history. The first Buntine Oration, by Professor Peter Karmel in Melbourne in 1962 (Karmel, P.H. (1962, *Some economic aspects of education*, Melbourne) is relevant in understanding and progressing funding debates today. There is a thread of educational thinking and concern running through the annual orations from Karmel in 1962 to David Gonski's Inaugural Jean Blackburn Oration in Melbourne May 2014 (<http://apo.org.au/research/jean-blackburn-oration-david-gonski-ac>). Our concerns are consistent. They still reflect an original driver in the establishing the College of Educators—to create a voice for the profession—an education voice, that spoke, not just for the interests of those employed in the industry, but for the values of the profession, including intellectual integrity, honesty of mind, and ethics.

The records show we have applied, and continue to apply, our knowledge, skill and intellect to shaping our society. ▶



## Adding value to the archives

The College Archives Fellows Research Group aims to use the material in the archives to write and publish stories about Australian education and educators. Much of its work is focused on producing archival briefs, short, easy to read articles on a person or a topic, to help inform ACE members and link past debates to present decisions. Members also produced a History of the South Australian Branch in 2009. Briefs in progress include Professionalism, Governance/School Autonomy and the History of Religious Education.

The group meets physically at the archives and links nationally.

## Use of the archives

There is a steady stream of requests for access to, or information from, the archives, to support local events and, increasingly, advocacy. There has been extensive mining by researchers from the University of Canberra and the University of Cambridge as well as by the ACE WA and NSW Branches involving lengthy and repeated visits. Ian Keese's recent presentation *A proud history' of the first 50 years of the College in NSW (1959 – 2009)* drew significantly on the College Archives.

The archives has also hosted visits from school groups working on their histories and records. Interstate teachers have visited during conferences in Adelaide. The ACE national office also used the archives to produce a book to mark the 50th anniversary of the College in 2009.

## Issues

A number of issues confront the College—and indeed all organisations—in relation to their archives.

### 1. Digital records

The archives store paper, tape and CD media. There are guidelines for branches to save and forward copies to the College's National Archives in Adelaide. Increasingly, however, branches and offices keep digital, rather than paper copies.

Digital records, should, of course, be archived. This requires protocols, processes, server space, standardising of formats and the establishment of new office routines to ensure appropriate and efficient archiving. If standard procedures and protocols are agreed and in place, digital archiving can be direct from local creation to national archives. Once archival standards and protocols are agreed up front, digital records can be easily archived, indexed and accessed. Work, however is needed to establish this—sooner rather than later.

### 2. The transience of media

Archivists struggle with appropriate processes to ensure future accessibility. Do they archive hardware along with records or do they transfer the record from one medium to another? Do they, for example, store microfiche readers, tape recorders, CD and video players or do they digitise all the microfiche, tape, CD, VHS – and other media? Paper records require significant space – but are usable as long as we can read and the paper survives. Other formats could easily become unviewable. Electronic records take up less physical space, but require back-up.

### 3. Resourcing the work

Archiving is work. It requires skill, time and up-to-date knowledge in a quickly changing field. The College does well with volunteers, but still requires succession and sustainability planning.

### 4. Partnerships

Archives rarely survive in isolation. Archivists need links to each other and to constantly changing standards and knowledge. They also need partnerships with researchers, writers and industry organisations to ensure a narrative that informs the present. Telling stories about the past is the way we inform the present, whether the stories are oral, written or visual. Archives are tools to serve us now.

Strangely, the seemingly old fashioned, dry-as-dust world of archives is now well in the forefront of digital technology. Archivists have much in common with forensic scientists, hackers and nerds. Their work underpins the burgeoning world of family history research and movies such as *The Imitation Game* and *The Water Diviner*. It is a world with which young people can engage.

The College has done well to recognise, earlier than most educational organisations, the importance of establishing, maintaining and using archives. Like our brains, the more we extend and use them, the better and longer they will serve us.

**Jillian Dellit is a new member of the College Archive Fellows Research Group and an education consultant in Adelaide.**



# Fantastic contributions to education

Fellowship of the College is one of the highest honours that ACE can award. This edition of *Professional Educator* highlights two 2014 Fellowship recipients: Mrs Anne Lockwood and Mr Simon Gipson and their outstanding contributions to Australian education:



**Ms Anne Lockwood, FACE**

Anne has demonstrated outstanding leadership in teacher librarianship both in school libraries and for professional library associations particularly in administering systems and serial librarianship, developing units of work for teachers using new technology in their classrooms, co-ordinating ICT integration, researching benefits of laptops in girls' education, producing information packages for families, encouraging wide reading programs and managing budgets, staff and timetables.

Designing programs to support students in managing new technologies in the information sciences, conducting in-service programs for staff and school executives, Anne also has given active assistance to professional associations by organising conferences and delivering insightful papers.

Anne's efforts were rewarded in 2007 when she was recognised as the Teacher Librarian of the Year by the Library Association of NSW and won an Outstanding Service Award from the Professional Teaching Council.

Anne has delivered programs for tertiary students in librarianship at the University of Technology and Charles Sturt University where her knowledge and expertise in information science have been valued by students.



**Mr Simon Gipson, FACE**

Simon has made an outstanding contribution to teaching and learning, educational research, educational leadership and staff development through his work at St Michael's Grammar School, the National College for School Leadership in the UK, the National Institute of Education in Singapore and his work in Cambodia, Thailand and New Zealand.

Involvement on the Board of Independent Schools Victoria, on the Council of the Centre for Strategic Education on the Executive of the Association of Independent Schools of Australia and work for the Cambodian Children's Fund are all evidence of Simon's outstanding service that goes beyond the formal requirements of the positions he holds.

Simon's work as a researcher and writer is evidence of his scholarship and willingness to share his ideas and findings with the wider educational community. Held in high regard by his colleagues in other independent school settings and international educators, the College was very excited to award Simon a Fellowship.

# School autonomy in rural Victoria

ALASTAIR BERG

**Rural Public Schools in Victoria lack the resources and demographics to take full advantage of proposals to increase school autonomy through the Independent Public Schools initiative.**

Victorian Government Schools have the greatest decision making autonomy of all the states and territories (Productivity Commission, 2012). Yet even in Victoria, centralised decision making restrains choices made by school management. Due to a lack of resources and disadvantage, this effect is even greater in rural Victoria.

While some stakeholders may welcome the federal initiative to encourage 25 per cent of government run schools to become Independent Public Schools, any benefits dissipate with the circumstances in which rural government schools operate. Benefits of school autonomy include accountability, innovation in curriculum and pedagogy, flexible workforce management and improved funding outcomes. These are largely unattainable for the public schools in rural Victoria that educate 30 per cent of that sector's students (Auditor-General, 2014).

School autonomy advocates frequently cite accountability to their immediate community as a key advantage to decentralising decision-making. This shift, it is argued, allows school management the opportunity to cater for the unique environment within which their student population resides. It also allows the opportunity to meaningfully respond to parental choice. Parental choice allows parents the ability to choose their child's school based on

decisions made about curriculum, pedagogy, infrastructure and school management among other things. This introduces a market-based mechanism into education, sparking competition between schools and improving student outcomes. However, even without addressing legitimate concerns over this market-based approach to a traditionally public good, the notion of increased accountability, and parental choice, is a false economy in typical rural communities.

A typical rural community might host a number of public schools, with small, primary 'feeder' schools in small towns and townships placing their graduates into a small secondary school in a host town. This arrangement might allow a majority of primary students the opportunity to attend a school relatively close to home, while during secondary school students may use government-funded transportation to attend the larger, although small by metropolitan standards, secondary school.

The low concentration of schools in rural areas removes opportunities for parental choice. While rural parents might desire a certain type of school with a unique curriculum offering and teaching philosophy, the choice of schools in their area is often limited to one. The exception to this are families who possess the resources to provide private transportation to neighbouring localities, or means to send their children to expensive private boarding schools.

Parental choice is almost non-existent for families in Victorian rural areas, along with the incentive it provides

for school management and teaching staff to innovate curricula offerings and pedagogy. The source of innovation therefore largely resides in school management and teachers, as the difficulty recruiting and retaining of graduates means the latest research based pedagogy takes longer to disseminate and complement the experienced teachers in rural areas.\*

Rural demographics also means public schools are unable to exercise true autonomy in funding as compared with metropolitan and larger regional areas. Metropolitan public schools are more likely to be able to levy large fees on their parents, affording them new infrastructure and curriculum offerings. Yet rural schools, with systemic socio-economic disadvantage in their communities cannot do the same. In one rural secondary school, a voluntary fee of \$95 typically has a payment rate of 30 per cent.

Rural public schools operate with limited resources while facing disadvantage, putting them greatly at odds with their metropolitan counterparts. Increasing school autonomy, while perhaps advantageous in metropolitan areas, would have little effect on schools and students in rural Victoria. It may only serve to increase the gap between rural and metropolitan student outcomes.

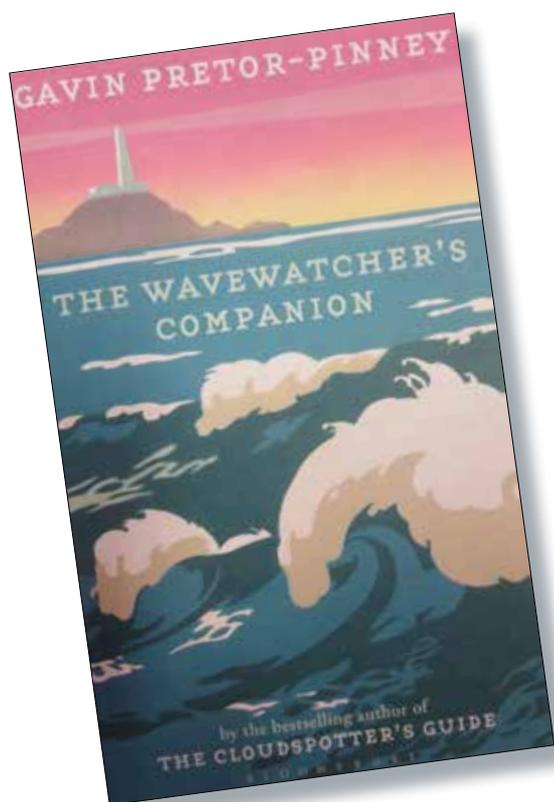
\* Schools around Australia (including Victoria) have greater difficulty recruiting and retaining graduate teachers than metro schools. In NSW 54 per cent of principals had supply issues, with 57 per cent saying it had worsened over time (Simone White, 2008 Placing Teachers? Sustaining Rural Schooling through Place-consciousness in Teacher Education).

**Alastair Berg is a teacher at Alexandra Secondary College, Victoria. He is currently studying the Master of Education Policy (International) at the University of Melbourne.**

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## *The Wavewatcher's Companion* by Gavin Pretor-Pinney

Book review by Erica Jolly, MACE

*The Wavewatcher's Companion* by Gavin Pretor-Pinney, is the 2011 winner of the Royal Society Winton Prize for Science Books. Receiving such a prize is a great honour because the Royal Society is a fellowship of the world's most eminent scientists and the oldest scientific academy in continuous existence celebrating its 350th anniversary this year. *Professional Educator* offers this review in recognition of the promotion and support of excellence in Science.

There is an increasing need for a culture of connection in so many aspects of life. That means there must be a culture of connection in education.

When the now Federal Minister for Education, laughing on Q & A said, there is no connection between sustainability and Mathematics, we should have faced the fact then, that we, in education and in life, were and are in serious trouble. We must value and foster such interdisciplinary approaches. Such approaches counter the narrowing tendency of reductionism. It is for this reason that *The Wavewatcher's Companion* is important.

A book for the general reader, the author connects with us, as the father of a three-year old daughter Flora when they are 'messing around on the rocks on

Cornwall'. There, 'by default'—since there are no clouds to spot on the horizon—they begin to 'watch the motion of the water'. At least, he does. Flora wants to go on clambering about 'on the slippery boulders'.

That human connection, that conversational engagement, is the tone we hear throughout this book. He does not assume that science must be segregated from our ordinary lives. He comes as a breath of fresh air. And we are led to discover, explore and be enthralled by waves of all kinds.

There will be nine waves in all. The first 'passes through us'. The second 'fills our world with music'. The third brings in our information age. In the fifth, shock waves of all kinds. [We may even enjoy the physics in the book but there is no compulsion to do so].

Nothing is compulsory when reading the book. There is pleasure at every stage. The human face—ears, eyes, mind, heart, mouth, muscles and hands—is there for us to recognise. The 'Wavewatcher's A-Z Field Guide' is there to remind us that waves are all around us, even in financial fluctuations, the Yin and Yang, in radio and in the ocean.

The author will make a comparison in 'shock waves' between bull whips; I think of the new chief whip and supersonic jets.

In Gavin Pretor-Pinney we have the kind of writer who values the lateral direction with its broader vision.

I recommend that potential teachers in all disciplines read this book, buy it for school libraries and themselves. The ninth wave takes us, women and men, girls and boys into surfing. He includes a Hawaiian poem *Na Nalu or The waves*.

The index is outstanding. All the different references are there for each reader to follow where an interest leads. An equally enthralling book is the author's work *The Cloudspotter's Guide*.

Remember. *The Wavewatcher's Companion* is dedicated to Flora. 'The child is father of the man' [and woman]. He knows that.

Others are writing in this way. It is time for all engaged in education formally and informally to refuse to see subjects as 'silos'. Crime thrillers and chemistry have connections. *The Wavewatcher's Companion* brings together the comedian, Billy Crystal, and 'waves that flow between us'. Do go and find all Gavin Pretor-Pinney has to offer for yourself, your family and the students you teach.

Erica Jolly is a poet, writer and teacher. She served on the Flinders University Council and its Academic Senate for 12 years after working for the Department of Education.

# The grassroots potential for the future voice of all educators



**ACE is its members. It is an association formed and grown, with a shared vision and purpose, through its grassroots communities of interest and expertise. For 56 years we have been the national voice of the teaching profession, with a wide sector reach and history of leadership.**

The **ACE Grassroots Challenge** asks – ‘what do you envisage for the future of education, within your sector and for Australia?’ ‘How can we extend our community of teachers, educators and researchers to ensure the growth and the effective pursuit of our goals?’

We know that our recognised and authoritative voice as an informed representative association can impact on the development and policy direction of education. So to continue this good work, we must attract new members who will add to our expertise and energy.

**By growing our membership we will create a sustainable, effective and responsive future. Who better to do this than our current members who understand the value and ongoing potential of ACE?**

Cast your mind back to how you were introduced to our College. Was it through an invitation to an event, an expert opinion that struck a chord with you; or a conversation with a senior colleague sharing insight into how to grow your

career? Instigating an introduction is a great way to show your support for new colleagues.

Think also about educators at other stages in their careers, who might be interested in engaging more with their profession, and who would contribute to and benefit from ACE activities and its goals.

## **Tell your colleagues that by joining ACE they will:**

- Stay informed via a relevant stream of education news and views
- Add their voice to policy discussion, read about and support critical issues
- Access relevant professional development programs
- Instigate and participate in events, share expertise and ideas
- Raise the profile of sectors and specialisations within the bigger education picture
- Contribute news and views online and in printed publications
- Engage through regional, state and national committees
- Participate in high-profile events and connect with eminent educators
- Be able to use our post nominal (MACE, FACE, AACE) to indicate professional standing

Last year our leadership was evidenced in a submission to the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG) on teacher education; presenting the inaugural Jean Blackburn Oration by Mr David Gonski AC; publishing probing articles in *Professional Educator*; and increasing media exposure on topical education policy and issues.

This September the National Conference, *‘Educators on the edge’*, will bring together education thought leaders and our members in Brisbane for quality presentations and lively discussions. **Now is an excellent opportunity for new members to join ACE with a special offer combining an Early Bird Full registration and membership for \$900 (a saving of \$105), a great way to meet a wide range of colleagues.**

With your continued assistance, our membership will continue to grow, and so will our strength in advocating for education in Australia, making a real difference to the educational journey of all Australians.

**Please visit <http://www.austcolled.com.au/membership> and become involved.**



# Become an AACE member today

ACE is known as the nationwide voice of the teaching profession. By becoming an Associate of the College you are JOINING THE TEACHING PROFESSION and becoming part of the strong voice that is currently being heard and heeded by Australia's public and government decision-makers.

## Who can qualify as an AACE?

Pre-service teacher education candidates and recent graduates awaiting a substantive appointment are eligible to join ACE.

Associate members will be entitled to use

the post-nominal AACE. Once employment is obtained (fractional, contract or full-time), Associates may transfer to full membership of ACE – [MACE].

## What are the benefits of an AACE membership?

Becoming actively engaged in the profession through ACE seminars, professional development events, conferences, committees, interest groups and other activities.

Participation in high-profile education events, for example the College's 2014

inaugural Jean Blackburn Oration with guest speaker Mr David Gonski AC and the ACE 2014 National Conference featuring keynote speakers: Ms Virginia Simmons, Professor Colette Tayler, Professor Bob Lingard, Professor Richard James, Professor Stephen Dinham and Australia's Chief Scientist, Professor Ian Chubb AC.

Opening the door to your profession and career by attending networking events with key educators and other experts across all education sectors nationwide.

Becoming engaged with state and national Committees in a range of education subjects and fields.

Access to ACE publications, including *Professional Educator*, and other ACE resources.

Easy online registration, subsidised fees for Associate members (**\$65 AACE annual rate**). Please visit <http://www.austcolled.com.au/membership/type/AACE> now.



## ACE 2015 National Conference

Educators across all sectors are adapting to changes and challenges (including technological, economic and social).

Through adopting innovative approaches, educators are now at 'the edge' and going beyond it to improve student learning.

The Australian College of Educators' (ACE) 2015 National Conference will provide educators with the perfect forum to share cutting edge and creative practices, nationally and globally.

To book your place at the conference visit our website at [www.austcolled.com.au/events/category/ace-national-conference](http://www.austcolled.com.au/events/category/ace-national-conference).

For more detailed information please call ACE on **03 9035 5473**, or become a member of our 'Australian College of Educators' LinkedIn.com group.

ACE has secured some of Australia's most highly-regarded and influential education leaders and practitioners to present over the two informative days of the conference. These include:



Professor Stephen Dinham,  
Melbourne Graduate School  
of Education  
ACE National President



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Professor John Hattie,  
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Merivale Street, Brisbane, QLD 4101

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### Early Bird registration ends 30 June 2015

AACE member: \$130

MACE & FACE member: \$610

Non-member: \$730

Non-member group: \$650

(five or more delegates; cost per person)

### Full registration

AACE member: \$150

MACE & FACE member: \$700

Non-member: \$820

Non-member group: \$750

(five or more delegates; cost per person)

### One day registration

Member: \$360

Non-member: \$410

The Gala Dinner  
will be at Rydges  
on 24 September

Members \$120  
Non members \$150

## Australian College of Educators

*Professional Educator* is the College's magazine for members. ACE represents educators across all sectors and systems of education. ACE encourages and fosters open, collaborative discussion to enable all members to provide the best outcomes for Australian students across all levels of education.

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Become a member of one of Australia's leading education professional associations and develop your professional growth and deepen your knowledge of education.

Join ACE and open the door to the education profession, connect with a dynamic community of educators who have made a commitment to raising the status of their profession and contribute to the strong voice of the College that is currently being heard and heeded by Australia's public and government decision makers.

Visit [www.austcolled.com.au](http://www.austcolled.com.au) for detailed information.

