

Hamilton Associates

SCHOOL AUTONOMY

*Building the conditions for student
success*

A research project commissioned by the Western Australian
Department of Education

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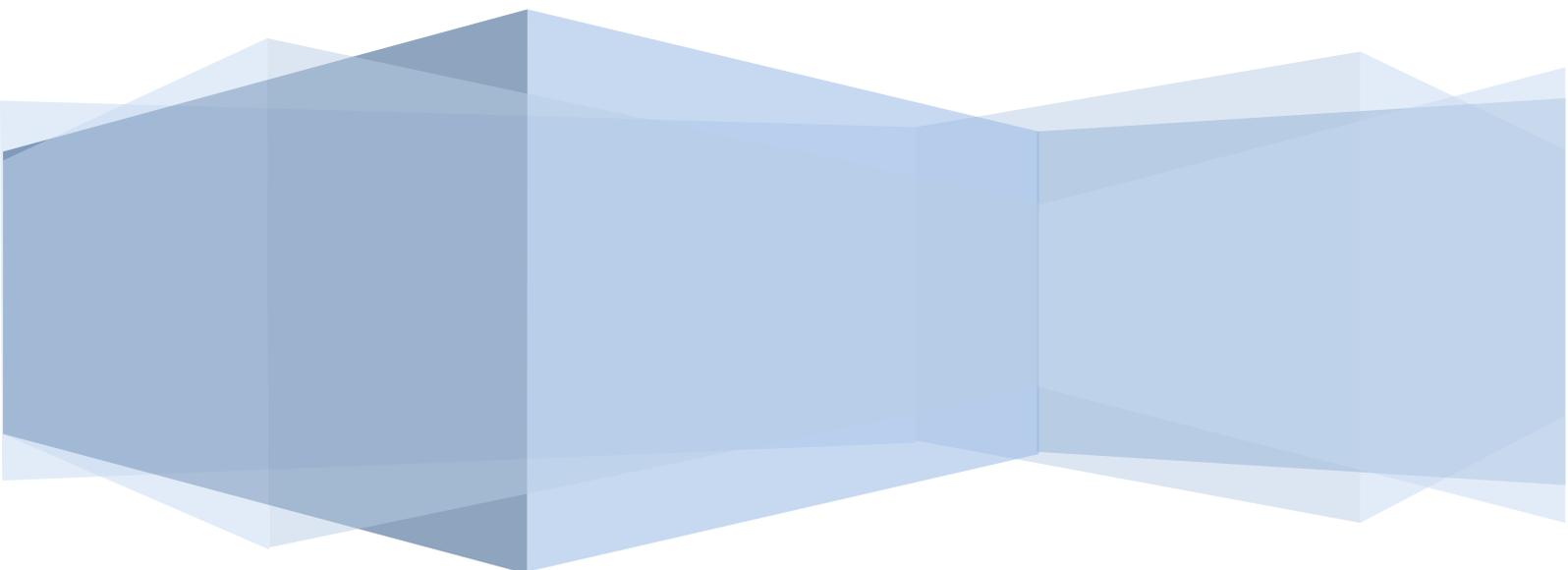


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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Independent Public Schools (IPS) initiative was introduced into the Western Australian public school system in 2009. The objective was to empower school communities by giving schools greater decision-making authority over key aspects of their operation such as staffing and budgets. Over 100 schools expressed an interest in being part of the program. A selection process determined that 34 schools were ready to operate with greater autonomy and were accepted as the first intake in 2010. Since that time there have been four further intakes of schools and in 2015 Independent Public Schools constituted 57% of all public schools in Western Australia and 70% of the students and staff.

In 2013 an independent evaluation of the program was undertaken by a Melbourne University team headed by Professor John Hattie. The evaluation team found that IPS had been successful in creating the conditions for improved student performance but further research was needed to understand how principals could use their increased flexibility and autonomy to make a difference in classrooms.

The research reported on in this paper was commissioned by the Department of Education to build an understanding of how IPS principals had used their increased autonomy to impact on the quality of teaching and learning in their school. The project had two parts. The first part was an international literature review to examine the evidence on the relationship between increased school autonomy, effective leadership and improved classroom practice.

The second part of the project was a program of school visits to eight Independent Public Schools (three primary schools, two secondary schools and one school cluster comprising one secondary and two primary schools). The purpose of these visits was to examine first hand the changes within the schools that had occurred since each school had become an IPS and the extent to which the changes were impacting on teachers' classroom practice.

While there is a substantial literature addressing the question of whether increasing school autonomy improves learning outcomes for students, the debate has moved beyond the simple question of whether the evidence supports or is against school autonomy, to identifying the conditions which must also be present for autonomy to deliver benefits. Increasing school autonomy will not in and of itself create better schools. Autonomy is only beneficial when someone uses it effectively.

The main factors identified in the literature that would need to accompany a policy of increased school autonomy for improved student outcomes to result are:

- Principal capacity building
- Intelligent accountability mechanisms
- An empowered mindset amongst principals and teachers
- Collaboration within and between schools

- A focus on improving the quality of teaching and the educational experience of students
- A commitment and capacity within the central authority to actually deliver and support meaningful authority and not circumscribe it in such detailed ways that schools gain little benefit

Political and system rhetoric in school autonomy initiatives often invokes the concept of empowerment of those at the local level to take ownership and responsibility for school improvement. But giving schools greater autonomy does not necessarily create a sense of empowerment for principals and teachers. Decision-making authority can be shifted from central authorities to schools, but if principals adopt a compliance perspective of their role and don't use their increased authority to drive change in their schools, classrooms are unlikely to be affected.

Systems that wish to create such an orientation of empowerment amongst school staff would need to consider a number of factors in addition to increasing school autonomy. These include the way they implement their autonomy initiatives, the kind of leadership development that is likely to advance principal empowerment, and the kind of support for schools that will promote and encourage empowerment of school staff.

The message for school systems from the literature is clear: they should give more autonomy to those schools that are able to benefit from it as part of an overall system strategy to improve student learning. Central to that strategy should be the development of school leaders who are empowered to work with their staff in ways that will improve their teaching practice, because it is only through improved teaching practice that student achievement levels will rise.

In the IPS case study schools there was a general agreement that becoming an IPS had shifted the context within which schools went about their business from one characterised by bureaucratic control to one based on the professionalization of teaching.

The case studies validated a key finding of the literature that the most powerful of the mediating factors linking school autonomy and student achievement is the work of principals and other school leaders in building the professional capacity of their staff. Principals in the case study schools were using their autonomy effectively to build the capacity of teachers to improve outcomes for students. While principals reported changes in school management and governance, the main thrust of their use of flexibility over resources was to drive improvements in the school's programs and teacher effectiveness.

Principals in the case study schools reported an increased sense of empowerment, which was more than simply having additional decision making capacity. They saw themselves as more trusted as a leader in the public school system, as being given the levers to enact change in their schools, as having a high level of discretion about

how to improve the school and they were confident in their own capability to be successful.

Principals viewed being an IPS as enabling them to drive a school culture that emphasised high expectations of students and staff, teachers as professionals, collaboration centred on improved classroom practice, norms of responsibility and problem solving where mistakes and problems were responded to by a search for better strategies rather than by excuses for students' lack of progress.

Principals placed great emphasis on building good relationships within the school. They did this by engaging in behaviours that are described in the literature as promoting trust and empowerment amongst their staff. These behaviours included listening to staff, demonstrating understanding of their issues and concerns, encouraging staff and being interested in them as individuals, being able to be light hearted as well as serious, dealing with conflict productively and treating all staff with equal respect and including them as part of the school team.

There was clear evidence that the empowerment of teachers increased their level of intrinsic motivation. The principals knew how to enhance teachers' sense of meaning, sense of competence, sense of impact and sense of autonomy. This tended to make them more motivated to improve instruction in their classrooms, more willing to discuss practices with colleagues and supervisors and to host them in their classrooms.

In summary, the principals of the case study schools are taking the kind of action that is supported by research as being effective in improving learning outcomes. They have a focus on teaching and learning, see themselves as instructional leaders, empower their teachers, build trust, establish strong relationships, instil confidence, build ownership, insist on accountability, set high expectations, set a clear vision and direction, align the structures of the school with the improvement strategies, and make sure that the support and resources are in place to enable change.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Department should ensure that any future expansion of IPS continues to be set within a broader set of strategies to improve teaching and learning. Connections with *Classroom First*, integrating the autonomy agenda within other priorities of the new Strategic Plan and any future *Focus* documents or Director General Statements, is essential. Such a positioning of the Department's school autonomy agenda should also be reflected in the professional learning for school leaders associated with any further expansion of IPS. Leadership and management by IPS principals need to be centrally concerned with the purpose or aims of education.
2. The Department should continue to prosecute an empowerment agenda rather than simply an autonomy agenda. It would appear that one of the reasons for the success of the IPS initiative to date has been that decisions

about implementation have been anchored in an empowerment paradigm. It has been the empowerment of principals in the case study schools that has seen them use their increased decision making authority to have an impact in classrooms.

3. The Department should expand the use of IPS principals in critical system leadership roles. It is clear from the 2013 IPS evaluation that the IPS principals are a significant asset in advancing the reform of the whole public school system. The principals in the case study schools are already providing a system leadership role in the way they are leading their schools, but the Department should explore further ways of harnessing the leadership capability of IPS principals in system reform.
4. Future school leadership development programs need to equip principals with the capacity to build a professional learning community where there is trust, where teachers are motivated to improve their practice, where collaborative learning is structured, expected and supported, and where teachers embrace an action research orientation where they explore the differential impact of various teaching strategies. Such programs also need to support the development of an empowerment mindset amongst principals. Giving additional autonomy to principals who adopt a compliance orientation to their leadership will deliver limited benefits.
5. Future leadership development activities need to recognise that the middle management layer of schools, particularly secondary schools, are a critical target group to build understandings about how to turn autonomy into improved classroom teaching. Secondary teachers are primarily influenced by their learning area head, and that person needs to have the capacity to shape teacher behaviour for the better. This issue is also increasingly applying to primary schools that now often have a middle layer of teacher leaders whose role is to drive improved practice in classrooms.
6. The Department should continue to promote and support strong collaborative relationships between schools. Not only is this a clear competitive advantage of being part of a system of schools, but it can also be an important part of strategies to raise teacher expectations, improve moderation and share best practice.
7. The role of the central office in supporting the IPS initiative needs to evolve. It was acknowledged by the case study principals that the central office (the School Innovation and Reform Unit in particular) has played an important role in ensuring the success of autonomy initiatives. But what is also true is that the role of the system needs to change as the autonomy initiative progresses. For example in the early stages of the IPS initiative, the focus was on selecting schools that were capable of operating in a new environment, delivering the flexibilities for an increasing number of schools, risk management and ensuring that the technical aspects of leadership required

to effectively manage the new flexibilities (such as managing a one line budget and staffing processes) were in place.

Now that there is an increased maturity in the initiative and the flexibilities are relatively routine, the facilitative work of the central office changes. While some of the original functions need to be maintained, the core function in the future will be to maximise the principals' capacity to enact reforms within their school so that teachers are teaching more effectively. There is clear evidence of some principals doing that very effectively now. The challenge is how to ensure that all IPS principals are using their increased autonomy to do the same. And of course such a development should not be restricted to IPS; all principals regardless of their level of autonomy need to be supported to use their authority as leaders to improve the effectiveness of their teachers. The practical experience of IPS principals could be used to good effect in acting as system leaders to spread such practices throughout the whole public school system.

SCHOOL AUTONOMY: BUILDING THE CONDITIONS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

BACKGROUND

The Independent Public Schools (IPS) initiative was introduced into the Western Australian public school system in 2009. The objective was to empower school communities by giving schools greater decision-making authority over key aspects of their operation such as staffing and budgets. Over 100 schools expressed an interest in being part of the program. A selection process determined school readiness to operate with greater autonomy and 34 schools were accepted as the first intake in 2010. Since that time there have been four further intakes of schools and in 2015 Independent Public Schools constituted 57% of all public schools and 70% of the students and staff.

In terms of the degree of autonomy granted to schools, the program is relatively modest compared to some school autonomy initiatives. But given the highly centralised history of public schooling in Western Australia, the IPS initiative is a significant shift in the balance of decision making between schools and the central office of the Western Australian Department of Education.

In order to fully understand the difference between Western Australia's IPS initiative and school autonomy initiatives elsewhere in Australia and internationally, the following design features of the implementation are worth noting:

- Schools (in consultation with their communities) were able to exercise choice about whether they wished to participate.
- Only those schools already operating effectively and deemed able to benefit from increased autonomy were included in the initiative.
- Part of the selection process required schools to demonstrate how they would use their increased autonomy to improve the educational experience of their students.
- The combination of, on the one hand, features that were attractive to principals and, on the other, hurdles for selection, made the attainment of IPS high status for schools and their communities. For each intake year the number of schools accepted into the program far exceeded the number of schools applying for inclusion.
- From the outset of the program it was emphasised that while schools that opted to become IPS would have increased independence, they were still part of the public school system and had a responsibility to act in ways that protected the integrity of the system. IPS principals were challenged to find the balance between acting in their school's interest and acting in the system's interest.
- Strengthened accountability arrangements were introduced for IPS in the form of a performance agreement between the Director General, the principal and the Chair of the School Board along with a periodic external school review by an agency independent of the Department of Education. These additional accountability mechanisms were accepted by principals as educationally fair and reasonable given the increased autonomy.

- Initial planning was based on an acknowledgement that an important site for change would be the central office. A strategic implementation unit within the Department of Education bureaucracy was established to facilitate the delivery of greater school autonomy. Staff in the unit worked alongside staff in the various arms of the central office to educate staff, ensure that the promised flexibilities were faithfully delivered and to re-examine bureaucratic impediments to greater school flexibility.
- An important symbolic act of greater school independence was the elimination of the key reporting layer above the principals, which meant that IPS principals were, in line management terms, accountable directly to the Director General. Part of such arrangements included regular face-to-face meetings between IPS principals and the Director General where information could be exchanged and problems dealt with.
- A comprehensive capacity building transition program for principals was implemented to ensure they had the capability to manage the increased responsibilities of IPS.
- Throughout the initiative there was a resolve to foster and support the empowerment of principals. This began with the element of choice regarding participation and continued throughout by challenging, whenever it arose, the culture of dependency that had characterised the relationship between central office and schools. Giving IPS principals system leadership responsibility in planning each phase of the initiative, selecting new IPS and in delivering professional learning for prospective IPS principals, further enhanced the trust placed in principals by the system.

In 2013 an independent evaluation of the program was undertaken by a Melbourne University team headed by Professor John Hattie. The evaluation team found that IPS had been successful in creating the conditions for improved student performance but further research was needed to understand how principals could use their increased flexibility and autonomy to make a difference in classrooms. This, of course, is the issue that has bedevilled much educational reform in the past: how to impact behind the classroom door.

The research reported on in this paper was commissioned by the Department of Education to build an understanding of how IPS principals had used their increased autonomy to impact on the quality of teaching and learning in their school. The project had two parts. The first part was an international literature review to examine the evidence on the relationship between increased school autonomy, effective leadership and improved classroom practice. The literature review addressed the following questions:

- What is meant by 'school autonomy'?
- What different models of school autonomy exist?
- Does school autonomy deliver improved student outcomes?
- What is known about principal impact on student performance?
- Does increased autonomy enhance principal effectiveness?

- What behaviours and actions do empowered principals engage in that improves teachers' effectiveness in the classroom?

The second part of the project was a program of school visits to eight Independent Public Schools (three primary schools, two secondary schools and one school cluster comprising one secondary and two primary schools). The purpose of these visits was to examine first hand the changes within the schools that had occurred since the school had become an IPS and the extent to which the changes were impacting on teachers' classroom practice.

PART A: LITERATURE REVIEW SUMMARY

A literature review was undertaken to examine the links between increased school autonomy, principal empowerment, changes in the classroom practice of teachers and benefits for students. The literature review is contained in Attachment 1. What follows is a summary of the literature review.

School autonomy is not a well-defined concept; it is used loosely in the literature with wide variations in meaning. Increasing school autonomy as manifested in Australian public school systems and many other jurisdictions is best seen as a complicated mixture of centralising and de-centralising tendencies happening together. The central authorities of the public school systems are allowing schools to make decisions that were formerly the prerogative of the central office, but are retaining other functions or even taking on new roles that were not previously undertaken. More systematic monitoring and review of schools' performance, and intervention in cases of school under-performance are examples of such additional functions.

Movements towards greater school autonomy can be found in many jurisdictions but are located within quite different reform agendas with disparate rationales. Prominent examples are charter schools in the US, academies in the UK and free schools in Sweden. To treat these as all driving a single 'school autonomy' reform and to assess the impacts of each as evidence of the effectiveness or otherwise of giving schools greater autonomy, makes little sense. A more sensible approach is to analyse each separately and ask what lessons can be learned for future implementation of Australian school autonomy policies.

In regard to the question of whether increasing school autonomy improves learning outcomes for students, the debate has moved beyond the simple question of whether the evidence supports or is against school autonomy, to identifying the conditions which must also be present for autonomy to deliver benefits. Increasing school autonomy will not in and of itself create better schools. Autonomy is only beneficial when someone uses it effectively.

The main factors identified in the literature that play a part in ensuring that increased school autonomy produces improved student outcomes are:

- Principal capacity building
- Intelligent accountability mechanisms
- An empowered mindset amongst principals and teachers
- Collaboration within and between schools
- A focus on improving the quality of teaching and the educational experience of students
- A commitment and capacity within the central authority to actually deliver and support meaningful authority and not circumscribe it in such detailed ways that schools gain little benefit

There is a longstanding interest in the leadership and management literature that suggests that empowering subordinates is a key factor in managerial and organisational effectiveness. Political and system rhetoric in school autonomy initiatives often invokes the concept of empowerment of those at the local level to take ownership and responsibility for school improvement. But giving schools greater autonomy does not necessarily create a sense of empowerment for principals and teachers. Decision-making authority can be shifted from central authorities to schools, but if principals adopt a compliance perspective of their role and don't use their increased authority to drive change in their schools, classrooms are unlikely to be affected.

Systems that wish to create such an orientation of empowerment amongst school staff would need to consider a number of factors in addition to increasing school autonomy. These include the way they implement their autonomy initiatives, the kind of leadership development that is likely to advance principal empowerment, and the kind of support for schools that will promote and encourage empowerment of school staff.

From a school improvement perspective, the ideal is when principals have autonomy, an empowered mindset and the capacity to use their autonomy to produce benefits for students. This is more complex than simply shifting decision making from central to school level but potentially more powerful in terms of influencing schools for the better.

This literature suggests that principals need to adopt behaviours that facilitate teacher empowerment because it is an important mediating variable for some critical teacher work related outcomes including teacher motivation, the quality of teaching and teachers' wellbeing. If principals want their teachers to be autonomous professionals who are intrinsically motivated and satisfied and perform at their best, they need to understand and be able to facilitate teacher empowerment.

The message for school systems is clear: they should give more autonomy to those schools that are able to benefit from it as part of an overall system strategy to improve student learning. Central to that strategy should be the development of school leaders who are empowered to work with their staff in ways that get them to improve their teaching practice, because it is only through improved teaching practice that student achievement levels will rise.

In designing their overall school autonomy strategy, systems would be well advised to:

1. ensure that the way they implement their autonomy initiatives actually empowers principals;
2. develop leadership capability by designing learning experiences for principals that foster an empowerment mindset;
3. align leadership selection and talent spotting with autonomy in mind;
4. keep the focus on the goal of student performance excellence;

5. promote evidence-based strategies for improving teaching but ensure that principals retain the capacity to design and implement them with their staff in ways that suit their school;
6. ensure that accountability mechanisms are designed to match the increased autonomy;
7. promote and support strong collaborative relationships between schools so that best practice and shared expertise is available beyond each school; and
8. retain a strong role for the system in monitoring, performance analysis and intervention where required.

PART B: SCHOOL CASE STUDIES

Methodology

It was decided not to adopt a standardised or highly structured approach to each of the school visits. Given that the purpose was to try and understand how becoming an IPS had impacted on the school and in particular on the teaching and learning program, scope was allowed to shape each school visit in ways that would best achieve that. Given that there would be no attempt to generalise findings beyond the eight schools, each school was treated as an individual case study.

The schools were selected by the Department to ensure a range of primary and secondary schools and a school cluster, a mix of metropolitan and country schools and a spread of schools ranging from high to low socio-economic status. There is no claim that these eight schools are representative of all IPS, simply that each provides an opportunity to examine in some detail how the school's increased autonomy had been used to impact on the learning outcomes of students. The schools are listed in Attachment 2.

While the structure of each school visit varied from school to school, principals were advised prior to the visit that the issues to be explored included:

- any changes in the school since becoming an IPS;
- the implications for the principal and the leadership team in becoming an IPS;
- any impact on the management of the school and its resources, or on the school's teaching and learning program;
- in what way, if any, the teachers and support staff had been impacted;
- whether any benefits to the students could be identified; and
- how the new accountability arrangements (Delivery and Performance Agreement and the external school review) had impacted on the school.

Information about each school was gathered prior to the school visit. This included school plans, annual reports and information about the school and its performance provided on the MySchool website.

Each school visit generally comprised the following elements:

- A discussion with the principal and key members of the school leadership team.
- A discussion with a range of teachers and school board representatives.
- Observation of any specific initiatives or innovations undertaken by the school.
- Provision of key school documentation beyond that already sourced online. This included reports of external school reviews, operational school plans, internal analysis of student performance and documents pertaining to specific school initiatives.

Findings

Ten main themes emerged from the material gathered on the school visits.

Theme 1: The link between increased school autonomy and school improvement initiatives

For some school initiatives principals were confident about linking student benefits directly to the school's IPS status. Being able to select staff with a particular skills profile to meet specific school needs was one such initiative that clearly would not have been possible if the school did not have the capacity to select its own staff. Such a decision has a direct impact on the quality of teaching in the school and derives specifically from the flexibilities afforded IPS.

The budget flexibility was also cited by principals as enabling them to deploy funds to bring specialist expertise into the school, often on a contracted, part-time basis, or to free up staff internally to play specialist roles in the school. This enables the delivery of services to students that would not have been possible without the greater control over the school's budget provided by being an IPS. Again, principals attributed such benefits to students directly to the school's IPS status.

But for many other initiatives principals acknowledged the difficulty of linking directly in a cause and effect way, their increased autonomy with the initiatives being undertaken within their school. Referring to a major initiative undertaken by the school, one principal said:

We could have done this if we weren't IPS but I don't know if we would have. It's hard to say why we would not have done it, because nothing was getting in the way but ourselves, but somehow IPS gave us the reason or the impetus to do these things. I think what IPS did do was to free us up so we felt more confident to take the actions we did.

And another:

The school has done an awful lot of good things since becoming IPS and I could identify real gains for the students from them. But whether all these things can be attributed to IPS I'm not sure. The important thing for me is that we did them, not whether IPS caused them.

And yet another:

What IPS did was help to create a climate of getting things done that was not there before, but as a leader I was working to create this as well and would have whether we were IPS or not. All I can say is that we often referred to IPS as a reason for being able to do it.

This assessment by principals that many factors are generally involved in explaining why schools undertook various initiatives is consistent with the conclusion of the

literature on the impact of increased school autonomy. Principals thought that autonomy was best seen as one of the contributing factors that were at play rather than being the single cause of the school adopting a particular initiative.

It is also significant that some principals said that in order to assess the impact of IPS on their school, the Department's *Classroom First* strategy needed to be factored in as well. These principals said that they were already working in line with *Classroom First* by focussing on what was happening in the classrooms and adopting strategies to improve the quality of teaching across the school. When IPS came along, principals said that they used their increased authority to strengthen that focus. One principal went even further:

My reading of the Classroom First document was that it was signalling that principals needed to be instructional leaders. It may not have said that, but I thought it was suggesting that as principal I should be getting involved in making sure every one of my teachers was being effective. So IPS was a chance to use my authority to be an even better instructional leader. And that's how I've played it.

While only conjecture, it is possible that had *Classroom First* not preceded IPS, the focus in schools may have been more on the governance and school management aspects of IPS and not as strongly on the teaching and learning dimension of schools.

This connection made by principals between IPS and *Classroom First* is also consistent with the literature on what is required for increased autonomy to have benefits for students. The message from the literature is that systems must have other strategies to address teaching and learning improvements as well as giving schools increased autonomy if they want classroom impact. For the Western Australian public school system it appears that *Classroom First* may have been an important part of that broader set of strategies.

It is also clear from an analysis of the Department's Strategic Plan, the annual Focus documents and the series of Director General Statements, that there has been a strong emphasis on improving the quality of instruction by teachers, including an emphasis on what has been referred to as 'explicit teaching'. These strategies are all part of the backdrop to the IPS initiative that together may explain why principals in the case study schools have used their autonomy to enhance the quality of teaching and learning, rather than adopting a narrower focus on the management and governance of the school.

An interesting aside in regard to the relationship between the principals and the Department is that the case study school principals reported that they had become stronger system advocates than previously. In some cases they puzzled over why this should be the case, but in others it seemed to be related to feeling more trusted and accepted as a system leader. Having a direct relationship with the Director General also seemed to have the effect of promoting a greater sense of responsibility for the success of the system. The sometimes-cited risk that empowering principals could

generate more aberrant behaviour by 'rogue' principals, was not evident in any of the case study schools.

Theme 2: Raising expectations

Every principal talked of the need to raise expectations as part of their school improvement strategy – mostly the expectations that teachers had of the students' achievement, but sometimes the expectations of teachers as professionals. Several of the principals referred to the creation of a climate where teachers expected more of each other. With the increased independence of IPS, principals felt there was an opportunity to re-set expectations in the school, and with the increased accountability, a necessity to do so.

One way the re-setting of expectations was effected was through the targets set in the school's Business Plan. The plan had been a focus of the schools once they became an IPS. One principal described it thus:

Every teacher in this school knows what's in the Business Plan because they all had input into it and we refer to it regularly. The targets in that plan are therefore taken more seriously than in previous school plans because there is more staff ownership of them. And these targets are pretty ambitious. In fact, I know now that we are definitely not going to achieve all of them. But staff now don't accept that what the kids have been achieving up until now is what they will achieve in the future.

One principal claimed that since becoming an IPS she had felt more confident to spell out to her teachers what she expected of them and what they should expect of each other. She spoke of the expectations of a 'contemporary teacher' being different to that of teachers in the past. This included using data to pinpoint problems in individual students rather than simply delivering a one-size-fits-all program, being open to feedback about performance, working with colleagues rather than alone, working to shared ideas of what constitutes acceptable progress for students and being prepared to change teaching strategies if students are not making progress. For teachers who had slipped into a comfort zone this had generated a positive pressure to 'keep up and perform'. Teachers couldn't 'hide behind the closed door and claim professional freedom to teach however they liked'.

This issue of principal confidence to assert the need to raise expectations and enact strategies to meet them, was a recurring theme among the case study school principals. It was as if IPS had lifted a constraint that principals had placed on themselves and their leadership. This is a central component of what the term 'empowerment' refers to in the literature on school autonomy. One principal said that after becoming an IPS she had talked to the staff about the setting of expectations being one of the local issues that the school now had control over, and this had prompted a discussion that had not been had before.

Another principal had shifted staff expectations of student achievement through engaging staff in moderation exercises across a cluster of schools. When they saw

the standard of student work being produced by students like theirs, it caused staff to be challenged about what constituted acceptable achievement for their students.

One principal said that the increased responsibility they felt since becoming an IPS meant that they took stronger action about areas of the school where low expectations were prevalent. She said that in the past there would have been a tendency to 'turn a blind eye' to classes where the teaching was below par, but now she felt like it was up to her, not the Department, to take some action to raise the bar in those situations. She said she felt a moral responsibility to intervene because these students' future should not be limited by having a teacher who does not challenge them to achieve their potential. In her words:

...the buck stops with me. There's no-one else further up the line to get involved. If I don't do anything, nothing will change.

An important issue that arose in relation to principals raising expectations across the school, was the risk that teachers could feel anxious and demoralised by the relentless pressure to achieve higher and higher standards. One principal spoke of his awareness of the need to accompany the drive for higher performance with a high level of care for staff. This meant building relationships where staff knew their concerns would be listened to, their anxieties managed and their individual circumstances recognised. Without this sense of being cared for, raising the stakes on expectations and performance could have counterproductive effects in terms of staff wellbeing. What this principal was seeking to establish in his school was a 'high performance - high care' culture.

A teacher gave a cogent explanation of why her and her colleagues had been prepared to take seriously more ambitious student achievement targets than previously. Firstly, she explained that she had been included in the discussion and setting of the targets, rather than have them set independently by the principal and then handed to the staff as an expectation of them. But secondly, and most importantly, she said that as an IPS, the staff felt more in control of the decision-making and therefore felt they had more power to achieve the higher expectations. The principal had led a conversation with the teachers that gave them a sense that the school staff could 'shift things around to get the best strategies in place', and that being IPS meant that 'no-one is telling us what to do', and this had had the effect of making staff more confident about what they could achieve.

Teachers also referred to feeling more energised and this had led to a greater willingness to lift their expectations of themselves as teachers and therefore on what their teaching could achieve for their students.

Given the strong evidence for the impact of expectations on student achievement, if increasing school autonomy can assist in the creation of a culture of high expectations, as was evident in some of the case study schools, then it could be expected to make a significant contribution to raising student achievement.

Theme 3: Staff selection and staff deployment

Not surprisingly, the most commonly cited direct impact on students of a school becoming an IPS, was selecting the right teachers for the school. This was put forward by principals, teachers, school support staff and parents. It is also repeated often in the school improvement literature.

For example, Todd Whittaker (2003) says if you want to improve schools hire better teachers and improve the teachers you have. Jim Collins (2001) says it too:

'...first get the right people on the bus and the wrong people off the bus'.

And Henry Mintzberg (1998) maintained that service delivery in professional organisations like health and education could never be better than the people delivering them.

All principals spoke of the need to get the best possible match of staff with student need and that this produced a direct and immediate benefit for students.

The point was made that in selecting a teacher, principals were not simply trying to attract a teacher who was 'the best teacher', but rather a teacher who was best suited to their particular school with its own culture, staff profile, student needs and community character. One principal articulated it this way:

A teacher does not perform equally well at every school. Our aim was to find a teacher who would fit in with our school, staff and community and who had an affinity with the kind of kids we have. It's horses for courses.

One principal sought to achieve such a match by asking all in the school community, including the students, what sort of teacher the school should try and attract with their advertisement. One of the students suggested that the teacher should be 'just a little bit crazy'! This was faithfully put into the school's advertisement that successfully recruited an excellent teacher well suited to the school.

Principals of schools where there was a history of staff turnover reported cumulative positive effects of exercising their authority to select staff over a number of years. To them, staff selection was an important part of building a particular school culture:

We've changed the culture of the school by year after year making really good decisions about staff recruitment. I expect that this will continue.

One of the primary schools used their first opportunity after becoming an IPS to recruit a Science specialist because it was identified as an area where the school needed to improve. The key function of the newly appointed teacher was building the capacity of all teachers in the school to deliver high quality science instruction. Strategies used included demonstration lessons, advice about science resources, classroom observation and feedback, teaching students across the school one strand of the science curriculum and collaborative lesson planning. The teachers reported

that this had raised the profile of science in the school and improved the quality of teaching.

The principal made the observation that, at a time when STEM was a national priority, this strategy of having a STEM specialist as a teacher-leader in the primary school was a successful strategy for school systems to consider.

In another primary school the opportunity to select staff was used to recruit a specialist teacher with expertise in the area of special education. The twenty four students with disabilities had been in a total withdrawal program involving what were essentially 'fun activities' which the principal felt was not enabling the students to achieve their full potential. Now the students are in mainstream classes with partial withdrawal. The Education Assistants have been trained by the specialist teacher and the quality of the support for these students is much improved.

Staff selection has also enabled one school to bring some younger teachers (some from the *Teach for Australia* program) onto a staff where the average age was mid-fifties. The principal reported that this had brought new energy and ideas to a staff that was very settled into well-established routines that had not changed for many years. The mix of high-energy younger teachers and very experienced older teachers had 'shaken up the status quo' and benefited the teaching practices of both groups. It was a deliberate strategy of staff re-vitalisation.

Principals were also able to describe the classroom impacts of changing the staffing profile in their school afforded to them by their IPS status. In one primary school this had resulted in the establishment of a third deputy position with responsibility for curriculum/Students At Educational Risk. This role provided curriculum leadership for teachers and a stronger co-ordination of programs across the school for students with special needs. The same school instituted a team of seven teacher-leaders for different areas of the curriculum and the principal saw them as playing a key role in driving improvement:

Within the school we re-structured the middle management layer and empowered them to work with their teachers on the quality of the programs and their practice. Work was done collectively with middle management on how to have discussions with staff about performance. These were all internal people with high credibility and it is having a real impact on the staff as a whole.

A principal of a secondary school used the staffing flexibility to place an increased focus on students with learning difficulties. While the school had a large contingent of high achieving students and a reputation in the community for academic excellence, the principal was concerned that the school's performance data still showed a significant group of students with very low levels of achievement. He commented:

Surely a school as well resourced and as highly regarded as ours can do something extra for those students that are struggling. While we have a lot of very academic

kids and stimulating programs for them, I could see that we needed to re-focus on those students who had real problems with learning. Some had diagnoses, some didn't, but they were getting lost in the normal classes and teachers felt they couldn't really meet their needs.

The school formed three special groupings of students: those with mild, moderate and severe learning difficulties, selected a high performing teacher with a special interest in these students from within the staff and exposed the teacher to specialist professional learning. Programs are carefully negotiated with the mainstream learning areas so that each student can make the maximum progress through the Australian Curriculum. The teacher said that there was now a real focus on meeting the educational needs of every student; every student is closely monitored and the response from the students and their parents had been very positive. Analysis of the latest NAPLAN results indicated significant improvement in the priority areas of English targeted.

Another benefit to students from the staffing flexibility of IPS had been less teacher turnover. This had been achieved in various ways. One principal gave the example of a staff member who was going to be on leave for 3 months and, rather than bringing a new teacher in, was able to cover the absence internally so that there was continuity for the students. Another principal spoke of how they had been able to retain outstanding graduate teachers in their school which, prior to IPS, they would have lost. This reduced the teacher turnover in the school which was a benefit for the students.

Further examples of better utilisation of school staff were also given by principals. This was based on the thinking that within the school staff there are a pool of skills and the school should capitalise on that by looking at what needed to be done and who had the skills to do it. One example was using the skills of the non-teaching staff to enrich the school's curriculum by having the School Business Manager lead the development of the Health and Wellbeing and Marketing Plan. Another involved an Educational Assistant in leading the whole school benchmarking of reading texts.

An area of staffing flexibility which continued to frustrate principals and members of their staff was the difficulty they had in dealing convincingly with chronically under-performing teachers who did not respond to persistent efforts to assist them to improve. Jensen (2013) makes the point that there is nothing that de-motivates hard working teachers more than working with poor teachers whose performance goes unchecked for long periods of time. They not only have a negative effect on their students but they can also poison the overall climate of their school. Principals reported that while they appreciated the increased staffing flexibility afforded by IPS, this did not extend to dealing more strongly with persistent under-performance.

Some principals spoke about a partial solution to this problem as creating a culture that demanded a lot of teachers and where teachers expected a lot of each other. For some this created sufficient discomfort for an under-performing teacher to feel that the school was not the right match for them and they voluntarily moved on. For

some this meant retirement or seeking an alternative career, for others it resulted in applying for other schools. But in many cases the principals felt that their hands were tied and that there was a need for a policy that protected both the individual teacher's rights to a fair assessment and support to improve, and the student's right to an effective teacher.

Theme 4: Building the capacity of teachers

With the increased flexibilities of being an IPS, principals believed they had more control over the agenda of growth and development for staff. Although the strategies for teacher capacity building varied across the case study schools, the focus on what teachers needed to be able to do was similar. Some principals used the AITSL Professional Standards for Teachers as the focus; others gave Professor John Hattie's *Visible Learning* text to all staff and worked from that; others identified the core elements derived from the research on effective teaching and included them in the Performance Management process.

Each of these approaches produced a variation of what was described by principals as 'more targeted teaching' or 'more purposeful teaching' and by teachers as 'evidence based teaching' and 'more considered teaching'. The common elements appeared to be:

- Teachers needed to have a very clear and explicit understanding of what they expected their students to achieve over the year in each curriculum area and these expectations needed to be realistically challenging.
- Within any curriculum area, all teachers in the school needed to collaborate to ensure that they followed a clear sequence of learning activities.
- Teachers needed to be capable of applying a range of teaching strategies that would enable each student to make adequate progress towards meeting those expectations.
- Teachers needed to be able to use a range of data to assess the progress students have made and use that data to identify areas they need to address next.
- If students were not making sufficient progress, teachers needed to be able to apply alternative teaching strategies until the student made satisfactory progress.

Teachers described the change to their teaching as building a much clearer picture of where each child was at with their learning and being prepared to change strategies if what they were doing wasn't having the effect they intended. One teacher commented that the hardest question her principal asked her about what she was doing in the classroom was 'Why are you doing that?' This challenged her to move away from just 'delivering the program I had developed over years' to a much more diagnostic approach to her teaching.

That teacher was quick to stress, however, that she had developed a relationship with the principal where such a question was not seen as a demand or a judgement of her teaching ability, but as a supportive question aimed at helping the teacher to

reflect and to clarify in her own mind the basis for choosing the strategy she had chosen. Based on her personal experience, this teacher wondered why, in everyday discussions with teachers about their practice, the interrogative 'why' is so rarely applied.

This reinforces the case put by Michael Barber (2015) that

...we need to move away from the existing model of students moving in lockstep through content irrespective of how successfully they have learnt the previous lesson.

The teacher capacity building strategies that principals used to develop these teaching capabilities can be grouped as follows:

- 4.1 Collaboration between teachers to share understandings about expected student progress and how to improve the impact of their teaching strategies on students.
- 4.2 Installing a group of teacher-leaders in the school to work with staff teams.
- 4.3 Systems of classroom observation and feedback.
- 4.4 Systems of mentoring and coaching.

4.1 Teacher collaboration

In every one of the case study schools, building the capacity of teachers by increasing collaboration between them, was being pursued. Through a range of strategies the culture of teacher isolation was being broken down. While this is a trend across all schools, not just IPS, the principals in the case study schools were emphasising collaboration of a particular kind: teachers working together to improve their teaching practice. In other words, while collaboration in many schools is related to matters of co-ordination, administration and policy and procedures, the collaboration in the case study schools was focused on pedagogy, the impacts of different teaching strategies on student learning, teacher observation and feedback and coaching and mentoring.

One teacher remarked:

I don't feel nearly as lonely in my job as I used to. I've learned so much from other teachers and am now quite comfortable about them coming into my class and helping me to get through to some of the students I wasn't really helping much.

In that school the team meetings that were held every two weeks between the 3 Team Leaders and the teachers in each team, were directly focused on where teachers needed help with their teaching, where student progress was not as expected and what would be done to address it. This was in addition to teachers working in pairs to observe specific aspects of each other's teaching and provide feedback.

Principals recognised that undertaking teacher capacity building through collaboration takes time that is often difficult to find in a school's schedule. They did different things to create the time for the teachers to collaborate more including:

- Gaining teachers' agreement to have part of their DOTT as common DOTT with their team for collaborative work.
- Using resources freed up from their budget flexibility to create a pool of funds for teacher relief so that teachers were freed up to meet and to have feedback sessions after classroom visits.
- Using part of current allocated time for staff meetings, pupil-free days and professional learning for teacher collaboration.

Teacher collaboration across schools via networks was also used extensively by some primary schools. This ranged from accessing IT expertise located in the neighbouring high school, to having quite intensive moderation sessions where teachers brought student work and discussed the basis for their allocation of grades.

4.2 Teacher-leaders

All of the case study schools had instituted a structure of teacher-leaders who were released from some of their teaching duties to lead teaching and learning improvement amongst the staff. A middle management layer of senior teachers has, of course, long been a part of the administrative structure of secondary schools based on learning areas. In the case study primary schools, these teacher-leaders were not part of the administrative structure and team meetings were not taken up with administrative matters, but devoted to matters of curriculum and pedagogy. The focus for team discussions included deepening understandings of curriculum content, establishing a sequence of learning activities and targets for student progress within year levels, supporting effective assessment practices and facilitating the development of evidence based teaching strategies.

In some cases the teacher-leaders worked with a team of teachers in each curriculum area, in others they led teacher teams in the early, middle and upper years of the primary school, and in others they were in the form of literacy and numeracy coaches working across the school. All of these leaders were experienced teachers who had, or were having, professional learning to enhance their effectiveness at working with other teachers.

4.3 Classroom observation and feedback

In one of the case study schools a system of classroom observation and feedback was just beginning having recently gained the support of the whole staff for its implementation. In the case study high schools there were informal arrangements within learning areas where this was happening and in all other case study schools there were well-established systems in place.

The system in one school involved the principal asking every teacher to identify something from Hattie's (2011) *Visible Learning* that they wanted feedback about, and she would then meet with every teacher and give feedback specific to that dimension following a classroom visit. In another, each teacher identified one

Standard from the three Domains of Teaching drawn from the AITSL Professional Standards for Teachers.

Teachers reported that, even though there was some additional time and organisation required, having a respected colleague observe your teaching and provide feedback was self-rewarding because they were getting something out of it.

4.4 Mentoring and coaching

Mentoring and coaching programs are also common amongst case study schools. In one school there has been a deliberate strategy to pair weak teachers with strong teachers, while many of the schools have coaching and mentoring arrangements for the graduate teachers in the school. One of the primary schools had appointed a Cross-Curriculum Coach to work with teachers across the school.

One primary school is about to begin a major initiative in teacher coaching using a private consultant. All teachers attended a presentation from the consultant and were then asked to choose whether they wanted to be involved. All teachers opted in. Teachers work in pairs, share teaching practice, go into each other's classrooms and give feedback. The Education Assistants are also involved as part of the principal's message that 'we're all in this together'. The principal is also using this as a strategy to raise the status of the Education Assistants.

Theme 5: A climate of trust

Teachers in the case study schools frequently referred to the importance of trust, particularly trust in the principal, but also trust in the professionalism of their colleagues. Teachers perceived that the authority of the principal had been strengthened since the school became an IPS and thought that this was a good thing because they had trust in their principal, but thought that being in an IPS where the teachers did not have such trust would be a negative. They felt that a pre-requisite of IPS being effective for a school is that there is trust in the principal – from the staff and the community.

In prosecuting the case for strengthening schools as professional learning communities, Hattie (2015) stresses that

...these professional discussions (amongst teachers) must be conducted in an atmosphere of trust more than in an atmosphere of accountability.....Without a level of trust, teachers, like most people, will close ranks, put up shutters and retreat to the old and tried methods behind a closed classroom door, claiming they have evidence they can improve learning.

Hattie highlights the importance of having safe and trusting places to explore ideas, to make and to learn from errors and to use expertise to maximise successful learning.

When questioned about how trust in the principal was built, teachers offered the following observations and analyses:

The principal treats us as professionals who have ideas that are taken seriously. If you come forward with an idea, no matter what it is, you are given a good hearing and it is fully explored. I always feel like a grown up when I have those conversations with our principal whereas in the past I often felt like a child being put in their place by a controlling parent. I guess it's that she really listens and tries to understand what you're on about.

The principal is clear on what he will back us on and what he won't so we know where we stand. He's predictable and consistent. You know what he stands for.

She expresses confidence in us. Tells us we're doing a good job and always thinks that we can solve the problems ourselves. You sort of know she's shepherding you towards a particular solution but she leaves you to get there.

She does what she says she'll do. She follows through. Not just talk, but action and the staff know that.

He doesn't have favourites. He's fair to everyone.

He encourages us to say if something is not working. It's OK to admit mistakes or feelings of failure, or that you don't know what to do. He wants to understand why I think it didn't work and what I can do to address the problem.

You don't get left struggling on your own and feeling that you're not a good teacher. You know that you will get the support and resources you need. This is my third school and this principal just seems to be really on top of the job.

These messages from teachers confirm the key findings in the literature on the development of trust between principals and staff and amongst staff members. What is evident from the literature on trust in organisations is that the following will have an important bearing on the extent of teachers' trust in the principal:

- Ability: whether the principal is seen as having the necessary skills and competence required of the position;
- Benevolence: whether the principal cares about the teachers' welfare; and
- Integrity: whether the principal acts in accordance with a set of principles that teachers find acceptable.

The literature also confirms the commentary from teachers about the importance of building an environment where teachers can experience success and failure as part of the learning process. Revans (1986) talks about creating a climate that permits the 'upward communication of doubt'. If members do not feel there is a permission to admit failure, to question their effectiveness, their impacts and their inability to see a path forward, their own learning will be impeded. Hattie (2015) invokes a similar

concept when he talks about the trust needed for teachers to ‘venture into the pit of the unknown together’.

Teachers comments about their trust in the principal also confirms the messages from the literature about how principals can build trusting relationships with teachers by demonstrating positive outlooks, by manifesting trusting dispositions, and by showing confidence in the intent and competence of their staff.

Theme 6: Accountability as a driver of improvement

A clear message from the literature is that increasing school autonomy needs to be accompanied by an increased level of accountability. One of the risks identified with increased accountability is that it can shape behaviour in unproductive ways. For example, it can focus principals’ attention on compliance and thus inhibit more creative uses of their autonomy. It can also narrow the educational agenda for schools by focusing only on the high stakes outcomes that can be easily measured, thus distorting the school’s efforts to produce well-rounded students.

There was no evidence of these negative effects of increased accountability in the case study schools. To the contrary, principals reported that the pressure they felt from the need to be accountable had driven greater effort to improve outcomes for students. One said:

I definitely feel under pressure to perform - especially with staffing now more under my control. When problems arise, I feel like it’s up to us to make things work. In the end, if our results aren’t good, it comes down to us. And I think the teachers are beginning to understand that – you can’t blame the Department any more!

The focus of principals’ felt accountability was the achievement of student outcomes. In some cases this had meant that the principal had to establish an understanding amongst the staff that, while it was important to get effective processes in place, especially effective teaching processes, the judgement of the school’s success was going to rest on the progress that students made in the various curriculum areas. This outcome orientation was exemplified by one secondary school principal who, on arriving at the school, was told by the staff that ‘we are a pastoral care school’. His reply was ‘No, we’re a learning school’, and thus began the process of ensuring that staff knew the difference between strategies and achievements and that success was defined by achievements.

In the words of another secondary principal:

You can’t get away from the results. We may feel like things are going pretty well in the school but if the results are just not there we need to confront the hard questions about whether what we are doing is working.

In all of the case study schools there was extensive use of data to monitor progress, to analyse areas of weakness and to establish priorities for their plans. This applied to classroom teachers in their use of data from a range of assessments to judge

student progress and to pinpoint areas of weakness. It also applied at the school level where principals used standardised test data as well as internally derived data to question strategies, expectations and progress. One principal and School Board Chair also remarked on how important using data to demonstrate progress had been to the celebration of success and the building of staff morale and community confidence.

Theme 7: Better application of resources

Across the case study schools, principals and teachers quoted examples of how the flexibility in the use of budget and staff had enabled a better use of resources. Many of these examples related to better use of support staff, both teaching and non-teaching.

The use of the school's Education Assistants (EAs) was frequently discussed. Several principals reported that prior to the school being an IPS the allocation of EA time to teachers' classes was not questioned. But with the flexibility of IPS, the school was able to re-consider the total pool of EA time and how that might be used to deliver greater benefits for students. In one school the principal negotiated with the EAs that if they took the same morning tea and lunch break as the teaching staff, this was 20 minutes per day longer than stipulated in the award, and in return the EAs being would spend 20 mins prior to school to deliver MULTILIT with individual students. Student progress was clearly evident from this intervention. In another school EAs were used to do some of the administrative work associated with the Australian Early Development Index, thereby freeing up teacher time that could be spent with the students.

Other ways that schools used their funding flexibility to improve their offering to students included hiring a speech pathologist for one day per week to address a particular need that had been identified in the early years; hiring a retired teacher who had particular expertise in language development for one day per week; and negotiating with the local Parent and Child Centre to have the school psychologist deliver a Positive Parenting Program for every parent of their kindergarten students.

Several of the principals reported the benefits to students that accrued from having a single bucket of resources rather than receiving funding from many separate sources. One advantage was the reduction in paperwork for principals and teachers from having to account for each separate project, thus allowing them to spend more time on the teaching and learning work of the school. But another significant benefit was the sustainability of programs. Rather than be subjected to end-dated funding for projects, the school could allocate funding and, for successful programs, maintain that over the long haul.

Theme 8: Principal empowerment

Principals of the case study schools rarely used the term 'empowerment' to describe the mindset change that was part of becoming an IPS. Instead, they often spoke of increased confidence from being an IPS:

I feel more confident to make 'hard' decisions and to have 'hard' conversations.

I feel more confident to lead and set directions. I think once the school was selected as an IPS, the community and the teachers took that as an affirmation that we must be a pretty good school or we would not have got in. That translated to me as the principal being seen as able to take the school somewhere and there was more confidence in me as the leader.

I feel much more confident to really lead the school. Before IPS I felt that the staff and the community saw me as an agent of the Education Department, more like a manager of the school. Now I'm clearly the leader who sets the directions, makes the hard calls and is responsible for the school's success.

Principals also described in various ways how becoming an IPS had moved them to become more action-orientated, which is also related to increased confidence. A principal put it this way:

Autonomy is a like a bridge between an idea and action to put the idea into effect. IPS didn't give us the ideas, it didn't set the vision and direction we needed, but once we were all clear on those things, IPS gave us the bridge to doing what we needed to do to put them in place.

Two of the principals spoke of the legitimation that being an IPS gave them. While they felt able to make changes in their school prior to IPS and to act in ways that may have breached some Departmental rules or procedures, they now felt able to be more open about doing this. As one principal's rather dramatic statement illustrated:

Innovation has become legal. It's legitimate now; you don't have to hide it.

What was also common across the eight schools is that each of the principals had a strong sense of agency: they all had a strong belief that they were able to influence their teachers to meet the high expectations they have of their students. They frequently spoke of being 'in charge' of their schools; that they had the power to make a real difference to the achievement levels of the students and they felt responsible for the standards achieved in their school. They believed problems were theirs to solve, not someone else's and so they acted as problem solvers when things were not going as they expected. They didn't run for cover when results were not achieved, they looked for new answers and then tested them out.

One principal described his approach in these terms:

I talked with staff about having a 'no blame, no excuses' motto for the way we worked. Teachers are now beginning to understand that if there's a problem, I'm not interested in looking for someone to blame, but I'm also not interested in listening to excuses. And I expect that when they talk about problems they will adopt the same approach. We're not there yet with everyone, but we're making gains.

Another put it this way:

Now we just focus on what we've got control over. It's focussed us on making a difference rather than pointing to all the things we don't control.

And another:

There is more of a focus on what we can do rather than what we can't do.

All of the principals had confidence in their capacity to make good decisions. They knew what effective teachers did and they orientated their systems and structures and processes to support that. They used their resources to enable the kind of collaboration amongst their staff that they wanted to see and they set the parameters for this. They empowered their leading teachers and used their resource flexibility to give them the time they needed to have a real impact on other staff. And their feedback systems were based on data about what was happening and what impact was being achieved.

One principal described the shift in thinking this way:

I'm thinking harder now about what is the best use of this money. Before we were IPS many of those decisions were already made by the time we got the money. Now, I don't think FTE, I think dollars. Using the dollars for FTE is one option, but there are others, and I now think about what is going to have the most impact. The teachers are also thinking more about what would be the best thing to do to solve the problem, rather than doing what we've always done.

Collectively, these statements from principals define what is referred to in the literature as an 'empowerment' mindset. The four cognitions commonly referred to as being the elements of empowerment are all evident: a sense of meaning, of autonomy, of impact and of capability.

Theme 9: A stronger focus on external relationships

Principals universally reported that while being an IPS had an enabling effect on many changes within the school, there had been significant changes in their school's relationships with external stakeholders that could be directly attributable to having IPS status. This was confirmed by parents and Chairs of School Boards. One Business Manager referred to a 'more outward looking orientation' by the principal and other school staff that meant that many more opportunities were now available that the school would not have entertained before.

Principals spoke of being able to recruit and attract prominent people from the community to their School Board who would not have participated in the previous School Council. The Board was seen as providing a stronger opportunity to influence the school, its overall direction and improvement strategies. This change in composition of the Board had given the school stronger advocacy as well as a different perspective on the issues and opportunities it faced. But examples were also quoted of how individuals on the Board had taken action that led to direct benefits for students. In one case a Board member of a secondary school had arranged for a number of volunteers to come into the school to work with individual students.

But this sense of a more outward looking stance did not only relate to the School Board. One principal said

Parents have 'caught' the IPS thinking. Now I hear a lot more of 'I can do that for you, don't pay for it' They feel a much greater ownership for the school and talk much more about 'our' school. The greater ownership by parents has also meant that we've got a 'better bang for the buck' when it comes to maintenance and facilities management. Parent volunteering has increased and the quality of the end product has also improved because of the pride and ownership in the work. I estimate that parents have contributed about \$160 000 worth of work on the school grounds.

Teachers also remarked about their own connectedness beyond the school which was different to their pre-IPS experience. They relate more strongly to other schools in their network and with the wider world of education through national and international conferences and opportunities for grants. 'We would never have thought we could do that before', said one primary school teacher.

Commentary from other school staff indicated that there was a different relationship with the Education Department and that this had created more space for the school to form its own relationships. While still connected to the Department, it was as if the school's energy for external relationships was not so consumed by its relationship with the Department.

Theme 10: Teacher empowerment, motivation and confidence

Many teachers in the case study schools reported being more energetic and enthusiastic about their teaching. They attributed this to a range of factors connected to the principal and other school leaders. Important amongst these was that they felt more capable in terms of their teaching practice and were becoming as one teacher put it 'a better and better teacher every term'.

The teacher teams structure that principals had put in place and the learning from teacher leaders was instrumental in this because this had helped teachers feel more capable of being able to talk about their practice, use data to pinpoint problems and learn new strategies. Teachers felt they were operating in a more professional way,

able to justify what they were doing and why and feeling confident about being challenged rather than operating more intuitively and basing their decisions only on their own personal preferences and experiences.

Another factor teachers reported as increasing their motivation was seeing the power of their teaching interventions. A teacher said

I feel like I'm having an impact now. Because our monitoring is so much better, when I apply a certain teaching strategy and can see the impact it has on the students' learning, I realise how much of an impact I can have and I do feel much more powerful in what I can do for my students. It feels good but it's a bit scary too.

The sense of autonomy that teachers had was also moderated by the obligation to function as a team member with obligations to their colleagues. One teacher talked of how this had motivated her to meet the standards being set by the team:

I feel like I'm trusted to make my own decisions rather than being told how I should teach and interact with my colleagues. Now I feel guilty if I go to a team meeting unprepared, whereas once it wouldn't have mattered because everyone was just 'winging it'. But now I feel like I'm letting the other members of the team and my team leader down if I haven't followed up on what I said I'd do. Other teachers in the team will ask me questions that I won't be able to answer. No one has to say anything, you just know that you're expected to lift your game; we're all pulling each other up.

Teachers spoke as though they 'owned' the improvement strategies rather than being simply required to implement externally imposed changes, which they said they used to do, but without enthusiasm. The principals had succeeded in gaining the commitment of teachers to such a degree that higher levels of achievement had become virtually a moral imperative.

Teachers also reported feeling more connected to the whole school's aims and objectives and an appreciation of the importance of a good education to the students' future lives. Their involvement in the Business Plan was one strategy that had produced this, but more commonly teachers referred to the principal regularly linking their work in the classroom with the 'big picture' of changing student's lives for the better. This was more strongly represented in the low SES schools but was present in all case study schools.

This was evident in this teacher's comment:

I'm somehow more connected now to the reasons I became a teacher in the first place. It sounds funny to say that after 18 years in the classroom but it's true. I feel like I've got a cause again – to give these kids a fair shot at life by giving them a better than average education.

One thing that built teacher confidence was the speed with which decision-making occurred once the school became IPS. Teachers said that things happen much more quickly; things get fixed more quickly; things get approved more quickly; excursions are easier and less bureaucratic; red tape is less. This means that there is more energy available for teaching. One teacher said

Things can happen much more quickly now. I wanted to organise for a group of students to go to Sydney for an event that I thought would be a real educational buzz. But I thought 'Can I be bothered with all the red tape'. I mentioned it to the principal, explained why and he said he would approve it. Of course we had to do all the right things but it just felt great that we at the school could make the decision.

This commentary from teachers confirmed the concept of teacher empowerment that is emerging in the literature as manifesting itself via four cognitions:

- Meaning (the degree to which a teacher values their work in relation to their own ideals and standards and gains a sense of personal significance through what they do);
- Autonomy (the degree to which a teacher has a choice in how to perform their job);
- Impact (the degree to which a teacher believes they can make a difference); and
- Competence (the degree to which teachers believe they have the capability to be successful).

CONCLUSIONS FROM THE CASE STUDY SCHOOLS

1. Although not articulated by all school staff and parents, there was a general agreement that becoming an IPS had shifted the context within which schools went about their business from one characterised by bureaucratic control to one based on the professionalization of teaching.
2. The general view of principals was that the increased autonomy provided by being an IPS was best seen as one of the contributing factors that were at play rather than being the single cause of the school adopting any particular initiative. The successful innovation seen in each of the case study schools is best understood as a product of effective leadership acting with increased decision-making authority.
3. The case studies validated a key finding of the literature that the most powerful of the mediating factors linking school autonomy and student achievement is the work of principals and other school leaders in building the professional capacity of their staff. Principals in the case study schools were using their autonomy effectively to build the capacity of teachers to improve outcomes for students. While principals reported changes in school management and governance, the main thrust of their use of flexibility over resources was to drive improvements in the school's programs and teacher effectiveness.
4. Principals reported an increased sense of empowerment, which was more than simply having additional decision making capacity. They saw themselves as more trusted as a leader in the public school system, as being given the levers to enact change in their schools, as having a high level of discretion about how to improve the school and they were confident in their own capability to be successful.
5. Principals viewed being an IPS as enabling them to drive a school culture that emphasised high expectations of students and staff, teachers as professionals, collaboration centred on improved classroom practice, norms of responsibility and problem solving where mistakes and problems were responded to by a search for better strategies rather than by excuses for students' lack of progress.
6. Principals placed great emphasis on building good relationships within the school. They did this by engaging in behaviours that are described in the literature as promoting trust and empowerment amongst their staff. These behaviours included listening to staff, demonstrating understanding of their issues and concerns, encouraging staff and being interested in them as individuals, being able to be light hearted as well as serious, dealing with conflict productively and treating all staff with equal respect and including them as part of the school team.

7. Principals used the resource flexibilities of being an IPS to create the conditions for teacher capacity building and collaboration that was deemed necessary to improve the quality of teaching - especially the time and the teacher leadership required to make the collaboration productive. They did not operate under the assumption that teacher collaboration was necessarily a good thing in and of itself, but supported the focus, structure, content and leadership that were needed for collaboration to have classroom impact.
8. The principals all had a strong outcome orientation. They had good processes of decision-making but the processes served the outcome, rather than being the main focus. They used data to prioritise the achievement of certain outcomes, monitored their progress and used the improvement to celebrate and encourage staff to increase their impact on other outcomes.
9. There was clear evidence that the empowerment of teachers increased their level of intrinsic motivation. The principals knew how to enhance teachers' sense of meaning, sense of competence, sense of impact and sense of autonomy. This tended to make them more motivated to improve instruction in their classrooms, more willing to discuss practices with colleagues and supervisors and to host them in their classrooms.
10. The principals in the case study schools demonstrated their achievement of the Australian Professional Standard for Principals at a high level. There is a strong case that the Standard describes how all principals should exercise a high level of professional autonomy. It was also evident that building the capacity of teachers to meet the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers was a strong focus in the case study schools.
11. The school improvement narratives in several of the case study schools demonstrate the importance of momentum in sustainable school improvement. A common journey described by principals was this: the school is successful in its bid to become an IPS, the parents have more confidence once the school becomes an IPS, the principal's leadership makes the teachers feel more recognised, the principal feels empowered to make more decisions, things happen and it builds on itself. The importance of building and then maintaining momentum should not be under-estimated as part of the change management process and principals see IPS as contributing to that momentum and helping to maintain it.

In summary, the principals of the case study schools are taking the kind of action that is supported by research as being effective in improving learning outcomes. They have a focus on teaching and learning, see themselves as instructional leaders, empower their teachers, build trust, establish strong relationships, instil confidence, build ownership, insist on accountability, set high expectations, set a clear vision and direction, align the structures of the school with the improvement strategies, and make sure that the support and resources are in place to enable change.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF IPS

1. The Department should ensure that any future expansion of IPS continues to be set within a broader set of strategies to improve teaching and learning. Connections with *Classroom First*, integrating the autonomy agenda within other priorities of the new Strategic Plan and any future *Focus* documents or Director General Statements is essential. Such a positioning of the Department's school autonomy agenda should also be reflected in any professional learning for school leaders associated with any further expansion of IPS. Leadership and management by IPS principals needs to be tightly connected to curriculum and pedagogy. This is in clear contrast to some school autonomy initiatives elsewhere where leadership and management appeared to be disconnected from the core work of the school rather than being centrally concerned with the purpose or aims of education.
2. The Department should continue to prosecute an empowerment agenda rather than simply an autonomy agenda. One of the reasons for the success of the IPS initiative to date has been that decisions about implementation have been anchored in an empowerment paradigm. It has been the empowerment of principals in the case study schools that has seen them use their increased decision making authority to have an impact in classrooms.
3. The Department should expand the use of IPS principals in critical system leadership roles. It is clear from the 2013 IPS evaluation that the IPS principals are a significant asset in advancing the reform of the whole public school system. The principals in the case study schools are already providing a system leadership role in the way they are leading their schools, but the Department should explore further ways of harnessing the leadership capability of IPS principals in system reform.
4. Future school leadership development programs need to equip principals with the capacity to build a professional learning community where there is trust, where teachers are motivated to improve their practice, where collaborative learning is structured, expected and supported, and where teachers embrace an action research orientation where they explore the differential impact of various teaching strategies. Such programs also need to support the development of an empowerment mindset amongst principals. Giving additional autonomy to principals who adopt a compliance orientation to their leadership will deliver limited benefits.
5. Future leadership development activities need to recognise that the middle management layer of schools, particularly secondary schools, are a critical target group to build understandings about how to turn autonomy into improved classroom teaching. Secondary teachers are primarily influenced by their learning area head, and that person needs to have the capacity to shape teacher behaviour for the better. This issue is also increasingly applying to

primary schools that now often have a middle layer of teacher leaders whose role is to drive improved practice in classrooms.

6. The Department should continue to promote and support strong collaborative relationships between schools. Not only is this a clear competitive advantage of being part of a system of schools, but it can be an important part of strategies to raise teacher expectations, improve moderation and share best practice.
7. The role of the central office in supporting the IPS initiative needs to evolve. It was acknowledged by the case study principals that the central office (SIRU in particular) has played an important role in ensuring the success of autonomy initiatives. But what is also true is that the role of the system needs to change as the autonomy initiative progresses. For example in the early stages of the IPS initiative, the focus was on selecting schools that were capable of operating in a new environment, delivering the flexibilities for an increasing number of schools, risk management and ensuring that the technical aspects of leadership required to effectively manage the new flexibilities (such as managing a one line budget and staffing processes) were in place.

Now that there is an increased maturity in the initiative and the flexibilities are relatively routine, the facilitative work of the central office changes. While some of the original functions need to be maintained, the core function in the future will be to maximise the principals' capacity to enact reforms within their school so that teachers are teaching more effectively. There is clear evidence of some principals doing that very effectively now. The challenge is how to ensure that all IPS principals are using their increased autonomy to do the same. And of course such a development should not be restricted to IPS; all principals regardless of their level of autonomy need to be supported to use their authority as leaders to improve the effectiveness of their teachers. The practical experience of IPS principals could be used to good effect in acting as system leaders to spread such practices throughout the whole public school system.

ATTACHMENT 1

CLASSROOM IMPACTS OF INCREASED SCHOOL AUTONOMY

LITERATURE REVIEW

Focus of the Literature Review

The *Evaluation of the Independent Public Schools Initiative Final Report (2013)* found that Independent Public Schools (IPS) in Western Australia had established the conditions that were likely to lead to improved student outcomes. The report recommended that further research should seek to understand how principals could use their increased flexibility and autonomy to make a difference in classrooms.

This literature review examines the links between increased school autonomy, principal empowerment, changes in the practice of teachers and benefits for students.

It traverses the following territory in the literature:

1. What is meant by 'school autonomy'?
2. What different models of school autonomy exist?
3. Does school autonomy deliver improved student outcomes?
4. What is known about principal impact on student performance?
5. Does increased autonomy enhance principal effectiveness?
6. What behaviours and actions do empowered principals engage in that improves teachers' effectiveness in the classroom?

1. What is meant by school autonomy?

At its simplest, it is generally understood in the literature that school autonomy refers to providing principals and their staff with more discretion and responsibility over their school.

It is not a new idea. There is a history spanning 25 years of public school systems in Australia shifting powers from the state's education department to the school. In fact, the first argument supporting increased school autonomy in Australian schools can be traced to the 1973 Karmel Report:

Responsibility will be most effectively discharged where the people entrusted with making decisions are also the people responsible for carrying them out, with an obligation to justify them, and in a position to profit from their experience.

In 1987 Western Australia made one of the earlier attempts by an Australian public school system to put such a policy in place with its *Better Schools in Western Australia: A programme for improvement*. This was a hotly contested reform and only partially implemented. In fact, the devolution of staffing responsibilities to schools, which was at the heart of the program, was never implemented. Soon after, New Zealand introduced its school autonomy program *Tomorrow's Schools* (1988), which was followed in 1992 by Victoria's *Schools of the Future* program. These latter two programs changed the school systems in those countries in quite fundamental ways that persist to the present day.

Many of the terms used to describe the process of enhancing school autonomy are used interchangeably; terms such as school based management, school empowerment, devolution, decentralisation and locally managed schools being the most common. In many jurisdictions the autonomy reforms are described by a particular type of school, for example charter schools in the US, academies in the UK, free schools in Sweden and the UK and Independent Public Schools in Australia.

An analysis of school autonomy as manifested in different school systems reveals schools with varying degrees of responsibility in different areas of school operations. Schools can have varying levels of decision-making responsibility in relation to staff recruitment and deployment, staff conditions of work, financial management, facilities management, curriculum, assessment and other elements of school administration (Gamage and Zajda, 2009). Different governance responsibilities are also evident in the various forms of school boards or councils and accountability arrangements also vary widely. Because of this it is probably best to view school autonomy as a continuum with schools and school systems located at different points along it.

For the Australian context, Caldwell's (2009) definition is the most useful because it captures the essence of what is happening in public school systems, where schools are having greater autonomy within the confines of system parameters and policy frameworks:

....a broadly defined set of processes where decision making responsibility on significant matters is systematically and consistently shifted to schools and school communities, within centrally managed frameworks.

School autonomy is sometimes interpreted in the literature as schools being relatively unconstrained by the system of which they are a part. For example, Eck and Goodwin (2010) ask whether systems shouldn't simply 'find great leaders and stay out of their way.' Carr (2015) describes the argument for greater school autonomy as '... school leaders, freed from the shackles of centralised decision making, are able to innovate and explore novel ideas'.

Such conceptions are far too simplistic for the Australian context where the central authorities have expanded schools' decision-making authority while continuing to maintain a strong presence. This presence has taken the form of system policy and accountability requirements and also certain support services that would be difficult to duplicate at each school site. No school in a public system of education is fully autonomous, but rather has a relatively high or low level of autonomy depending on the policy settings of the system to which they belong.

The distinction made by Simkins (1997) and Glatter et al. (2004) between criteria and operational power is useful in clarifying the issue. Criteria power refers to the specification of the goals and purposes of a service (the 'why and what') whereas operational power refers to decisions about how to deliver and resource the service (the 'how'). Increasing school autonomy in the Australian context has involved the

various agencies of government specifying the curriculum standards and outcomes with schools given increasing discretion over how to achieve those standards and outcomes. In Simkin's terms, there has been a shift of operational power from centralised agencies to schools, but not of criteria power.

Higham and Earley (2013) note that when principals challenge whether their autonomy to run their schools as they see fit has increased at all, it is because the traditional areas of professional autonomy, such as curriculum and assessment, are now more centrally prescribed than they have been in the past. Coupled with the rise in centrally set accountability requirements, such as national testing, school reviews and analysis of student performance information, the picture is a more complicated one than simply handing more authority to schools as is suggested by some interpretations of school autonomy in the literature.

Sometimes the terms used to describe schools with greater autonomy imply a more complete authority over decision-making than is actually the case. Independent Public Schools, the term used in Western Australia and nationally, actually describes schools with greater autonomy set firmly within system requirements and constraints. This is a much more common version of a school autonomy agenda than one where schools are completely cut loose of system controls.

Rather than equating school autonomy with de-regulation of the system, Helgoj et al. (2007) argue that it is more accurate to describe it as 're-regulation' where certain aspects of schooling have been subjected to new forms of state control and other aspects have been placed more firmly in schools' control. Lingard and Sellar (2012) also talk of re-regulation around tight external strictures holding schools to account.

Higham and Earley (2013) refer to simultaneous centralisation and decentralisation as better describing the school autonomy agenda in countries like the UK and Australia.

It may also be worth noting that, strictly speaking, it is not 'schools' that are given greater autonomy; it is the principal or the School Board that is given greater decision-making responsibilities. Depending on the principal's leadership style, the autonomy could be exercised as autocratic decision-making or in more participative ways that empower the whole staff and the wider community. This subject will be further explored later in the review.

In summary, school autonomy is not a well-defined concept; it is used loosely in the literature with wide variations in meaning. Increasing school autonomy as manifested in Australian public school systems and many other jurisdictions is best seen as a complicated mixture of centralising and de-centralising tendencies happening together. The central offices of the public school systems are allowing schools to make decisions that were formerly the prerogative of the central office, but are retaining other functions or even taking on new roles that were not previously undertaken. More systematic monitoring and review of schools'

performance, and intervention in cases of school under-performance are examples of such additional functions.

2. What different models of school autonomy exist?

Carr (2015) makes the observation that the school autonomy tent includes highly decentralised public school systems, school systems underpinned by school voucher programs, systems where private operators run public schools and many other designs.

2.1 Self-managing schools

The different expressions of school autonomy in different jurisdictions can be located in quite different paradigms of school improvement. One 'version' of autonomy comes in the form of self-managing schools within a central regulatory framework. As already stated, this is the common understanding of school autonomy in the Australian public school system context. There are, however, different rationales within this paradigm that are used to argue for the efficacy of greater school autonomy.

The most common is that those closest to the point of action are likely to know more about the local conditions and what is likely to work than those in a distant bureaucracy. Placing decision-making authority in the hands of those at the local level is thus more likely to address local needs and produce better outcomes. Increased responsiveness is at the heart of this rationale.

Another argument emphasises the increased flexibility available to principals in how they use the school's resources to generate improvement. Greater control over the finances and staffing gives additional levers to principals to put resources to use in ways that will best advance the school's goals and priorities. Flexibility in decision-making is at the heart of this rationale.

A further argument that is receiving increasing attention is that increasing school autonomy produces benefits because it brings the psychology of empowerment into play. This rationale for school autonomy holds that by giving the principal and school staff greater control over decision-making they will feel a greater sense of agency to take whatever action they believe will improve performance and to feel greater responsibility for the outcomes of their decisions. This was referred to in the *Evaluation of Independent Public Schools Final Report (2013)* as an 'empowerment mindset' and was reported as being evident in many IPS principals:

Principals involved in IPS felt empowered, and consequently believed they were able to better empower their teachers so that there was a more targeted focus on the specific needs of students.

2.2 Markets, autonomy, competition and choice

A second 'version' of the school autonomy agenda is an expression of neo-liberal economic principles. In this scenario the role of school autonomy is to allow schools

to differentiate themselves from each other so they can more effectively compete for students in a market where parents can choose the school for their children. In this model it is the competitive forces mobilised between schools to attract students that drive school improvement. Chubb and Moe (1990) were the first to clearly set out this framework in *Politics, Markets and America's Schools*. As Jensen (2013) notes, this conceptualisation is much more controversial than the former.

In the Australian context, the 2013 Grattan Institute report *The Myth of Markets in School Education* ruled unequivocally that such a model has not and will not work for the unique conditions that apply to Australian public school systems. Jensen makes it clear in this report that he is not arguing against school choice or giving schools greater autonomy, but rather the use of school autonomy as a means of schools differentiating themselves in order to compete with other schools for students:

Parents should be able to choose the school they want. But the right of parents to choose schools should not be confused with the idea that choice improves school performance.

The Independent Public Schools initiative was, from the original policy statement (Liberal Party of WA, 2008) to the announcement of the Government Media Office (2009), and to the prospectus released by the Department of Education (2010), not couched as part of the neoliberal policy discourse. Rather, it was set within a paradigm of empowerment of those at the local level to bring to bear increased ownership, motivation and local knowledge on the improvement of the school. Gobby (2013), however, postulates that this is at the level of rhetoric only and that the Independent Public Schools initiative is still best thought of as a programme of neoliberal government. Such a view did not emerge in the IPS evaluation report as a significant factor in the perception of the IPS initiative by the major players.

2.3 International autonomy initiatives

Because there are so many variations of school autonomy initiatives across different countries, a careful analysis of each model is required before drawing conclusions that are relevant to the Western Australian model of Independent Public Schools.

Keddie (2014) refers to a movement across many countries 'to create an increasingly autonomised education system' and references academies and the free school movement in the UK and other contexts in Europe, charter schools in the USA and Independent Public Schools in Australia. While these developments may have in common increased school autonomy, the autonomy is but one element of an overall reform agenda that has very different motivations and is built on very different rationales across countries.

Charter schools are the most often quoted example of the school autonomy movement in the US. Their stated purpose was to take power away from malfunctioning education bureaucracies and place it in the hands of those who are closest to, and who often care most about, students. They are an example of an 'opt

out' model of school autonomy where schools or chains of schools opt out of the school system and the rules that govern the system.

As Triant (2001) remarks, the charter school movement has an unlikely coalition of supporters including conservatives who support small government, progressives looking for new strategies to assist schools in low socioeconomic areas, disillusioned and frustrated public school educators, and renegade education reformers.

Charter schools have a wide variety of powers. There are examples of charter schools that have opted for a longer school year; where there are no teachers union contracts so that principals can hire community members as teachers who are uncertified (in some schools less than 25% of the teachers are certified teachers); where the principal can decide how much to pay teachers; can remove bad teachers with relative ease; and in some cases where the principal has decided to lengthen the school day by several hours and lengthen the school year by as much as 30 days.

This scope of decision-making authority in the hands of the principal is a far cry from the autonomy being implemented in Australian school systems. It is therefore of little relevance to the Australian policy context to consider the evidence of what impact charter schools have had on student performance.

The US nearest equivalent to the school autonomy policies in Australian schools is not charter schools, which attempt to create autonomous schools outside regular public school systems, but those autonomy initiatives that have arisen in the past 10-15 years within the state public school systems. Prominent examples are the Boston Public Schools (CCE, 2006), Chicago Public Schools (Spote, 2003), Oakland Unified School District (OUSD, 2000) and New York City Public Schools (New Vision for Public Schools, 2007). While these differ in some significant details both from each other and from the Australian context, they are, like the Western Australian Independent Public Schools initiative, examples of an 'opt in' model where schools remain in the system but opt in to an environment of increased autonomy.

Some features of these initiatives have particular relevance to school autonomy programs in the Australian context. Firstly, they treat the new decision making flexibilities for schools, not as an end in themselves as earlier attempts had done, but as a means to improve teaching and learning. From the various historical analyses that have been done, the difference between the early reforms of 20-30 years ago and the current school autonomy programs is clear: the initial reforms were focussed on changes in education governance and more local control of schools (Burke, 1992); the more recent reforms are more directly about improvements in student learning (Gammage, 2008).

Secondly, the various US state autonomy initiatives also focussed on training and development to make sure that schools had the capacity to take on and make productive use of their new decision making authority. In Oakland, the selection criteria for participation in the autonomy initiative required schools to demonstrate their capacity to operate under the new regime (OUSD, 2000).

And finally, the central offices of these US state public school systems are strong participants in changing their way of operating so as to enable schools to use their new authorities and be key implementation supporters. The “Incubator” in the Oakland model provided major support and capacity building including coaches working onsite to assist principals with implementation. The research analysing the success of the initiative identified the support schools received through the “Incubator” as vital (Vasudeva et al., 2009). An equivalent facilitative unit within the central bureaucracy of the Western Australian Education Department (the School Innovation and Reform Unit) was also rated by principals as an important source of support for their transition to becoming an Independent Public School (*Evaluation of the Independent Public Schools Initiative Final Report, 2013*).

An interesting feature of these US initiatives is that even though the focus was on improving teaching and learning, there is little evidence of how much that focus penetrated actual classroom practice (Honig and Rainey, 2012). Although teachers did report that in Oakland’s initiative the implementation involved formal times for teacher collaboration and the development of a differentiated instructional approach to meet the academic and cultural needs of a diverse student body. Overall, the evidence that these system reforms delivered improved student performance is mixed (Honig and Rainey, 2012).

Sweden’s *friskolor* policy has produced what are known as free schools. Many of these schools are privately operated and have been running since 1992. They receive the same level of funding as local government schools but many are run by for-profit companies. The policy did much more than simply shift decision making from the central agency to municipalities; it also changed the exam system, teacher training and introduced a voucher system for parents to take funding to wherever they chose to educate their children.

In an interview reported in the Guardian (2015) seeking to explain the recent decline in performance of Sweden’s schools’ PISA results, Andreas Schleicher, the OECD’s director for education and skills commented:

When establishing school autonomy and choice, the Swedish system did not strengthen oversight and intervention functions (which were traditionally weak in Sweden). So the system had no means to learn from successful schools and scale their success, and it had no means to detect and address educational underperformance.

As in the case of US charter schools, Sweden’s free schools certainly are an example of schools being given greater autonomy, but they are the result of a fundamental recasting of schooling involving the profit motive and parent vouchers. This makes them such a different ‘beast’ to the schools in Australia being given greater autonomy that comparisons are of little practical use in assessing the likely impact of the kind of school autonomy policies being implemented in the Australian context.

Academies in the UK were introduced by the Labour Government in 1992 to replace existing failing schools. Although they remain part of the state sector and are non-fee-charging state funded schools, they were taken outside of the control of the Local Education Authorities. They are managed by private, independent sponsors through a largely self-appointed board of governors which has responsibility for hiring the staff, negotiating pay and working conditions and deciding on matters such as discipline and performance management as well as determining term and school day duration (DfES 2013).

But as Machin (2013) notes, with the election of a Conservative Coalition Government in 2010, the nature of academies changed and they no longer focus on the disadvantaged institutions which characterised their introduction under the previous Government. Given the significant powers of the school board governors, both in the original and the 'new wave' academies, impact comparisons with Independent Public Schools in Western Australia would appear to be drawing a very long bow.

In summary, movements towards greater school autonomy can be found in many jurisdictions but are located within quite different reform agendas with disparate rationales. To treat these as all driving a single 'school autonomy' reform and to assess the impacts of each as evidence of the effectiveness or otherwise of giving schools greater autonomy, makes little sense. A more sensible approach is to analyse each separately and ask what lessons can be learned for future implementation of Australian school autonomy policies.

3. Does school autonomy deliver improved student outcomes?

The debate about whether a policy of school autonomy produces improved student performance has raged in the literature since such policies became more widespread. In this section an attempt will be made to capture where that debate has now landed, rather than capture the literature illustrative of both sides of the debate as recently documented by Suggett (2015).

A feature of the literature examining the impact of school autonomy policies on student performance has been the analysis of the OECD PISA reports to support arguments both in support of and against increasing school autonomy. Rather than giving a simple yes or no answer to the question, most analyses tend to conclude that there is no direct causal link between autonomy and school performance, but rather autonomy can have positive effects when accompanied by other interventions. As the review of school autonomy within Boston's public schools prepared for The Boston Foundation (2014) puts it:

Autonomy doesn't equate to success. It creates the conditions for success.

One of the most common accompaniments to school autonomy deemed to be necessary for positive effects is strong accountability. The OECD 2011 PISA report concludes:

PISA results suggest that, when autonomy and accountability are intelligently combined, they tend to be associated with better student performance.

Eric Hanushek and his colleagues constructed a very large data set from the four waves of PISA tests spanning 2000-2009, comprising over one million students in 42 countries and arrived at another condition that applies to the positive impact of school autonomy:

...autonomy affects student achievement negatively in developing and low-performing countries but positively in developed and high performing countries.

In his most recent analysis of the data, Caldwell (2015) concludes as follows;

Evidence from deep analysis of results in PISA tend to confirm that higher levels of school autonomy are associated with higher levels of student achievement provided there is a balance of autonomy and accountability.....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.

In terms of the debate about whether the PISA results demonstrate student achievement gains for schools and school systems with greater autonomy, perhaps the UK Government's 2010 White Paper presents the clearest summary locating increased autonomy with other key features of the school systems of the most successful countries based on the PISA results.

The White Paper notes that high performing countries on PISA combine:

- high levels of autonomy for schools;
- a high status teaching profession;
- comprehensive and effective accountability systems; and
- a strong sense of aspiration for all children, whatever their background.

The 2014 Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission report summarised the state of play as follows:

The Commission's assessment of the empirical studies looking at the relationship between autonomy and school performance reveals a mixed and inconclusive picture. While some studies report a performance benefit – particularly if autonomy is accompanied by effective accountability mechanisms – others find little impact, or even negative effects.

The Gonski School Funding Review Report (2011) also backed school autonomy as part of a suite of measures necessary for improvement. The Report concluded that school leaders who were able to make decisions, including decisions about hiring staff and over the school budget, did well in terms of student achievement, providing there were measures of accountability. It is interesting to note that the Gonski report, when discussing the use by principals of resource flexibility, quotes

examples of decisions that relate quite directly to improving the quality of instruction.

With greater autonomy and budgetary control, schools are best placed to make decisions about how best to use resources, such as tailoring school timetables to meet student needs, hiring specialist help such as literacy and numeracy specialists, and making more time available for teachers to plan or prepare for classes.

The key message most strongly enunciated by Jensen (2013) is that while there was no doubt that some schools would excel with autonomy, the literature emphasised the advantages of school autonomy as part of a comprehensive strategy for school and system improvement. He says

Giving school leaders autonomy to run their schools well is a good idea, but it has little impact on performance when governments do not implement it as part of a larger plan to improve teaching and learning.

Many years earlier Caldwell and Spinks (1988) made the same point:

Self-management is but one element in a constellation of approaches that must be aligned if the desired outcomes are to be achieved.

And the title of Suggett's (2015) paper, *School autonomy: Necessary but not sufficient*, foreshadows the same position: that the evidence on school autonomy is that it is best considered as one piece of the jigsaw of school and system improvement and not a policy that, on its own, should be expected to deliver improved outcomes.

There is also clear evidence in the literature that giving schools increased autonomy can have positive outcomes if the school is ready and already has some of the fundamental ingredients of school improvement in place. Mourshed et al. (2010) analysed different school systems and found that autonomy is more effective in systems that are moving from 'great to excellent'. And the Gates foundation also found through its sponsorship of increased school autonomy that 'giving failing schools greater autonomy is a bad idea'.

This would lead designers of school autonomy initiatives to take care about which schools in the system might benefit from such a policy and which schools might require more direct forms of support and intervention, rather than adopting a one size fits all approach to such a reform. The concept of 'earned autonomy' has been used to connote such differentiation amongst schools (Kay, 2010).

Caldwell's (2012) work with principals makes it clear that, while it may be tempting for governments and central authorities to attribute improvements to autonomy alone, principals understand that improvements are usually best explained by a complex interaction between a whole range of system and school activity in operation at the time. Nor do principals see the point in trying to attribute gains

solely to increased autonomy; they value autonomy and see it as one part of the overall toolkit of school improvement.

Attention in the literature to the issue of collaboration between schools has confirmed that this is also an important area to consider along with increasing school autonomy. There is a well established literature demonstrating that processes of networking and collaboration between schools can create highly effective communities of learning and practice leading to significant and sustained improvement across the system (Ainscow, 2010; Ainscow et al., 2012). The experience of the UK would confirm that policies that increase school autonomy risk isolating schools from the support and expertise available in surrounding schools and that strategies need to be adopted to build and maintain such networks.

Drawing on Ainscow's work in this field, Keddie (2014) reports that the processes of school collaboration can also have a positive effect on teachers and teaching by validating teacher professionalism as well as sharing expertise across schools. The sharing of expertise across schools can be achieved in a variety of ways but Ainscow et al. (2012) refer to 'hub schools' as one strategy. These are groups of schools that are identified as having specific expertise in particular subject areas or learning areas such as Education Support.

One of the significant findings of the Academies Commission (2013) in the UK was that, not only was autonomy per se an insufficient condition for school improvement, but that that such improvement was much more related to *how* autonomy is mobilised. From the *Evaluation of the Independent Public Schools Initiative Final Report* (2013) this was an important feature explaining the positive impacts of increased school autonomy. Unfortunately, there is little in the literature to guide systems in designing the implementation strategies for their school autonomy initiatives. This despite the finding of the Academies Commission that it was decisions about *how* the autonomy was mobilised amongst the schools it was intended to benefit that was critical.

A notable exception to this is the work of Meredith Honig in documenting the progress and issues associated with a range of school autonomy projects across the US, in particular, Oakland's 'small autonomous schools' initiative (Honig, 2002, Honig, 2003, Honig, 2009, Honig and Rainey, 2012)

The key implementation factors she identified were:

- The importance of schools focussing their improvement efforts on strengthening teaching and learning rather than simply a focus on governance and local decision making.
- The extent to which the initiatives contained action to build the capacity of schools to realise teaching and learning improvements.
- The changed role of the central offices from being implementation impediments to being implementation enablers.

Suggett's (2015) analysis of the most recent developments in school autonomy initiatives suggests that the role of school systems in successful implementation of such a policy has been under-done. She suggests that systems have a responsibility to

- clarify the freedoms that apply to schools as well as the governance responsibilities and capabilities;
- build a facilitative 'middle layer' in the bureaucracy;
- ensure there are strong professional support systems;
- establish formative as well as summative accountability systems;
- support leadership capacity building;
- strengthen the data literacy and performance metrics to underpin school improvement; and
- build capability for effective resource management.

Advocating a strong role for the system in implementing school autonomy policy does, however, run the risk that central offices will simply move to their default position and re-assert centralised control over schools. Suggett (2015) stresses that the system role must be clearly defined as setting parameters for schools, facilitating empowerment and building the capacity of school staff and only intervening where required to protect the integrity of the school system.

Gobby (2013) describes the case increasingly being recommended to political authorities at an international level as follows:

Decentralisation in itself does not improve school or system performance. However, decentralisation can improve school performance if attention is also paid to addressing certain features of a school's 'ecosystem', which include instruments of accountability, the social and cultural capital of schools, the quality of teaching, and the effectiveness of school leadership.

It should be noted that the research on whether autonomy policies impact positively on school performance is predicated on the vexed issue of outcome measurement. Ideally, an assessment of school performance should extend beyond how students perform on standardized tests and incorporate the full range of educational and social experiences that may result from greater school-level autonomy. For example, does greater autonomy improve student safety and establish a school climate that is more conducive to student wellbeing?

Fullan (2002) is one of many researchers challenging the narrowness of external measures of school success. He argues that schools are attempting to do a lot more than just improving students' achievement on narrow performance measures. He advocates for measurements that include a much broader view of the purposes of schooling in relation to students that includes social and moral learning.

Mulford (2008) argues that the commitment of schools to the social and moral development of students might be weakened as they seek to ascribe to the demands

of narrow external performance measures that accompanies greater autonomy as part of the 'audit culture'.

Levin (2010) also argues that we should assess our progress by 'improvement in student outcomes across a broad range of important areas, not just reading and mathematics, and not just measured by test scores' (p 230). Eacott (2011) is another who makes the same point: that judging the effectiveness of schools on data related to a narrow view of student learning, or data that only refers to specific, academic skills, is problematic.

A further complicating issue in evaluating the impact of autonomy and student outcomes is that 'big data' such as PISA, TIMMS, PIRLS and NAPLAN in Australia, can only take us so far. Particular implementation features that apply locally to specific autonomy initiatives (like IPS in Western Australia) also need to be considered in any sophisticated analysis of impact.

A final complicating factor in assessing whether autonomy has impacted positively on student outcomes is the timescale needed for any effects to be evident. The literature suggests that if improvement in student outcomes is the major goal of extending school autonomy, then patience will be required from those expecting to see such results. Evaluations of school based management in the USA have found that impacts on internal school processes, improved management of resources, stronger school climate, greater community engagement and the like are likely to be seen within 5 years. Gains in student outcome data are generally not evident until approximately 8 years after schools gain greater autonomy. (Barrera-Osoria et al., 2009).

When analysing the results of the New Zealand school system following a far reaching school autonomy agenda implemented in the 1980s, Wylie (2012) reports that it has taken almost two generations before that country has seen impacts on student achievement as demonstrated by the country's recent rise on the PISA league table of countries.

In summary, the debate has moved beyond the simple question of whether the evidence supports or is against school autonomy, to identifying the conditions which must also be present for autonomy to deliver benefits. The main factors identified in the literature that play a part in ensuring that increased school autonomy produces improved student outcomes are:

- Principal capacity building
- Intelligent accountability mechanisms
- Fostering a sense of agency amongst principals and teachers
- Enhancing collaboration within and between schools
- A focus on improving the quality of teaching and the educational experience of students
- A commitment and capacity within the central authority to actually deliver and support meaningful authority and not circumscribe it in such detailed ways that schools gain little benefit

4. What is known about principal impact on student performance?

While there are many factors that impact on educational outcomes, there is a considerable literature testifying to the importance of effective school leadership in improving student outcomes (Hallinger and Heck, 1996; Hallinger, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2008; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004; Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2003). Hallinger and Heck (1999) found that school leaders have an indirect impact via their influence on teachers, and it is the school and classroom practices that have a direct impact on student learning.

It has been established that the second greatest school-based contributor to student learning, after the quality of teachers, is the quality of school leaders. Several studies (Waters et al. 2003; Leithwood et al. 2004) have estimated that leadership accounts for one quarter of the variation in student learning explained by all school level variables. Gates et al. (2004) also noted that in schools where students perform above expectations based on demographic characteristics, the defining factor is the school leader.

The leadership roles that principals play can be broadly categorised as instructional leadership and organisational leadership. Instructional leadership refers to those actions that directly support the achievement of students and the ability of teachers to teach (Marks and Printy, 2003). Organisational leadership is associated with actions indirectly related to instruction, such as the way in which a principal impacts on the school culture, environment and conditions through management decisions (Grissom and Loeb, 2011).

Examination of the impact of the principal on student performance has usually been through analysing the instructional leadership role of the principal, but the evidence for one type of leadership being more important than the other is inconclusive. The management decisions that principals make regarding staffing, budget and organisational strategy can also have important indirect effects on student achievement.

While instructional leadership by principals is now being more strongly advocated, Richard Elmore, as cited in Gordon (2003), warns against under-estimating the difficulty for principals to shift their role more strongly in that direction. The core of his argument is that having principals more directly involved with what teachers are doing in their classrooms flies in the face of the 'loosely coupled' nature of schools as institutions. Schools have typified the 'loosely coupled' organisation in that the *technical core* (detailed decisions about what goes on in classrooms with regard to teaching and learning) has traditionally been determined by the teachers, not by the organisations that surround them. Teachers worked in isolation in their classrooms with autonomy; the principal's job was not to manage the technical core, but to keep external forces at bay, manage the reputation and smooth running of the school and comply with system policies.

As an instructional leader, principals are supposed to be able to analyse a teacher's instruction, diagnose instructional problems and provide assistance to the teacher to improve their instruction (Seifert and Vornberg, 2002). They are also expected to transform their schools into professional learning communities and create a school culture that encourages collaboration and dialogue on instruction amongst teachers (DuFour and Eaker, 1998). In many instances, in a school culture which functions as a professional learning community, principals distribute their instructional leadership responsibilities to other teacher leaders in order to benefit from their skills and expertise across the school. In this framework, isolation is viewed as the enemy of school improvement efforts and the entire staff assumes responsibility for student learning.

Importantly, the concept of instructional leadership moves away from the idea that leaders 'control' their subordinates. The word control implies that the controller knows exactly what the 'controlee' should do. If principals assume that they have all the answers, this can be a formula for disaster.

If successful principals view their schools as containing groups of professional educators, then their roles as instructional leaders is to work with their expert teachers with the objective of providing coaching, feedback (including student performance data) and professional development to all teachers so that teaching and learning improves.

5. Does increased autonomy enhance principal effectiveness?

Clearly, if school autonomy policies place more power in the hands of school leaders, their capability to use that power wisely becomes critical. The Productivity Commission in its 2012 *Schools Workforce* report warned that the benefits of autonomy depended on schools having the necessary leadership capacity to manage the extra responsibilities and to take advantage of the increased flexibility.

Expecting that all principals will know how to use their increased autonomy to improve classroom practice is a big assumption. Much of the school improvement research finds that only a minority of schools know what changes to make to improve their results and suggests schools need to be provided with capacity building opportunities and support in order to achieve the aim of improved classroom practice. Richard Elmore in Gordon (2003) also makes the point that '...the premise that educators know what to do...is essentially wrong. Some educators know what to do; most don't'.

4.1 The concept of empowerment

There is a longstanding interest in the leadership and management literature that suggests that empowering subordinates is a key factor in managerial and organisational effectiveness. (Bennis and Nanus, 1985). Educational researcher's attention has become increasingly focused on the importance of teacher empowerment in predicting various work related outcomes such as teaching quality and innovation, job satisfaction and organisational and professional commitment.

Empowerment is a term that is used loosely, not only in the literature, but also by school systems and governments in their reform rhetoric. Lee and Nie (2014) differentiate between social structural perspectives and psychological approaches to empowerment. The social structural perspective tends to view empowerment as an act of a system or school leader or a practice that involves the granting of power to those being empowered. Sagnak (2012) provides an example of this perspective in discussing principal's empowerment of their staff by opening up decision-making processes to staff involvement.

Others, such as Spreitzer (1995), define the psychological perspective of empowerment as an individual's psychological state which manifests itself as four cognitions: meaning, competence, autonomy and impact. Using this frame, empowered principals are those that feel there is a good fit between their work role and their own values, beliefs and behaviours (meaning); who believe they have the capability to perform their job with skill (competence); who believe they have some choice in regulating their own actions (autonomy); and who feel they are able to influence strategic or everyday outcomes at work (impact). This concept of psychological empowerment is closely connected to an individual's intrinsic work motivation and an important dimension of work performance.

Conger and Kanungo (1988) also treat empowerment as a motivational construct, ie as an enabling rather than a delegating process. Enabling in the sense that it involves creating the conditions for enhancing motivation for task accomplishment through the development of a strong sense of personal efficacy. Consistent with Bandura's (1986) original concept of self-efficacy, they define empowerment as a process whereby an individual's belief in his or her self-efficacy is enhanced.

When the concept of empowerment is invoked as a rationale for increasing school autonomy, it is often a vague mixture of both these perspectives. Granting a principal or School Board additional decision-making authority is often referred to as 'empowering' the principal or local community. This is an example of adopting a social structural perspective of empowerment. The same perspective is taken when a principal who delegates decisions to their teachers is described as 'empowering' their staff. With this concept, empowerment is something that is given from a higher order authority to a lower order authority.

But when giving schools greater autonomy is proposed with the intention of raising the level of ownership, commitment, motivation and responsibility of school staff, the psychological perspective of empowerment is being invoked. Ownership of school success by the staff and 'buy in' to changes being advocated by leadership are regarded as important because they can increase innovation and effective reforms in schools (Triant, 2011; Heargraves and Hopkins, 1991; White, 1992).

The benefits of engendering amongst principals a strong sense of psychological empowerment are reported in the literature as increased motivation and investment in the success of their school (IPS Evaluation, 2013); greater ownership (Jensen,

2013); more openness to change (Farris-Berg, 2013); initiating innovative practices which support effective teaching and learning (IPS Evaluation, 2013); a tendency to solve problems rather than seeing challenges as roadblocks (Boston Foundation, 2014); acceptance of stronger accountability (Hill, 2013); stronger buy-in to system goals (Manasse, 1985); taking more initiative and being more entrepreneurial (Farris-Berg, 2013) and a stronger sense of commitment, responsibility and motivation (Mizrav, 2014).

The importance for policy makers of this distinction between empowerment as a delegating process and empowerment as a motivating construct is that if the objective is to raise the levels of motivation and organisational and professional commitment of principals and teachers (sometimes seen in the language of autonomy policies as ‘unleashing the potential’ within schools), giving them greater autonomy may or may not achieve this. Instead, central decision makers would need to address the question of what conditions would need to be created, in addition to greater autonomy, to generate such a sense of empowerment. In particular, what kind of action at the system level would imbue principals with a sense of empowerment, and what kind of leadership by principals would engender that within their staff.

The IPS evaluation also reported

There is a corpus of academic literature that identifies a connection between the mindset of principals and cultural change in schools; further linking this cultural change to the success of the school as a whole (Gamage, 2006; Hallinger&Heck, 1999).

Jensen (2010) provides a particularly useful distinction between ‘autonomy’ and ‘empowerment’. He also argues that schools can be empowered without being autonomous, and vice versa, and that it’s empowerment that matters. He writes:

School leaders should be empowered to run their schools well. But empowerment means much more than autonomy. School leaders are too often granted autonomy but lack the direction, support and development to lead the key reforms their schools need.

The extension of Jensen’s (2010) argument is that the central offices of the school systems need to take a strong leadership role so that, having given their schools greater autonomy, they also provide them with the kind of development and support that will ensure they use their increased freedom to enact reforms in their schools that will improve the effectiveness of their teachers. Without such development and support it is possible that principals will take actions that have little or no impact on classroom practice and hence result in no benefits for students.

A similar concept to school empowerment is what psychologist Albert Bandura has called ‘collective efficacy’. Hoy et al. (2006) also conclude that the collective efficacy of the school staff is a key factor in generating what they call ‘academic optimism’, a concept closely linked with having high expectations of students. Eck and Goodwin

(2010) quote US professor Roger Goddard's contention that collective efficacy is actually a better predictor of school success than student socio-economic status or race.

Bandura has identified several sources of collective efficacy, including mastery experiences (helping people experience success or quick wins), social persuasion (relying on influential individuals to create high expectations and encourage others to meet those expectations) and group enablement (providing individuals or groups with opportunities to offer input or develop their own responses to identified challenges).

4.2 The principal's mindset and increased school autonomy

The capacity of principals to be effective leaders in a more autonomous school environment is variable and represents one of the foremost challenges for school system managers (Trimmer, 2013). Systems can delegate authorities to principals but the principals' mindset or view of their operating environment will have a significant bearing on whether they feel empowered to act. If a principal adopts a compliance perspective in relation to the regulatory framework of the system, then their behaviour is unlikely to change significantly in a more autonomous environment. If systems are to address this issue as part of their overall implementation plan for increasing school autonomy, they will need to design leadership development programs that go beyond mastery of the technical skills of leadership and extend to influencing the disposition of principals to claim their authority as leaders and to take responsibility for delivering improved outcomes.

It should also be noted, however, that some principals who had difficulty accepting and operating within the strictures of a more centralised system, have had no difficulty moving into more autonomous arrangements. In pursuing school autonomy reforms in the Boston public school system, it was noted that 'in both Baltimore and New York City, principals who were non-compliant troublemakers in the old system were particularly able to adapt to the new responsibilities that accompany having increased autonomy'.

4.3 Leadership in a more autonomous environment

There is a substantial evidence base on effective school leadership (Day et al. 2009; Robinson et al. 2009), and this will not be repeated in this review, but important questions arise about whether these effective leadership behaviours are enhanced or inhibited in an environment of increased school autonomy. The most commonly advanced argument is that, freed from the shackles of bureaucracy, more autonomous school leaders are more able to set their school's vision and be entrepreneurial and creative about ways of achieving it.

A contrary argument is that the reality encourages behaviours that are reactive, compliant and managerial (Fink 2010). The reasoning behind this argument is that along with the increased autonomy is the increased surveillance and controls (what Keddle (2014) calls the 'audit culture') and this has the effect of forcing a constant attention by principals to the monitoring and accountability requirements so that

any real innovation is effectively stymied. Eacott's (2011) research in NSW revealed that autonomy sometimes restricted innovation, making principals unwilling to risk losing market share.

Clearly effective leadership can be demonstrated in schools that have a great deal of authority but also in schools that do not. Autonomy is not necessary for effective leadership, but is best seen as an enabler. It provides opportunities for good leaders to add additional value to the work of the school by virtue of the extra scope for exercising astute decision-making. And if autonomy is accompanied by other supporting strategies and implemented in such a way that principals feel more empowered to lead their teachers to more effective practices, then additional value can be added.

The most recent PISA report (PISA, 2013) provides direct empirical evidence in support of the claim that higher levels of principal autonomy improve school quality. Suggett (2015) reports work done by Caldwell to investigate what is gained from the exercise of leadership in an environment of autonomy compared with that which is demonstrated by good leaders operating in a more centralised environment. The conclusion drawn is that leadership is critical for good performance and autonomy facilitates good leadership rather than being a pre-requisite for it. This is consistent with the general conclusion about autonomy and school effects: that it is an enabler rather than a stand-alone determinant.

One of the characteristics of successful educational leaders is the willingness to take reasonable risks (Mendez-Morse, 1992; Fullan, 1993). Sergiovani (2005) argues that principals need to be able to take calculated risks based on experience, research and data, and learn from their successes and failures.

It could be argued that increasing school autonomy expands the scope and potential for risk taking by principals. But if they do not have the confidence to take decisions that are not simply grounded in compliance with the system regulatory framework, but based on their best judgement about what will improve the school's performance, they will continue to 'play safe' and not exploit the potential that is presented by increased autonomy (Reeve et al, 2003). This reinforces the need for school systems to adopt sophisticated strategies to raise the confidence of school leaders to move beyond a compliance perspective of governance and to strengthen their belief in their own capacity to bring about change in their schools.

Mizrav (2014) argues that increasing autonomy has three major positive effects on the principal's capacity to impact on school performance. Firstly, they can use their local knowledge and understanding to greater effect when they exercise increased decision-making responsibility. Secondly, autonomy increases the level of commitment, responsibility and motivation that principals bring to their jobs. And thirdly, principals are prepared to accept greater accountability if they are more in control of the decisions impacting on school success.

In summary, giving schools greater autonomy can facilitate an empowered mindset amongst the principal and staff, but doesn't guarantee it. From a school improvement perspective, the ideal is when principals have autonomy and an empowered mindset to use it to produce benefits for students. The system can 'empower' principals in the sense of giving them greater decision-making about their school. But if it wants to gain the benefits that accrue from increasing the sense of agency of principals and teachers it will need to have strategies to develop such a disposition. This is more complex than simply shifting decision making but potentially more powerful in terms of influencing schools for the better.

6. What behaviours and actions do empowered principals engage in that improves teachers' effectiveness in the classroom?

Before examining the evidence of what effective principals do that gets teachers to improve their teaching, it is important to consider what is known about what needs to be done to improve the quality of teaching in any school.

In the 2007 report by McKinsay & Company titled 'How the world's best performing school systems come out on top', the authors note that improving the quality of instruction requires three things:

- *Individual teachers need to become aware of specific weaknesses in their own practice (which turns out to be more than simply an understanding of their own behaviour, but importantly the mindset underlying it).*
- *Individual teachers need to gain an understanding of specific best practices through the demonstration of such practices in an authentic setting.*
- *Individual teachers need to be motivated to make the necessary improvements. In general this requires a deeper change in motivation that cannot be achieved through material incentives. Such changes come about when teachers have high expectations, a shared sense of purpose, and, above all, a collective belief in their common ability to make a difference to the education of the children they serve.*

There is plenty of evidence to suggest that without all three things in place, change will be limited. It is unusual, however, for school systems to conscientiously adopt strategies to put all three into place.

Jensen would argue that the first of these three could be effectively met by putting in place systems of classroom observation and performance feedback as part of an effective system of teacher appraisal. This is supported by Hattie's (2009) research which showed that teacher appraisal, feedback and development are key levers to improve learning and teaching in schools and have been shown to be strongly influenced by the actions of school leaders. Advice from the 2013 IPS evaluation report was 'to focus on changes in collaboration amongst teachers to focus on their impact collectively, and how teachers work to understand and implement enhancements to their classroom practices.' The evaluation also noted that 'mechanisms for achieving 'better teaching' other than traditional professional

development- for example, work shadowing, peer or principal review etc – did not seem to be clearly identified or valued as such’.

The second of the three requirements for improving teacher practice can also be put in place through an individual school or a network of schools sharing the expertise of high expertise teachers who are capable of demonstrating effective practice in an authentic setting. ACER Prof Geoff Masters states the challenge for school systems as how to ‘get all teachers doing what the best already do’. Outstanding teachers have a sound grasp of the subjects they teach. They are familiar with, and use, a range of research-based teaching strategies, and they know their students well, including their individual strengths and weaknesses, learning needs, interests and motivations.

Although generally acknowledged as critical, the third of the three requirements is more problematic: what can school leaders do to motivate teachers to improve their teaching effectiveness?

5.1 Leadership and teacher motivation

Rowan (1996) identified three factors that affect job performance: motivation, ability and situation. Motivation theory postulates that whether a person believes that his or her effort will lead to achievement of a particular goal or performance level is crucial because expectancy has been found to have a strong and significant effect on student performance (Kelly, et al. 2003). In Finnigan’s (2012) research it was clear that while skills and knowledge were important to improving teacher’s practice, the will to change was also significant. She draws the conclusion that to bring about improvements in student performance principals are in a key position to improve the performance of teachers by improving their motivation. Fullan (2005) also acknowledges this when he describes capacity building as increasing the knowledge, competencies and motivation to engage in improvement actions.

The 2013 IPS evaluation provides further confirmation of the significance of teacher motivation in improving practice:

Much educational research supports the understanding that motivation is an essential factor in effective teaching. Over time, this increased motivation is likely to have significant positive impacts on teaching and learning practices. Motivated teachers become more enthusiastic about reflecting on and improving their practice and impact; thus empowering teachers to be willing to implement new ideas in the classroom, and this can be expected to have significant benefits for students.

Levin (2010) says that if you are expecting teachers to change they need to ‘know what to do differently, *and want to do those things*’ (my italics).

And he adds ‘one of the fundamental lessons of research on human motivation is that people will do more of what they think they are good at or can become good at.....you cannot threaten or shame or punish people into top performance’.

Wagner (2001) poses the fundamental questions that principals who want to get teachers to change their practice must contend with: 'What motivates adults to want to do new and sometimes very difficult things?' What do leaders need to do to create the will to learn how to improve student achievement?

Daniel Pink in his 2011 publication *Drive: the surprising truth about what motivates us* identified three 'touchstones' in explaining what motivates us: autonomy, mastery and purpose. Autonomy is defined as the ability to define important aspects of daily tasks. Mastery is gaining the requisite foundational knowledge to become truly expert in an area and to ask novel questions and create new approaches. Purpose is defined as working towards a larger purpose that transcends and connects to significant social or communal value. Pink contends that extrinsic motivators like carrots and sticks are fine for straightforward algorithmic tasks like factory work and data entry but when it comes to the knowledge work required in schools it is intrinsic motivators that work.

Principals need to understand what motivates teachers to change so that they can develop an overall change management strategy to improve teaching quality across their school. Effective leadership involves building a school climate where teachers are motivated to change, installing systems where teachers get the feedback and support to change and where there is accountability for improvement. To impact on teacher practice, system policies of school autonomy need also to be accompanied by action that ensures principals are able to do these things.

5.2 Principal behaviours that build productive relationships with teachers

There is a substantial stream of literature confirming that interpersonal relations contribute to student achievement and school effectiveness (Barth, 2006, Louis, 2006). This is simply confirming what most principals and teachers already know: that it is the quality of the relationships in the school that makes a difference. A critical element of this is the relationships between the principal and the teachers which is regarded as a significant predictor of a school's readiness to reform and its ability to sustain it, as well as student achievement (Barnett and McCormick, 2004, Sebring and Bryk, 2000).

Dinham (2004) notes:

Leaders' relationship with their followers have thus assumed greater importance than the more technical aspects of administration, management and decision-making. It has been recognised that leaders need a sound understanding of human nature if they are to lead effectively.

And Hoppey and McLeskey (2013) talk of 'lubricating the human machinery' or providing support for teachers so they could do their best work.

Blau (1964), writing about leadership in general rather than specifically principal-teacher relationships, provides an important conceptual differentiation between what he calls high-quality and low-quality exchanges between leaders and followers.

Low-quality exchanges are characterised by the exercise of formal organisational authority and tend to be defined by the performance contract. High-quality exchanges are social and psychological contracts which go beyond the formal exchanges required. They are based on loyalty, mutual respect and friendliness and often result in followers going beyond the call of duty and formal employment contracts.

When principals engage in high-quality exchange relationships with teachers, there is evidence that teachers engage in voluntary and helping behaviours towards colleagues, principals and students that are beyond performance expectations of their formal role (Elstad et al. 2011).

Zeinabadi (2014) concludes from his research that

'.....principals are instrumental in motivating good relationships and high-quality exchange indicators in schools. They should equip themselves with qualities which increase these indicators and create professional, supportive, truthful and consciously developed relationships. Principals who have established good relationships with teachers were typically liked, respected, and trusted. These principals facilitate teachers' growth, demonstrate a sense of humour, empathy and compassion, and work for the betterment of the school, teachers, and students rather than themselves.

Blase and Blase (2000) identify two major categories of principal behaviour that have a direct impact on instruction. One was talking with teachers to promote reflection; the other was promoting professional growth. The specific strategies related to the first were: making suggestions; giving feedback; modelling; using inquiry and soliciting advice and opinions; and giving praise. The specific strategies related to the second were: emphasising the study of teaching and learning; supporting collaboration efforts among educators; developing coaching relationships among educators; encouraging and supporting re-design of programs; applying the principles of adult learning and growth to all phases of staff development; and implementing action research to inform instructional decision making.

Lee and Nie (2013) identified 7 dimensions of principals' leadership behaviour that were significantly correlated with teacher empowerment. They were:

- Delegation of authority
- Providing intellectual stimulation
- Giving acknowledgement and recognition
- Articulating a vision
- Fostering collaborative relationships
- Providing individualised concern and support
- Providing role modelling

Triant (2001) also identified what one might call the 'zeitgeist' of schools – a positive school culture that permeated teachers and students. It significantly affected

teachers' work ethics, their capacities to innovate, and the whole environment of a school.

5.3 Leadership and trust

Trust is recognised as a key element in school effectiveness (Bryk and Schneider, 2002). The study by Moye et al. (2005) found that teachers who perceived that they were empowered in their work environment had higher levels of interpersonal trust in their principals. That is, teachers who found their work personally meaningful and who reported significant autonomy and substantial influence in their work environments, had higher levels of interpersonal trust in their principals.

This literature has implications for principals' leadership behaviour. It would imply that principals need to adopt behaviours that facilitate teacher empowerment effectively because teacher's psychological empowerment is an important mediating variable for some important teacher work related outcomes including the quality of teaching and teacher's wellbeing. If principals want their teachers to be autonomous professionals who are intrinsically motivated and satisfied and perform at their best at work, they need to understand and be able to facilitate teacher empowerment.

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ATTACHMENT 2

LIST OF CASE STUDY SCHOOLS

BALGA SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

BEELIAR PRIMARY SCHOOL

BROOME SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

CABLE BEACH PRIMARY SCHOOL

COOINDA PRIMARY SCHOOL

ROEBUCK PRIMARY SCHOOL

WILLETTON SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

WINTHROP PRIMARY SCHOOL