



# Putting the Public First?

An examination of the implications  
of the 2009 EAC Report

## Part Two: Independent Public Schools

Dr Scott Fitzgerald  
Research Fellow

Professor Al Rainnie  
Chair, CGSB Research and Development

Curtin Graduate School of Business

July 2011

Report commissioned by UnionsWA

## Executive Summary

### Introduction

1. *Putting the Public First (PtPF)* is a radical but far from new prescription for restructuring the public sector in WA.
2. It is based on neo-liberal New Public Management philosophy which has been applied around the world.
3. The drive behind PtPF is primarily financial, aimed at cutting public sector spending, particularly wage costs.
4. There is disturbing evidence from the UK and other parts of Australia that the policy threatens standards of service delivery, as well as terms and conditions of employment of staff within the public education system.

### Independent Public Schools

5. Self-managed schools do not improve 'student learning outcomes'.
6. Financial inducements to move to self-managed status rapidly disappear, reinforcing existing inequality within and between schools.
7. The aim is to abolish the distinctiveness of public schools and align their methods, culture and ethical systems to that of the private sector.
8. School staff have increased workloads with principals increasingly required to be managers rather than educators.
9. The combined drivers of managerialism, marketisation and performance management have led to a decline in the proportion of women in senior management positions, including as principals.
10. Teachers experience corrosion in the culture and character of teaching.

### Conclusion

11. There is little evidence that the development of Independent Public Schools will benefit school students.
12. The process shifts risk and responsibility to individuals and the community, and reinforces inequality and social disadvantage.
13. Marketisation in the education sector increases hierarchies and gender inequalities in the workforce.

## Table of Abbreviations

ACTU	Australian Council of Trade Unions	NPM	New Public Management
BCG	Boston Consulting Group	NSW	New South Wales
CCIWA	Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Western Australia	OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
EAC	Economic Audit Committee	PtPF	'Putting the Public First' report
GFC	Global Financial Crisis	SES	Socioeconomic Status
IMF	International Monetary Fund	SOTF	'Schools of the Future' policy
IPS	Independent Public Schools	UK	United Kingdom
NAO	National Audit Office	WA	Western Australia
NGO	Non-Government Organisation		

## Putting the Public First?

### An examination of the implications of the 2009 EAC Report

*Since at least the late 1990s, a significant body of research has established that 'self-managing schools' do not improve the quality of educational practices across the public education system or improve 'student learning outcomes' for all students. Indeed, it has been noted that on the contrary, for vast numbers of students, especially those who are already disadvantaged, this reform is coming to be seen as being extremely damaging. This outcome is clear in cases such as the Victorian, English and American education systems where self-managing schools have been most fully developed.*

## Introduction

In September 2009 the West Australian government released a document called 'Putting the Public First' (*PtPF*) (EAC 2009). Written by the Economic Audit Committee, the document is subtitled 'Partnering with the Community and Business to Deliver Outcomes'. The report is concerned with the future of public services in Western Australia and claims that if the WA government acts on the report's 43 recommendations then 'in five to ten years the Western Australian public sector will, achieve outcomes for Western Australians, including the most disadvantaged, that are among the best in the nation and are continually improving' (EAC: ii). This is an admirable aim, but our concern is that the report is based on a set of assumptions and a form of analysis that make this highly desirable outcome extremely unlikely.

### New Public Management and public schools

In part one of this report, we examined the implications of *PtPF* for the restructuring of the public sector in Western Australia with specific reference to the outsourcing of human services to the voluntary sector. In this part of the report we examine the future of public schools within the general framework of New Public Management (NPM) expressed within the Economic Audit Committee's report. In chapter three of *PtPF*, *Designing Services to Meet Citizens' Needs*, Independent Public Schools (IPS) are, together with individualised disability services, designated as models of self-directed service design and delivery that can be adopted elsewhere. These schemes are argued to give communities more 'control over the range of services they access and the means by which they are delivered. Communities will be given greater opportunity to wield control over the management of public facilities' (EAC 2009:49). Given the importance the *PtPF* document gives to IPS as transferable models of good practice, it is important that we examine the move towards semi-autonomous schools from a wider historical and international perspective. This is particularly necessary as IPS have been established relatively recently in Western Australia.

### Loosen responsibility, tighten control

The IPS model is based on the basic premises of New Public Management which have been adopted by governments both within Australia and around the world. This has been happening for long enough for us to be able to examine the evidence of its impact. As we noted before, not only are the principles not new; it is our argument that the outcomes are not effective either. In reviewing the program below we note that the move to semi-autonomous schools, is a form of loose-tight control in which elements of decision making are devolved to school managers, teachers and families while auditing, assessment and financial accountability are centrally retained and indeed strengthened. While the interrelated processes of inter-school competition, performance benchmarking and managerialism in themselves produce pernicious effects, overall self-managing schools shift responsibility and risk to families and communities.

## Independent Public Schools in Western Australia

### An epidemic of reform

Education reform is spreading across the globe... like 'a policy epidemic'. An unstable, uneven but apparently unstoppable flood of closely inter-related reform ideas is permeating and reorienting education systems in diverse social and political locations which have very different histories. This epidemic is 'carried' by powerful agents, like the World Bank and the OECD; it appeals to politicians of diverse persuasions; and is becoming thoroughly embedded in the 'assumptive worlds' of many academic educators. ... The novelty of this epidemic of reform is that it does not simply change what people, as educators, scholars and researchers do, it changes who they are (Ball 2003:215).

IPS were an election promise by Opposition Leader Colin Barnett in 2008, and the establishment of the program was announced by the new Coalition government in August 2009. Rehearsing the long established rationale for 'self-managing schools', the program purportedly would bring schools closer to their communities; overcome the constraints of a 'one-size-fits-all' bureaucratic model; and ensure greater autonomy and flexibility for principals who are deemed to have a better understanding of the needs and cultures of their schools. Instead of being reviewed each year by a district superintendent, a School Board, comprising senior staff and elected parent representatives, will review performance according to a three year business plan comprising of 19 targets. IPS principals and School Boards will be given greater latitude to manage individual budgets, including the hiring and firing of staff; exclude disruptive children; and shape school curriculum. The Department of Education and Training will remain the overall employing authority and ensure compliance with state (and eventually nationally) endorsed curriculum and public sector standards (EAC 2009:34).

### Shifting risk onto parents and communities

Notwithstanding notions of direct community involvement, control over management is here chiefly understood as deriving from 'informed' parental choice of school within a more diversified field of education services – one both underpinned and driven by an expanding private sector. The language of community participation and choice as expressed in the policy framework of IPS is superficially attractive; however, it needs to be emphasised that the IPS programme is shaped by the broad framework of Neoliberalism, New Public Management and the shift of risk to individuals, families and communities associated with processes of financialisation (See Appendix I).

The policy of devolved, 'self-managing schools' had been the central element of education policy under Barnett as Education Minister in the previous Coalition government. As Minister, Barnett had argued that devolution would increase competition and variety in WA schools. Maintaining all schools as equal was undesirable, he argued: 'All that breeds is mediocrity, so we are allowing schools to excel... We recognise some schools will struggle to keep up and they will get extra support' (Flint 1998: 5). The then Director General of Education had supported the push to devolve elements of decision-making to the school level, arguing that 'Devolution is more than a national direction, it is a global direction. It is a movement which is now non-negotiable' (Asworth 1998:1).

### Paying the price of reform

This movement has a long history of bipartisan support in Western Australia, beginning in earnest in the late 1980s with the Burke Government's *Better Schools* (1987) initiative. Attempts by Barnett to introduce 'self-managing schools' in the final year of the Court Government had in part failed because teachers and principals had been overwhelmed by a rapid increase in a decade long process of increasing managerial responsibility and performance accountability. This time greater financial inducements were offered via a \$19 million increase in education funding over four years; rather than targeting these funds at the most disadvantaged schools, IPS receive between \$20,000 and \$40,000 for set-up costs and an increase of between \$25,000 and \$50,000 in recurring funding. The initial call for IPS applications occurred in September 2009. Out of 778 public schools, 108 applied and 34 were selected. A second intake occurred in July 2010; 134 schools applied and 64 schools were selected. In a third intake, which closed in May 2011, a further 195 schools applied. The IPS program will not undergo any independent review process until 2013; nonetheless the Education Minister noted that she hoped to see it extend to all public schools. Clearly, as Raewyn Connell, University Professor at University of Sydney, notes 'Privatization in education has not flowed from a public policy debate that the privatizers won' (2006:144).

### Change by stealth

Undoubtedly the transformation has been unstable and uneven and there has been resistance to the process by teachers, parent associations and the education bureaucracy itself; yet the history of education changes is clearly marked by what could be described as the establishment of cultural hegemony via a long march through the education institutions and the wider public service. The privatisation of public education has occurred, according to John Smyth, Professor of Education at Ballarat University, 'via incremental stealth... [and] a gradual advancement on several inter-related fronts, [which] has transcended the boundaries of political parties regardless of which of them has been in power. The trend has been most pronounced during periods of neo-liberal or conservative governments' (2008).

Earlier government reports such as the *Burke White Paper* (1986) and the *Agenda for Reform* (McCarrey 1993), which aimed at producing greater efficiency in the Western Australian public service, also invoked the field of education reform as a key area of change. Indeed, at a state, national and international level, education policy has increasingly been subsumed within overall strategies of public services reform. Stephen Ball, Professor in the Institute of Education at the University of London, notes that what this has meant is that many of the specific initiatives in the organisation and delivery of education have more or less direct parallels in other parts of the public sector (Ball 2008a). The same solutions to the 'problems' identified by NPM have increasingly been adopted within education policy, as evident in Western Australia since the *Better Schools* initiative.

## Cost Cutting in NSW Education

In March 2011 a confidential report, *Expenditure Review of the Department of Education and Training (DET) -Initial Scan*, commissioned in January 2010 by the Labor NSW government from the Boston Consulting Group (BCG), became public. The BCG report suggested that to reduce costs the state should follow the model developed by the Victorian government in the 1990s: the NSW government should close over 100 schools, sell surplus land, reduce teaching numbers by 7500, increase class sizes and drastically cut costs of programs for disadvantaged students. These and other steps could generate \$850 million for the state. The report also contained advice about how these measures could be sold to the public.

When the report came to light the NSW Education Minister denied that any schools would be closed as a result of the BCG report; nonetheless, as per the BCG recommendations the Education Department had already instigated a trial of devolving decision making power to 47 school principals. The principals involved in the trial were told it was an opportunity for greater autonomy and flexibility but were not told the move was designed to save between \$15 million to \$25 million according BCG estimates. Between 150 and 250 full time positions across the Education Department could be eliminated through the move to a devolved model (BCG 2010: 37). The President of the NSW Secondary Principals Association noted that ‘There was no mention of any cutbacks in the resources available. It was never put to us as a cost savings measure’. Another principal, who did not participate in the trial, said ‘The notion of devolving responsibility to principals is a deceit because in reality it is about making principals do much more with much less’ (Patty 2011).

## Issues arising in self-managed schools

### Disappearing financial inducements

According to this policy framework, as with many state-funded services, public sector schools are burdened with bureaucracy and should become more like private schools where principals, and school communities, have the *right to manage* their schools in a manner that increases educational performance and overall productivity. As with other similar processes of school devolution, the IPS will enable government to abdicate responsibility for centrally determined educational outcomes in the context of stagnant and declining resources. Experience has shown that initial financial inducements for schools to move towards self-management rapidly disappear as schools have to find more of their resources from other sources, including school fees, reinforcing existing inequity within and between schools.

A central outcome of this shift is the transformation in the manner in which teachers, parents and principals perceive their scope for action. Driven by the three interwoven elements of market power, managerialism and performance assessment, these processes of change have worked to reduce the distinctiveness of public sector schools and align their ‘methods, culture and ethical system’ to that of the private sector (Ball 2003:216) – a process of institutional isomorphism<sup>1\*</sup>. The conception of the role of parents, teachers and principals within the public education system has continued to transform in a context in which, as noted, private education has dramatically expanded through Federal Government funding. Furthermore, education, as the purveyor of ‘human capital’, is viewed as an essential mechanism for offsetting individualised risk. This transformation has been supported by what Bell and Smyth refer to as a ‘discourse of derision’, one which emphasises declining traditional values, educational standards and discipline and has fuelled parental fears about a ‘crisis’ in public education.

### Closing ‘unviable’ schools

The language of community obscures the model of possessive individualism which is being promoted through these changes. Yet while parents are asked to make ‘strategic choices’ about their children’s schooling needs, since the mid-1990s the closure or amalgamation of ‘economically unviable’ schools – notwithstanding their close community ties - has altered the public sector ‘educational market place’ in WA (a policy still championed by the Western Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry [CCIWA]).

When announcing the fight against ‘mediocrity’ in Public Schools, Colin Barnett noted that the Government would ‘not be requiring [principals] to become businessmen as such, but we are saying that schools should be more accountable’ (Flint 1998:5). This (gendered) conception of leadership is at odds with the rhetoric of enlightened educational leadership facilitated through closer community connections; yet in practice the push towards self-managing schools in Australia has intensified principals’ workloads, which are now predominately managerial in nature, while maintaining a sharp cleavage between the conception and execution of leadership in a system of ‘controlled de-control’ marked by externally imposed financial constraints, performance benchmarks and legislative frameworks.

<sup>1\*</sup> See Part I of this report *Outsourcing Human Services* page 7: institutional isomorphism is the ‘growing pressure from funding bodies for organisations to adopt structures, working practices and rules that not only mean the community organisations increasingly resemble each other but also that they increasingly come to resemble private sector organisational structures, threatening the very uniqueness that the community sector is supposed to represent’.

## Increasing hierarchy brings divided schools

An increasing hierarchy within schools distances teachers from principals who are now asked, for example, to make hard decisions about whether to cut teaching positions to fund educational programmes. Indeed, in Western Australia in the 1990s a clear distance emerged between teacher unions and principal associations over the pace and direction of school 'reform'. Such tensions will only rise as a tight labour market, associated with a projected shortfall of 3000 teachers in the state within five years, coincides with the push for salary increases.

As the work of the principals has become more difficult and less attractive, turnover rates amongst principals in Australia have risen markedly (Beder 2009; Education Workforces Initiatives Taskforce 2007). Marie Brennan, Professor of Education at the University of South Australia argues that an initial trend towards a higher proportion of women in senior positions within self-managing schools has reversed with fewer women willing to take up principalships; this reflects, moreover, an overall decline in the proportion of senior women in the education sector as a whole (Brennan 2009)

## Education support staff under pressure

While the reconfiguration of what 'counts' for the public education workforce has transformed and reduced the professional autonomy of principals and teachers (Fitzgerald & Gunter 2011), other members of school workforces, such as education assistants, registrars, business managers, school cleaners and gardeners, face more difficult and less attractive work too. Predominantly women, school registrars and business managers have been poorly paid and have been provided with inadequate access to training and career path options (Milligan 1994). Although there may be limited community recognition of their connection to the processes of teaching and learning, the further devolvement of managerial and administrative responsibilities, together with increased community 'impression management', will significantly increase their already heavy workloads. Unless government funding is increased, the ability to appoint additional appropriately qualified and paid school support officers will vary considerably between schools, and will play into considerations about the employment status of other staff such as cleaners and gardeners.

## Cost-cutting and contracting out

At a national and international level, the push towards self-managing schools has had a significant impact on this latter category of 'day labour'. Given the increased budgetary discretion and greater financial and performance accountability, cost cutting and contracting out in the areas of grounds maintenance, cleaning and caretaking became the norm (Wilkins 2002). In England in the 1980s, the extensive contracting out of school cleaning and other services led to the severe deterioration of pay and conditions for thousands of low-paid, mainly women workers (Hill 2006). In Victoria in the 1990s, the government reduced wage expenditure by \$40 million through contracting out the jobs of some 3760 cleaners; the limited conditions of cleaning contracts impelled students, parents and teachers to undertake additional cleaning and maintenance duties (Gibson 1993).

Although not associated with self-managing schools, in Western Australia similar concerns about the resourcing and quality of outsourced cleaning services in public schools were raised in the 1990s by principals, parent associations and unions (Reardon 1997). Introduced under the Court government, the outsourced cleaning policy continued under the Gallop government until 2005. Although the Barnett government ordered a review of this policy position in 2009 in an effort to find 'potential efficiencies' (Macdonald 2009), at present Independent Public Schools are required to use government-employed cleaners and gardeners unless such day labour is unavailable (a particular issue for remote and regional schools).

Given the governance of IPS, the contracting of these services can be expected to increase if and when 'choice' of service provision is extended to individual schools. As well as the 'effectiveness' of the support services, the issue of the pay and conditions of support staff needs to be foregrounded. Although the industrial awards and individual EBAs remain in effect, the devolvement of human resource management and employment matters to a school level will potentially lead to more instances of breaches of the industrial instruments. In this regard, registrars and business managers have been given limited support mechanisms to access advice from central office regarding contracts and employment levels.

## Struggling for the soul of the teacher

Research has shown that the shift to self-managing schools has had pernicious effects with regards to teachers' work and identity (Considine 2005; Brennan 2009; Smyth 2003, 2008). While self-managing schools may permit some teachers to be more innovative, in most cases the raised expectations, absence of additional professional development and increased administrative workloads have only resulted in increased levels of stress and demoralisation. The consequences for teachers' work were particularly strong in the area of assessment, which has become both standardised and intensified.

Smyth (2003) speaks of the three ways in which teachers' ways of working are being damaged:

1. The **corrosion** of the culture and character of teaching, with the shift to individual responsibility for delivering outcomes;

2. The **intensification** in leadership and management shifts support away from the work of teaching, to the pursuit of corporate goals;
3. The school is being **reconstituted** in ways that re-institute hierarchies; diminish co-operation; foster competitive individualism between schools and in the end divert schools away from their educative agenda by requiring them to be entrepreneurial and more business-like.

These developments align with what Bell (2003, 2008a) refers to as 'struggling for the soul of the teacher'. The reform of teachers' work has the following broad features that can be grouped according to the overlapping **policy technologies** of **marketisation, managerialism** and **performance management**:

### Marketisation

- Devolution has involved the systematic removal of central structures and processes that supported teachers' work;
- An unhealthy degree of internal competition has been encouraged within and between public schools;
- Teachers expend increasing time and energies on image and impression management as per the competitive relations between self-managing schools;
- Teachers are impelled to force relationships with parents, and the wider community, in the direction of so-called 'partnerships'.

### Managerialism

- Professional autonomy and scope for democratic decision making in schools has been stripped away by external and hierarchical emphasis on managing teachers;
- Invoking and celebrating the alleged superiority of the language, practises and ideologies of the corporate sector;
- Promoting versions of leadership in schools that intensify the workload of principals, taking them away from educational issues, and separating them from teachers through intensifying and deepening the nature of hierarchy.

### Performance management

- Under the guise of accountability requirements, teachers are treated in increasingly disrespectful, distrustful and suspicious ways;
- Recentralisation of control over teachers through curriculum policy frameworks that are held in place by testing regimes, performance pay and league tables; assessment replaces learning in government schools; incessant assessment and measurement tied into turning schools into quasi-markets;
- Attempts to standardise, benchmark and homogenise teaching to a one-size fits all model;
- The tyranny of transparency is associated with the leaching away of trust (Smyth 2003).

As Brennan (2009) notes, the reduction of professional autonomy for teachers, the single largest professional group in Australia, has coincided with a slow but increasing feminisation of the teaching force within Australia, a pattern that is reflected internationally. Seventy-nine per cent of Australian primary teachers are women, as are fifty five per cent of secondary teachers. There are important parallels in how marketisation in the community sector and the primary and secondary education sector rely upon and reinforce gender inequalities within the workplace.

## Lessons from Australia and around the world

The decentralisation of school management has been an international trend from the 1980s onwards and a consistent rationale is that of improving the educational experience of students for the benefit of themselves, the community and the economy. However, since at least the late 1990s, a significant body of research has established that 'self-managing schools' do not improve the quality of educational practices across the public education system or improve 'student learning outcomes' for all students. Indeed, John Smyth notes that on the contrary, for vast numbers of students, especially those who are already disadvantaged, this reform is coming to be seen as being extremely damaging. This outcome is clear in cases such as the Victorian, English and American education systems where self-managing schools have been most fully developed.

### Schools of the Future in Victoria

In Australia, the move to largely devolve funding and other management decisions, including hiring and firing teachers, to school principals has already occurred in Victoria during the 1990s. As with the Western Australian reforms, the Victorian initiative professed to devolve school management to a 'partnership' between school principals and local communities and make communities the guarantors of quality education. Victoria provides a good example of the transformation of policy debate about **too much** or **too little** government from one guided by social democratic critiques of bureaucracy to one guided by the belief in the efficiency of market based competition and the empowered consumer. Throughout the 1980s,

first Liberal and then Labor Victorian State governments supported both devolvement of curriculum design and control over finances and appointment, promotion and transfer of teachers via self-governing state schools (as expressed in *White Paper on the Strategies and Structures for Education in Victoria* (1980) and the *Taking Schools into the 1990s* discussion paper (1986). During this period school zoning regulations were relaxed to give parents greater choice of schools.

The Kennett Liberal Government, guided by the slogans of efficiency, accountability, responsibility and authority, accelerated these processes through the *Schools of the Future* (SOTF) policy (1993). Blackmore *et al.* (1996: 195) argue that these slogans were tied to the rationale 'that in a time of declining resources, self-managing schools that are more consumer-oriented will produce more effective and efficient educational services'. The primary initiatives of the SOTF and related policies included:

- Fostering competition between state schools for resources and students;
- Devolving greater administrative duties, including budgetary, staffing and resourcing responsibilities to principals;
- Enabling principals and school councils, via individual 'School Charters', to determine school priorities, policy and curriculum within the framework of centrally determined policy guidelines;
- Reducing central and regional support services;
- Establishing new performance requirements for teachers and schools, including 'client satisfaction' surveys; and
- Reorganising curriculum into Key Learning Areas and an outcomes-based approach.

Between 1992 and 1999 the Victorian state devolved 93 per cent of the state government's public education budget to individual schools. In what ranks as one of the largest processes of educational restructuring, the Kennett Government amalgamated or closed over 600 schools, designated four and a half thousand teachers in 'excess of need' and privatised school cleaning. At the same time that the Victorian teacher workforce was downsized, it was also restructured via a new industrial relations system, new performance requirements and new teacher career paths (the Professional Recognition Program). In all over eight thousand teachers (20 per cent of the teaching force) accepted voluntary redundancy packages.

While SOTF's emphasis on self-management was couched in terms of 'empowerment' of the school community, the consequences of this drive for efficiency in the education system have been unequal for communities and public school students. Stephen Lamb, Associate Professor at the University of Melbourne, observes that one of the main effects of decentralisation and marketisation of schooling in Victoria has been the accelerated growth of middle and high socioeconomic status (SES) government schools which rapidly expanded in student numbers once school zones were deregulated. At the same time schools serving low SES areas became 'residual institutions' and have 'tended to wither and decay, shedding numbers at a vast rate' (Lamb 2007:2).

### Academy Schools: The UK Experience

In the United Kingdom, although the move towards self-managing schools was supported by both sides of politics since the late 1970s, the fully formed policy ensemble of the marketised, managerial school first emerged under the Thatcher Government's *Education Reform Act* of 1988. This reform picked up earlier critiques of the standards of public education and teacher control of curriculum to justify reduced funding and increased individual choice and competition in the public sector. The central elements of the *Reform Act* are easily recognisable within Western Australian education policy, including the Labor Government's *Better Schools* (1987) and particularly the Coalition Government's *Devolution: the next phase* (1993) initiatives. Relatively little of the Conservative policy was dispensed with by the New Labour government in the United Kingdom. While it increased public funding, it continued the focus on financial accountability and teacher performance. Moreover as part of public sector 'modernisation', New Labour backed the formation of new types of schools that would increase diversity and private participation in the provision of public education.

### For just a little money, sponsors call the shots

Academy Schools, established by the Blair government in 2000, are a prime example of this latter policy focus. In total £5 billion was set aside for the program's establishment. These self-governing public schools are independent of the standard Local Authority Control; yet they must meet National Curriculum guidelines with regards to core subjects and retain recurring funding from the UK Department of Education. Under the scheme private sponsors (individuals, businesses or churches) contribute a relatively small sum (£2 million out of total establishment costs of around £25 million) to own and run the Academies. While the Department of Education provides more funds for the establishment of an Academy than a state school, it has recently become flexible about the percentage of private investment as a way to encourage charities and existing schools to become sponsors. In return for their contribution, sponsors receive title to the school buildings and land; are able to influence school curriculum; and are able to appoint the principal and the majority of the school's governing board. Academies have greater freedom than normal to employ staff and set teacher pay and conditions. Today there are 629 Academy Schools, equivalent to approximately 1 in 6 public schools. The dramatic growth in this type of school occurred after the introduction of the new Conservative Government's *Academies Act of 2010* which aims to make it possible for all publicly-funded schools in England to become Academies (Shephard 2011). Despite their rapid growth opposition to Academies remains strong amongst parents, teachers, unions and MPs.<sup>2</sup>

2 See for example the coalition of groups organised through the <http://www.antiacademies.org.uk> website.

## Cherry picking the high performers

Although Academies were set up to cater to poor students in struggling inner-city schools, Beder (2009) notes that there is evidence that they are cherry-picking high performing students from more affluent middle class families as a means to boost the school's academic rating. One former Labour leader argued that despite the emphasis on parental choice, what had emerged was a 'seller's market'; the Academies represented a 'distortion of choice' because they permitted schools to select 'parents and children instead of parents selecting schools' (*Kinnock criticises city academies* 2006). A 2006 study by an educational researcher at the University of Edinburgh found that less able students had been encouraged to undertake vocational subjects to boost academic averages and poorly performing students were persuaded or forced to leave Academies. In 2005 the House of Commons Education & Skills Select Committee had expressed a similar concern that the encouraging results achieved by some Academies may be due to increased exclusions of harder-to-teach pupils. Government figures showed that Academies were expelling students at four times the rate of neighbouring state comprehensive schools. Despite these strategies, according to the 2006 Edinburgh University study the overall grades of students who remained within Academies improved by only 0.2 per cent.

## Widening the gap between schools

A recent assessment of Academies by the UK's National Audit Office (NAO) (2010) provides a more mixed assessment. Its figures on levels of student disadvantage between Academies and neighbouring comprehensive schools appears to qualify earlier concerns about Academies selective enrolment of children from better-off homes. Nonetheless the report does not consider other criteria for student selection. Such criteria have, according to Ball, clearly identifiable consequence in

the creation of local 'economies of student worth' within which schools compete to recruit 'value-adding' students, those most likely to contribute to measurable 'improvements' and 'performance outputs', and those easiest and cheapest to teach, and whose presence attracts others like them. Concomitantly, those students who add 'negative-value', those with Special Needs, those for whom English is a second language, or those with social or emotional difficulties are avoided where possible in this economy (Ball 2008b).

These 'economies' appear to effect the running of Academies. The NAO report notes that the gap between the performance of disadvantaged students and less disadvantaged students has risen within Academies and there continues to be higher levels of student exclusion and a greater focus on vocational subjects which improve overall performance figures. Notwithstanding the equivocal evidence of improvements brought about by Academies, in June 2010 the Conservative Government announced the establishment of Free Schools. These schools, the first of which will open in September 2011, are similar to Academies but do not require capital investment from a sponsor and have increased managerial discretion, including the ability to employ teachers who do not have Qualified Teacher Status.

## Charter Schools: The US Experience

The UK government explicitly compares the Free Schools initiative to the Charter Schools programme in the United States. As with Academies and Free Schools, Charter Schools receive public funding but are bound by an individual school charter and not by the government regulations that apply to normal state schools. As with Academies, they originally expanded in poor inner city areas of the United States with higher levels of disadvantaged students. Since their establishment in 1992 Charter Schools have developed rapidly across the country with the assistance of supporting legislation within various states. At a national level the Bush Administration's *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001 can require 'failing' state schools to be transformed into Charter Schools. In 2009 there were more than 4700 Charter Schools enrolling over 1.4 million children across the United States. As in the UK, support for these self-managing schools has transcended political lines: Barack Obama recently proclaimed National Charter School Week (May 1 - 7, 2011)

## Cutting costs on the backs of teachers, students, and the curriculum

While Charter Schools are not allowed to charge tuition and are themselves not-for-profit, private Education Management Organisations have joined universities and non-profit groups in their administration. This has been associated with a drive to reduce running costs by hiring less experienced teachers; paying teachers and administrative staff less; increasing class sizes; avoiding high-cost special education students; and standardising curriculum (Beder 2009: 162). This latter practise by commercial operators fits with the 'back to basics' approach, which together with increased discipline, is argued to produce better results amongst Charter School students. Connected to a discourse of derision about traditional schools, this focus on discipline at Charter Schools is associated with longer school days for students, constant assessment and performance pay for teachers and principals.

## No 'plan B' for continuing underperformance

A major issue with the Charter School Movement is that educational outcomes within these schools have been highly uneven. The performance of Charter Schools within 15 states and the District of Columbia was recently assessed by researchers at the Center for Research on Education Outcome at Stanford University (2009). They found that

a decent fraction of charter schools, 17 per cent, provide superior education opportunities for their students. Nearly half of the charter schools nationwide have results that are no different from the local public school options and over a third, 37 per cent, deliver learning results that are significantly worse than their students would have realized had they remained in traditional public schools (2009: 1).

Despite noting significant state-by-state differences in charter school performance, itself a matter of concern, national aggregate performance of Charter Schools showed a decline in comparative outcomes:

Charter School students on average see a decrease in their academic growth in reading of .01 standard deviations compared to their traditional school peers. In math, their learning lags by .03 standard deviations on average. While the magnitude of these effects is small, they are both statistically significant (2009: 6).

The findings of the Stanford University report are in line with results of five independent and government reports completed between 2003 and 2007. The Stanford report noted that there are clear differences between individual students' outcomes in Charter Schools; schools established and dedicated to improving the education of socio-economically disadvantaged students have produced better results than their traditional counterparts; though clearly this has not been the common experience with regards to Charter Schools. The report notes that whereas failing state schools face closure and conversion into Charter Schools, there has been no corresponding measure to control 'underperforming' charter schools.

## Conclusion: Turning schools into business is not a 'reform' we should follow

The EAC's *Putting the Public First* argues that Independent Public Schools are models of practice that offer choice and in so doing give communities greater control over the management of public facilities. A virtuous circle of participation, inclusion and identification between school and community is purportedly created. In reviewing the experience of the push towards self-managing schools within Australia and internationally we argue that what in fact occurs through such policies is a shift of risk to families and an abrogation of responsibility on behalf of government to operate and fund an inclusive and equitable public education system. In a summary of process and outcomes, Connell argues that decentralisation has come to mean:

Turning schools into little businesses, that is firms that compete with each other for pupils, resources, and academic results within a centrally fixed curriculum. [A] considerable body of evidence... shows this trend produces a less inclusive education system, that it increases educational advantages of socially privileged groups. Neoliberal governments either don't care about the effect, or actually want it to happen, since it benefits their supporters (in the short term) (Connell 2007: x).

This is not a model that should be extended to other areas of public services delivery. The introduction of IPS extends elements of NPM that are already entrenched within the public education system. As we noted in the previous report, 'market competition', 'managerialism', and 'performance management' are leading to **Mission Drift** and **Role Distortion** within the education system. The new dominant rationalities have not proven to be beneficial to all students and are proving harmful to teachers and, in many cases, to managers. If extended through a role out of Independent Public Schools, this approach threatens to lower the quality of the education system that is available to *all* of the Western Australian public. As national and international experience indicates, the push for schools to become more business-like is often a strategic step in opening up these areas for more thorough-going privatisation and commercial intervention.

## Appendix I

### Financialisation and New Public Management

Putting the Public First (PtPF) is a classic statement of neo-liberal free market orthodoxy in general, and its prescription for restructuring the public sector – known as New Public Management (NPM) – in particular. Although the GFC undermined the free market orthodoxy that dominated the end of the 20th century, it never went away, merely reinventing itself.

The NPM is a global phenomenon being forced on, or adopted by, governments, willing or not, all over the world by organisations such as the IMF, World Bank and the OECD. All argued that there was no alternative to public sector reform. Seeking private sector solutions to what were seen to be public sector problems, the prescription demanded that the public sector 'steer rather than row', meaning seek alternatives to direct public provision of services. This was to be accompanied by privatisation, marketisation, decentralisation, attacking what were taken to be highly centralised bureaucratic public sector organisations (Rainnie & Fairbrother 2006). Privatisation and decentralisation allowed all political risk of failure of service provision to be passed down to a growing number of organisations, now disciplined by markets or quasi markets.

### NPM becomes Neoliberalism

Over two decades the dominant policy discourse guiding this process of decentralisation and devolution shifted from social democracy, corporate managerialism, to market-driven Neoliberalism; policies originally guided by social democratic critiques of bureaucracy have been appropriated by advocates of new public management, market based competition and consumer choice at the expense of equity and an ethos of public service professionalism.

Although the mythology often suggested that agile, flexible small firms would replace public bureaucracies, the reality was that it was often giant private sector firms or national not-for-profit organisations that replaced local public service provision.

### The financial sector wins again!

Underlying all this, and culminating in the GFC, was the greater financialisation of the economy and society. Here we take financialisation to mean the greater autonomy of the financial sector, the proliferation of financial institutions and instruments and the integration of a broad range of economic actors in financial markets (Callinicos 2010).

In a major work examining the global auction of public assets, Dexter Whitfield, Director of the European Services Strategy Unit has argued that:

Financialisation, commodification and marketisation are creating a global wealth machine to further exploit public needs and resources. Transnational construction, energy and service companies, banks, management consultants and law firms, aided and abetted by governments are turning schools, hospitals, prisons and roads into commodities which are bought and sold globally. (Whitfield 2010: 14-15)

### Households become the shock absorbers for policy risk

What is emerging is a new sector, the privately provided public service sector. Furthermore, in a recent report for the ACTU, Rafferty and Yin (2010) pointed out that in this more brutal, market oriented world, governments and corporations have increasingly loaded the responsibility for bearing financial risk onto employees and households. Increasingly households are bearing the costs and risks associated with pensions, accommodation, health, education transport, care etc. NPM is a central part of this drive.

The IMF has described households as the shock absorber of last resort, and risk is being transferred by both the state and corporations to households. This is why NPM seeks to redefine people from being citizens in democratic organisations, to individual consumers of goods and services.

## References

- Ashworth, K 1998, 'Parent Power: New Plan For Schools', *West Australian*, June 4 p. 1.
- Ball, SJ 2003, 'The teacher's soul and the terrors of performativity', *Journal of Education Policy*, vol. 18, no. 2, pp. 215-28.
- Ball, SJ 2008a, *The Education Debate*, Policy Press, Bristol.
- Ball, SJ 2008b 'The Legacy of ERA, Privatization and the Policy Ratchet', *Educational Management Administration Leadership* vol. 36 no. 2, pp. 185-19.
- Beder, S 2009 *This little kiddy went to market: the corporate capture of childhood*, University of New South Wales Press Sydney.
- Blackmore, J, Bigum, C, Hodgens, J & Laskey, L 1996 'Managed Change and Self-Management in Schools of the Future', *Leading and Managing*, vol. 2, no. 3, pp. 195-220
- Brennan, M 1993, 'Reinventing Square Wheels: Planning for Schools to Ignore Realities', in J Smyth (ed.), *A Socially Critical View of the Self-managing School*, Falmer Press, London.
- Brennan, M 2009, 'Steering teachers: Working to control the feminized profession of education', *Journal of Sociology*, vol. 45, no. 4, pp. 339-59.
- Callinicos, A 2010, *Bonfire of Illusions: The twin crises of the liberal world*, Polity, Cambridge.
- Chamber of Commerce and Industry Western Australia 2009, *Building a Better Tomorrow: Education Reform in WA*, Perth.
- Connell, R 2006, 'The New Right Triumphant: The Privatization Agenda and Public Education in Australia', *Our Schools, Our Selves*, vol. 15, no. 3, pp. 143-62.
- Connell, R 2007, 'Foreword', in Forsey M, *Challenging the System? A Dramatic Tale of Neoliberal Reform*, Information Age, Charlotte, NC.
- Considine, G 2005, "...it's more than just teaching: the changing nature of teachers' work", in *23rd International Labour Process Conference, March 21st-23rd* Glasgow.
- Economic Audit Committee 2009, *Putting People First: Partnering with the Community and Business to Deliver Outcomes*, Government of Western Australia, Perth.
- Education Workforces Initiatives Taskforce 2007, *Education Workforce Initiatives Report: 'If you think education is expensive...'*, Western Australia.
- Fairbrother, P & Rainnie, A (eds.) 2006, *Globalisation State and Labour*, Routledge, London.
- Fitzgerald, T. & Gunter, H. 2011, "Dancing to a new tune? Centralisation and decentralisation in educational administration", *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, vol. 43, no. 2, pp. 89-93.
- Flint, J 1998, 'Plan 'will Split Schools'', *West Australian*, June 8 p. 5.
- Gibson, S 1993, 'Budget Cuts Force Parents to Clean Schools', *Sunday Age*, May 23 p.12
- Hill, D 2006, 'Education Services Liberalisation', in E Roskam (ed), *Winners or Losers? Liberalising Public Services*, ILO, Geneva, pp. 3-54.
- 'Kinnock criticises city academies' 2006, *BBC World News*, viewed 1 May, 2011, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/politics/4917808.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/4917808.stm)
- Lamb, S 2007, 'School Reform and Inequality in Urban Australia: A Case of Residualising the Poor', in R Teese, S Lamb & M Duru-Bellat (eds), *International Studies in Educational Inequality, Theory and Policy*, vol. 3, Springer, Netherlands, pp. 1-38.
- Macdonald, K 2009 'Cleaners warn of action on jobs', *West Australian*, September 11, p. 6.
- Milligan, S 1994, *Women in the Teaching Profession*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra.
- Patty, A 2011, 'Secret Cuts to Schools' *Sydney Morning Herald*, March 19 viewed 1 May, 2011, [www.smh.com.au/national/.../secret-cuts-to-schools-20110318-1c0m9.html](http://www.smh.com.au/national/.../secret-cuts-to-schools-20110318-1c0m9.html)
- Rafferty, M & Yu, S 2010, *Shifting Risk - Work and working life in Australia: A report for the Australian Council of Trade Unions*, Workplace Research Centre, University of Sydney.
- Rainnie, A & Fairbrother, P 2006, 'The state we are in (and against)', in P Fairbrother & A Rainnie (eds), *Globalisation, State and Labour*, Routledge, London.
- Reardon, D 1997, 'Cleaning Push Attacked', *West Australian*, February 24, p.6
- Shepherd, J 2011, 'Three Times as Many Academy Schools' *Guardian*, April 7, viewed 1 May, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2011/apr/07/academy-schools-treble>
- Smyth, J (ed.) 1993, *A Socially Critical View of the Self Managing School* Falmer Press, London.
- Smyth, J 2001, 'The Self-managing School and Social Justice: Are They on the Same Planet?' *The School Field: International Journal of Theory and Research in Education*, vol. 12, no. 1-2, pp. 61-72.
- Smyth, J 2003, 'Undamaging 'damaged' teachers: an antidote to the 'Self-Managing School'', *Delta: Policy and Practice in Education* vol. 55 no. 1&2, pp. 3-30.
- Smyth, J 2008 'Australia's great disengagement with public education and social justice in educational leadership', *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, vol. 30 no. 4, pp. 221 - 33
- Whitfield, D 2010, *Global Auction of Public Assets*, Spokesman, Nottingham
- Wilkins, R 2002, 'Linking Resources to Learning: Conceptual and Practical Problems', *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, vol. 30, no. 3, pp. 313-326.