



# DEVOLUTION AND EDUCATION

**A RESEARCH REPORT PREPARED BY THE**

Australian Education Union

120 Clarendon Street

Southbank 3006

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## INTRODUCTION

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Devolution in the context of education goes under many names. They include:

- School/Site-based decision making/Management
- School/Site-based autonomy
- Self-Managing Schools
- Autonomy for local schools
- Decentralised/Site-based management

Essentially it concerns the distribution of power and funding between governments and schools and structural changes in the governance, management and financing of schools.

Internationally there are significant differences in how it operates but there is general consensus amongst advocates of such initiatives that they will improve school effectiveness and student learning outcomes by producing better educational decision-making; improving school management and leadership; improving quality of teaching; leading to a more responsive curriculum; and producing more efficient use of resources.

## A BRIEF HISTORICAL NOTE

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*“Forces which have shaped current and emerging patterns of school management include a concern for efficiency in the management of public education, effects of the recession and financial crisis, complexity in the provision of education, empowerment of teachers and parents, the need for flexibility and responsiveness, the search for school effectiveness and school improvement, interest in choice and market forces in schooling, the politics of education, the establishment of new frameworks for industrial relations and the emergence of a national imperative.”*

Brian Caldwell, *Decentralising the Management of Australian Schools: a discussion paper*, Melbourne: National Industry Education Foundation 1993 p xiii.

Prior to the enthusiasm shown by governments over the last several years, devolution in education, by whatever name, is not new. A/Professor Tony Townsend from Monash University gave a keynote address to the ASPA 1999 Annual Conference concerning self-managing schools, a phenomenon, which he said *“is currently sweeping developed and developing countries around the world and seems to be an unstoppable event”*.

Tony Townsend, *Leadership in a time of rapid change*, Keynote Address, Australian Secondary Principals Association Annual Conference 1999.

[http://www.aspa.asn.au/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=66%3A1999-aspa-conference&catid=20%3Aaspa-conferences&Itemid=43&limitstart=1](http://www.aspa.asn.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=66%3A1999-aspa-conference&catid=20%3Aaspa-conferences&Itemid=43&limitstart=1)

## INTERNATIONAL

Early examples of devolved schools in North America in the 1970s included Dade County in Florida and Edmonton School District in Canada.

By 1993 some form of devolution was operating in over 44 US states, ranging from local initiatives to state-wide decentralisation policies in states such as Kentucky and Texas. Perhaps the most extreme form of devolution in the US is the Charter School movement.

In the UK, local education authority (LEA) funded schools began operating as Locally Managed (LM) Schools, and Grant Maintained (GM) schools. While they remained centrally funded they 'opted out' of LEA control and a number of financial, administrative and staffing responsibilities were shifted to individual schools and their governing bodies.

Elsewhere in Europe, some form of devolution in education was a policy priority of many European governments.

In New Zealand, *Schools of Tomorrow*, which followed the Picot Report in the early nineties, emphasised the need for greater devolution and financial and management efficiency, saw local schools assume all operational functions under the governance of a Board of Trustees.

## AUSTRALIA

In Australia, government devolution policies included:

- *Better Schools*, Western Australia (1987)
- *Schools Renewal*, New South Wales (1989)
- *Schools of the Future*, Victoria (1993)
- *Directions for Education*, Tasmania (1996)
- *Leading Schools*, Queensland, (1997)

## THREE DECADES OF GOVERNMENT POLICY IN SEARCH OF A LEGITIMATING RESEARCH BASE

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Given the zeal with which it was advocated and the claims made for what it would achieve, it could be expected that there would be an extensive research-base demonstrating that the implementation of self managing schools/devolution would lead to improved student learning, achievement and outcomes.

Unfortunately for its advocates, there is no evidence that devolution in its myriad forms has in itself led to improved student achievement.

### **Bullock and Thomas (1994 and 1997) on devolution in the UK:**

*“What remains elusive...is clear-cut evidence of [local management] leading to direct benefits on learning, an essential component if we are to conclude that it is contributing to higher levels of efficiency.”*

Bullock, A and Thomas H, *Schools at the Centre: A Study of Decentralisation* London Routledge 1997, p217.

Bullock and Thomas also noted that the majority of head teachers making a positive assessment concerning learning improvements were in schools which had experienced an increase in funding as a result of greater local schools management.

Bullock, A and Thomas H, *The Impact of Local Management of Schools: Final Report*, University of Birmingham 1994, p137.

**Elmore (1993) on the introduction of school-based management in the United States:**

*“...there is little or no evidence that [site-based management] has any direct or predictable relationship in changes in instruction and students’ learning. In fact, the evidence suggests that the implementation of SBM reforms has a more or less random relationship to changes in curriculum, teaching, and students’ learning.”*

Elmore, R F, *Why Restructuring Alone Won’t Improve Teaching*, Educational Leadership, Vol 49 No 7, April 1992, pp44-48.

**Summers and Johnson (1996) meta-analysis of 70 studies on the impact of school-based management:**

*“...there is little evidence to support the notion that SBM is effective in increasing student performance. There are very few quantitative studies, the studies are not statistically rigorous and the evidence of positive results is either weak or non-existent.”*

Summers, A and Johnson A, *The effects of school-based management plans in* Hanushek, E and Jorgenson, D (eds) *Improving America’s Schools: The Role of Incentives*, Washington DC: National Academy Press, 1996, p80.

Further Reading: Summers and Johnson (1991), *A review of the Evidence on the Effects of School-Based Management Plans*, Panel on the Economics of Educational Reform and Teaching.

**Walker (2000) on decentralisation of decision making and implementing school-based management:**

*“...at the same time that more and more school districts, states and nations are adopting decentralisation policies in the hope of bringing about improvement in student achievement, the evidence is suggesting that school based management may be less powerful a source of school improvement than its advocates would believe. Indeed, the evidence suggests that the impact of school-based management is more apparent in the areas of governance and organisational structure than in changed classroom practices and improved student achievement. (Wohlstetter and Mohrman 1996; Summers and Johnson 1991)”*

Elaine M Walker, *Decentralisation and participatory decision-making: Implementing school-based management in the Abbott Districts*. Centre for Urban Leadership, Renewal and Research, Research Brief Vol1 No 1 December 2000.

**Stephen Ball (1993) describes processes of self-management as:** *“the self management of decline”*.

Culture Cost and Control: Self Management and Entrepreneurial Schooling in England and Wales in John Smyth, *A Socially Critical View of the Self-Managing School*, London, Falmer Press 1993.

Further Reading: Stephen Ball, *Education Markets, Choice and Social Class: the market as a class strategy in the UK and the USA*, British Journal of Sociology of Education Volume 14, Issue 1, 1993, pp3-19.

**Cathy Wylie (1997) on Tomorrow's Schools in New Zealand:**

*"The reforms have been less successful in improving educational opportunities for disadvantaged groups ... resource gaps remain evident, particularly for schools serving low income and/or Maori children."*

Wylie, Cathy, *Self Managing Schools Seven Years On: What Have We learnt?* Wellington, New Zealand, NZCER 1997.

**Leithwood and Menzies (1998) meta-analysis of 83 empirical studies of devolution and the effects of each variant on students and others involved in New Zealand, Canada, Britain, Spain and Wales:**

*"Both positive and negative effects on students, teachers, and people in other relevant roles are reported. The review finds little evidence of positive effects on students."*

Kenneth Leithwood and Teresa Menzies, *Forms and Effects of School-Based Management: A Review*,

Educational Policy Vol 12 No 3 May 1998 p325-346 Abstract:

<http://epx.sagepub.com/content/12/3/325.abstract> .

Further Reading: Kenneth Leithwood and Teresa Menzies, *A Review of Research Concerning the Implementation of Site-Based Management*, School Effectiveness and School Improvement Vol 9 Number 3 July 1997.

**Whitty, Power and Halpin, *Devolution and Choice in Education. The School, The State and The Market*** (ACER 1998) examines devolution and choice policies in education in England and Wales, the USA, Australia, New Zealand and Sweden and the actual impact of these policies on school managers, teachers, students and local communities, including equity issues in systems of education where increased responsibility is delegated to the level of the school.

They conclude that there is no strong evidence to support the educational benefits claimed by advocates for such policies but rather that:

*"...the devolution of decision-making to the school level has shown no necessary consequences for enhancing teacher autonomy and professionalism and appears to be making little difference to the outcome of student learning."* (p126)

*"Case studies celebrating the success of individual self-managing schools overlook the impact of their success on neighbouring schools...recent research suggests that the fragmentation of bureaucratic systems of education is leading to a polarisation of provision, with 'good' schools being rewarded and able to choose their students – usually those who are academically and socially advantaged – while 'failing' schools are thrown into a cycle of decline from which they, and their students – usually the least*

*socially advantaged – find it difficult to recover... choice is as likely to reinforce hierarchies as to improve educational opportunities and the overall quality of schooling. ...If equity is to remain an important consideration in education policy, new ways have to be found of avoiding the divisive effects of choice and devolution.” (p14)*

**Michael Apple reviewing *Devolution and Choice in Education: The School, the State and the Market in Educational Research*, August/September 1998:**

*“... not only does education become a marketable commodity like bread and cars in which the values, procedures and metaphors of business dominate, but its results must be reducible to standardized ‘performance indicators’ ...[and] the state shifts the blame for the very evident inequalities in access and outcome it has promised to reduce from itself onto individual schools, parents, and children.” (pp24-28)*

Further Readings: Liz Gordon and Geoff Whitty, *Giving the 'Hidden Hand' a Helping Hand? The rhetoric and reality of neoliberal education reform in England and New Zealand*, a critical investigation of school autonomy, diversity and choice, private sector involvement, privatization, and accountability mechanisms in England/Wales and New Zealand. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Chicago, IL, March 24-28, 1997).

John Smyth’s edited collection, *A Socially Critical View of the Self-Managing School* (1993) investigates contemporary moves internationally towards school self- management and their ideological underpinnings. It shows the perpetuation of hierarchies and inequality between schools which are not funded equally.

**In short:**

*“The implication of the international research is that the argument that school self-management, in itself, improves student outcomes relies at best upon opinions rather than hard evidence of causality, and that even opinions are split between the positive and the negative. On this evidence, the case for the positive effect of self-management in learning quality is nowhere near proven.”*

Tony Townsend, *From Second to Third Millennium Schools: The Impact of the Reform Agenda on School Development*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association. Montreal, Canada, 19-23 April 1999, p7.

**And from Brian Caldwell himself (1998), following a comprehensive international survey:**

*“There is no doubt that, while factors underpinning the movement to self-managing schools are many and varied, there has always been an expectation that they will make a contribution to improved outcomes for students. There is also no doubt that evidence of a direct cause-and-effect relationship between self-management and improved outcomes is minimal.”*

Brian Caldwell, *Self-Managing Schools and Improved Learning Outcomes*, DEETYA 1998, p38.

**In Australia, the impact of *Schools of the Future*, the model of devolution first introduced to Victoria by the Kennett Government in 1993 was described by teachers as follows:**

*“It created a two-tier system of government schools with the government abandoning its responsibility to ensure equality of opportunity for all students and shifting responsibility for schools to local school councils. Public polling showed majority opposition and it was viewed as a cost-cutting move with no educational rationale. School councils had to become employers taking on administrative, business and industrial responsibilities offloaded by the Education Department. They had to take on legal liability, deal with industrial disputes, workers compensation, salaries etc. This led to differential salaries for principals, removed award protection, security of employment and introduced minimum conditions significantly worse than those of departmental employees.”*

*“[It] allowed Government to shift blame and responsibility for juggling budgets to school councils who were encouraged to seek corporate sponsorship and put business people on council. It diverted school principals and senior teachers from educational leadership and teaching to administration, marketing, organizational development and funds management.”*

Australian Education Union (AEU) Victoria Branch <http://www.aeuvic.asn.au/>.

### **Residualisation in the Public School System in Victoria**

The impact of three decades of greater school autonomy through devolution of decision making and a focus on school-based management on government school enrolments and student achievement in Victoria has been analysed by prominent academic Stephen Lamb.

Lamb considers a large body of research on the relationship between market-driven reforms and achievement and concludes that:

*“the school reforms driving the growing diversity in schools over the last decade have intensified the gaps between schools serving the rich and those serving the poor, gaps marked by growing differences in school size, student intake, resources and achievement.”* (p29)

Lamb’s research clearly establishes that these reforms have led to residualisation in the public school system, with severe negative consequences for students in low SES areas.

*“The market-driven reforms during the 1990s giving schools greater flexibility and increased local control did help invigorate government schools in the wealthier areas. They were able to muscle-up against their robust competitive private sector counterparts and increase mean enrolments. But it has occurred at the expense of government schools in low SES areas which shed numbers at a growing rate. This divergent experience meant that by 2004, government schools were highly segregated not only on the basis of social area but also on the basis of schools size and resources.”* (pp17-18)

*“...the market-based school reforms of the last 20 years have not only led to much lower enrolments in schools serving the poor in Melbourne, draining them of their most academically able students, but through this process leaving them with much higher concentrations of the various groups of disadvantaged students that have the most*

*difficult and demanding learning needs and histories of high rates of low achievement and poor school outcomes.” (p24)*

Lamb’s overall conclusion is that contrary to claims that market-based policies such as devolution, choice and competition would not lead to residualisation across the board but would reinvigorate government schools in Victoria, the benefits to some schools serving middle-class communities have been at huge cost to schools in low SES areas. (p32)

*School Reform and Inequality in Urban Australia A Case of Residualising the Poor* in R. Teese, S. Lamb and M. Duru-Bellat (eds.), *International Studies in Inequality, Theory and Policy Volume 3: Inequality: Educational Theory and Public Policy*, 2007.

## RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN AUSTRALIA

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*“Empowering Local Schools to Give Principals Greater Autonomy: The Gillard Labor Government is committed to giving principals and parents a bigger say in how schools are run. Already, as Minister for Education, Julia Gillard has embarked on reforms to empower school principals that have gone further than anything done in the history of the Commonwealth.”*

*“Now the Government is going further, with the Empowering Local Schools reform [where] participating schools will have greater responsibility over school budgets, selecting and employing teachers and staff and identifying funding priorities. This will drive improvements in students’ achievements and enable schools to better meet the needs of students”*

*“A key element of this reform is empowering local school communities to make decisions about what is best ...rather than a centralised system run by State bureaucracies dictating matters like the mix of staffing and how resources are allocated between competing demands.”*

2010 Election Campaign: *School Reform Making Every School a Great School*  
[www.alp.org.au/getattachment/0d9e5f31-7597.../school-reform/](http://www.alp.org.au/getattachment/0d9e5f31-7597.../school-reform/).

*“I think schools run best when school principals have the power and responsibility to make the decisions that shape their schools for the future... [I]n some schools, Principals don’t get enough of a go to actually then say, well now I know more about what is happening in my school, I want to change this, I want to change that, I want to drive my school forward by making the following changes. If re-elected as Prime Minister, I want to make sure that power is in the hands of school Principals.”*

Julia Gillard, Address to McCarthy Catholic College Assembly, August 2 2010, Election Campaign 2010.



“... Now this is freeing school principals from bureaucracy and making them into CEOs and leaders of their school in a real sense.” Miss Gillard said... Principals will [be] given more autonomy, Labor promises.

Sydney Morning Herald, August 2, 2010

<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-election/society/principals-will-given-more-autonomy-labor-promise-20100802-112dm.html#ixzz1sGE7Iywz>.

## WESTERN AUSTRALIA

The *Independent Public Schools Program [IPS]* was introduced by the Barnett Government in 2009 to implement the proposals of its pre-election policy paper *Empowering Local Communities*.

When the IPS program was announced, school communities were given 19 days to consult and consider if they would put in an application, despite the requirement of ‘community consultation’ to ensure ‘broad community support’.

Despite real concerns about the impact on equity and access issues in the public education system, and potential industrial ramifications, there was no consultation with the union. The SSTUWA, through Unions WA, commissioned an independent study by the Curtin University Graduate School of Business into Independent Public Schools.

Echoing the research studies of the previous several decades, the study shows that the drive behind IPS is primarily financial and there is little evidence that it will benefit school students or of any discernible improvement in student learning outcomes. It also shows that:

- IPS threatens standards of service delivery as well as terms and conditions of employment of staff within the public education system.
- Financial inducements to move into the system disappear once established which reinforces existing inequalities between schools.
- School staff have increased workloads with principals increasingly required to be managers rather than educators.
- The IPS process shifts risk and responsibility away from education departments to individuals and school communities and reinforces inequality and social disadvantage.

Dr Scott Fitzgerald and Professor Al Rainnie, *Putting the Public First? An examination of the implications of the 2009 EAC Report Part 2 Independent Public Schools*, Curtin Graduate School of Business. July 2011.

Scott Fitzgerald, *Opinion Piece: Independent Public Schools*

[http://www.cpsuca.org/component/docman/doc\\_view/512-ips-opinion-piece-scott-fitzgerald](http://www.cpsuca.org/component/docman/doc_view/512-ips-opinion-piece-scott-fitzgerald).

The office of the Auditor General WA has also undertaken a performance audit of the impact of staffing processes and the devolved model of staff recruitment and selection associated with the IPS on schools, teachers, students, the education system and the community.

A key criticism was that the WA government had failed to implement strategies to address identified risks associated with IPS, including the danger that the IPS initiative had the potential to create a two-tiered education system where some schools are ‘uncompetitive’.

*“IPSs have a number of perceived advantages in the open market that could result in a concentration of particular types of teachers in those schools, while other schools find it difficult to attract diverse or high quality teachers. There is the concern that some schools attract and retain the ‘best’ teachers, and that these schools are often good candidates for IPS status.”*

*“A possible outcome in an open market is that IPSs are more effective in recruiting teachers with experience and specific skills. Other schools may be left with concentrations of inexperienced staff, or a reliance on fixed term staff that causes problems with teacher continuity.”*

Auditor General Western Australia, *Right Teacher, Right Place, Right Time: Teacher Placement in Public Schools*, August 2011.

These critiques have been reinforced by recent data on IPS which shows:

- the number of education assistants has decreased;
- the number of staff on fixed term contracts has increased;
- the number of permanent senior teachers and administrators has decreased; and
- evidence of ‘cherry picking’ of ‘high performing’ staff .

Linda Belardi, *Less permanency at autonomous schools*, Education Review March 2012, pp1-4.

The IPS critiques demonstrate that, as in the past, the reforms are driven by financial considerations rather than student-centred educational improvement. A recent research report on IPS states:

*“Few would dispute that the basis for these reforms has much more to do with cost-cutting than educational improvement, but the drift is crystal clear: the responsibility for educational performance is moving from government and will be firmly embedded in the schools but the accountability for **overall** financial control will remain in the grip of central control.”*

*“Make no mistake about it; the IPS program creates an enormous workload on school administrations. Already, some IPS schools are floundering trying to manage increased financial responsibilities; some new IPS schools have produced less than adequate NAPLAN results; with the new workloads dubious staffing practices are now operating in IPS schools where new teachers to IPS are experiencing the “one year contract” system under a new “we’ll see how the school goes” concept. On this business model the net dollar bottom line is much more important than NAPLAN and performance data. What as first looked like Greeks bearing gifts is over, but the ‘wooden horse’ is in.”*

Ann Dreyfus, *All’s NOT quiet on the Western front*, Education Review March 2012, pp28-29.

Further Reading: The SSTUWA website has a section devoted to the Independent Public Schools Program in WA which contains a wealth of information:  
<http://www.sstuwa.org.au/sstuwa/independent-public-schools> .

## NEW SOUTH WALES

The O’Farrell Government’s *Local Schools Local Decisions* school autonomy policy was announced in March 2012.

Under the familiar rhetoric of ‘putting principals and teachers back in the driving seat – allowing them to exercise their professional judgement and making them accountable for their decisions’, it proposes devolving managerial responsibility and financial accountability to principals.

Responding to a *Local Schools Local Decisions* discussion paper (November 2011) the New South Wales Secondary Principals’ Council stated:

*“In its current form, the NSWSPC thinks the ideas presented in the ‘Local Schools, Local Decisions’ discussion paper lack substance and the level of detail required for a serious professional response...” (p1)*

*“The NSWSPC holds research and information from other OECD nations to show there is, at best, a variable relationship between School-Based Management and the results achieved by students in PISA results. International school improvement and improved student outcome cannot be attributed to SBM.” (p3)*

New South Wales Secondary Principals’ Council, *NSWSPC Initial Submission to Local Schools Local Decisions Consultation*, November 18 2011  
[http://www.nswspc.org.au/images/docs/submissions/LSLDinitresponse\\_nov2011.pdf](http://www.nswspc.org.au/images/docs/submissions/LSLDinitresponse_nov2011.pdf) .

Chris Bonnor (March 2012) writes that Barry O’Farrell’s plan to give principals more power to run their schools sounds good – but asks where is the evidence that local management leads to improved student performance:

*“...the problem is that local management really doesn’t make much difference to the school bottom line – the achievement of students. ...The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD] has not discovered any significant link between autonomy and student achievement in Australia. And no matter how you read our Australian student outcomes data, state-by-state, there are few differences that can be pinned down to whether schools are locally or more centrally managed. ...Good teaching and learning is what matters – and it can be found and improved in schools of any type in any system.”*

Bonnor also notes what has been a feature of decades of local school management: that the ‘success’ of well-funded devolution pilots does not indicate that there will be similar successes when schemes are implemented across systems and the high levels of funding for pilots are withdrawn. (See for example the research literature on devolution in New Zealand).

*“The impact of inevitable future reductions in real funding will be mainly felt by schools – where it will be principals who will make the decisions about which cuts and where.”*

*“But the bigger danger is that we risk losing the equity safeguards which our public school system, with all its claimed faults, currently provides. If every school in NSW chooses its own teachers the best will gravitate to the schools with the more valued location, easier to teach students and money.”*

*“There are other hidden stings. Unless closely monitored, increasingly autonomous public schools will seek and gain greater control over student enrolments. ...The better placed autonomous public schools will join their private counterparts in applying both overt and covert enrolment discriminators, worsening the complex equity problems revealed by the Gonski review.”*

Bonnor, C., *What’s not to like about School Autonomy?*, New Matilda March 14, 2012  
<http://newmatilda.com/2012/03/14/whats-not-about-school-autonomy>.

Maurie Mulheron’s examination of the O’Farrell Government’s *Local Schools Local Decisions* initiative identifies its genesis in the Boston Consulting Group Report *Expenditure Review of the Department of Education and Training* and the related and concurrent review by Price Waterhouse Coopers into savings related to school-based employee costs.

*The Real Agenda Behind Local Schools Local Decisions:*  
<http://www.nswtf.org.au/news/fedtv> .

Further readings:

Sharan Burrow [General Secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation] on the impacts of devolution policies on teachers and schools:  
<http://www.nswtf.org.au/campaigns/salaries-staffing-security/resources/sharan-burrow-interview-lecture-audio.html>.

*Doing More in NSW Public Schools with Less Funding From Government*, NSWTF Information Kit on LSLM  
[http://www.nswtf.org.au/files/nswtf\\_response\\_guide\\_to\\_lslm\\_consultation\\_17-10-11.pdf](http://www.nswtf.org.au/files/nswtf_response_guide_to_lslm_consultation_17-10-11.pdf).

Anna Patty, *Will budget autonomy for principals pass the test?* SMH Monday 12 March 2012  
<http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/society-and-culture/will-budget-autonomy-for-principals-pass-the-test-20120312-1utuz.html>.

Andrew Stevenson, *Reforms will help reduce spending*, SMH Tuesday 13 March 2012  
<http://www.smh.com.au/national/education/reforms-will-help-reduce-spending-says-report-20120312-1uw1.html>.

Report to Seminar - Boston Consulting Group by NSWTF President, Maurie Mulheron  
[https://www.nswtf.org.au/files/files/Report%20to%20Seminar\\_Boston%20Consulting%20Group.pdf](https://www.nswtf.org.au/files/files/Report%20to%20Seminar_Boston%20Consulting%20Group.pdf).

NWTF, *Education guarantee at risk in devolved systems* (podcast), 30 March 2012  
<http://www.nswtf.org.au/news/2012/03/30/education-guarantee-risk-devolved-systems-podcast.html>.

Raewyn Connell, *Ideology of the marketplace underpins school ‘reforms’*, ABC The Drum 16 March 2012  
<http://www.abc.net.au/unleashed/raewyn-connell-3892508.html>.

Sydney Morning Herald, *Will local autonomy improve public schools?* March 17, 2012  
<http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/the-question/will-local--autonomy--improve--public-schools-20120316-1vae6.html>.

## QUEENSLAND

The newly elected Newman Liberal National Government plans to introduce Independent Public Schools to Queensland.

Without citing any actual evidence to back his claim the new Premier says that the Queensland initiative will be modelled on the “*outstanding success of similar programs operating in Western Australia and overseas*” and lead to better educational outcomes.

The LNP’s \$21 million plan will see 120 schools (30 per year) becoming Independent Public Schools over the four next years on an opt-in basis. Schools would operate under a one-line budget with greater autonomy in decision making - staff recruitment, financial management, student behaviour standards, etc – with governance and accountability devolved to principals and local communities to give them greater control and ownership of their school.

Participating schools would be eligible for grants of up to \$50,000 for transitional arrangements and a further \$50,000 for administrative purposes.

The WA study of IPS undertaken by the Curtin Graduate School of Business which concluded that self-managed schools did not improve learning outcomes was dismissed by Campbell Newman because it was commissioned by unions.

While there is little detail as yet as to the impact on Queensland teachers, principals, schools and students, and no consultation with the QTU, it would effectively create 120 “elite” schools that would receive additional funding at the expense of the majority of schools and students in Queensland.

## VICTORIA

In November Education Minister Martin Dixon announced that the Baillieu Government would pursue local decision making as a central component of its *Victoria as a Learning Community* education reforms.

The three "non-negotiable principles" of *Victoria as a Learning Community*:

- **Parent choice:** Parents make real sacrifices for their child's education and they are entitled to expect that their local school is an excellent school, regardless of sector. The government will pursue high standards for all schools. It will also support parent choice by fostering diversity across the government school system, including support for specialist schools, selective entry schools and innovative programs such as the International Baccalaureate.
- **Local decision making:** Principals and school communities know and understand their local context and are best placed to drive improvement. The government will give principals, in partnership with their parent community, the freedom to make decisions that best suit their school communities.

- **School community integration:** The government will promote partnerships and greater involvement between schools and parents, business and the community. When schools are integrated with their communities, they can tap into expertise, facilities, resources and ideas, and the community benefits as well.

According to Dixon, principals, teachers and parents would be “empowered as the key decision-makers in their schools through a new focus on professional trust” which would result in improving student outcomes.

The Government intends to develop a compact with schools to detail how “professional trust and autonomy” will operate, with the Department ‘refocussed as a support agency’.

## CONTEMPORARY RESEARCH ON DEVOLUTION IN EDUCATION

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Contemporary research includes:

- UK National Audit Office October 2011 report into financial management in local authority maintained schools which highlights the impact of Government funding cuts on schools and local authorities and confirms that cost-cutting remains at the heart of local school management in the UK:

*“The Government’s expectation that schools can achieve savings of £1 billion through reducing procurement and back-office costs has been exposed for the unjustified assumption that it is. Schools will be forced instead ... to cut spending on staff – their most valuable resource. ...These attacks on our schools come at a time when we need to invest in high quality education to restore economic growth. The NAO also confirms that local authorities are reducing their capacity to monitor and support schools due to insufficient resources. This will inevitably have a detrimental impact on schools and, ultimately, the standard of education children and young people receive.”*

John Bangs, John MacBeath and Maurice Galton, *Reinventing Schools, Reforming Teaching*, UK 2011, p135-136.

- Francis Beckett’s *The Great City Academy Fraud* (2007) comprehensively documents the inequitable impact of market-driven schooling reform in the UK and the perils of “gambling the future of all our children on a dreadfully flawed model.” Chapter 10: But Does It Work? p151.
- Reports from the National Union of Teachers on the impact of Academies <http://www.teachers.org.uk/node/10584>.
- New Zealand research on devolution and choice in NZ schooling which highlights its failure as good educational policy and the impact on students and schools of funding shortfalls and other pressures associated with local school management.

Liz Gordon, *School choice and the Social Market in New Zealand: Educational Reform in an Era of Increasing Inequality*, *International Studies in Sociology of Education* 13(1) 003, pp17-34.

Liz Gordon, *Where does the power lie now? Devolution, choice and democracy in schooling* 2007.

- *Liberating the strong to help the weak? Devolution and accountability in a divided school system*. Professor Richard Teese, Director of Centre for Research on Education Systems, Melbourne Graduate School of Education. Keynote speech to VASSP Annual Conference 2011  
<http://www.vassp.org.au/webpages/Conference2011/2011conference-teese.html>.
- Lubienski's 2009 research for the OECD reviews the evidence from over 20 OECD and non-OECD on the effects of pro market reforms; ie. measures designed to increase choice and competition between schools, including increased choice of school, decentralised governance giving schools greater operational freedom, self-governing schools in the public sector, reduced regulation of schools, reporting school results, government funding of private schools and sanctions against under-performing schools. He concludes that, among other things, quasi-market reforms have not been effective in improving the performance of low SES students – the “underperforming tail”:

“...it appears that there is no direct causal relationship between leveraging quasi-market mechanisms of choice and competition in education and inducing educational innovation in the classroom. In fact, the very causal direction is in question in view of the fact that government intervention, rather than market forces, has often led to pedagogical and curricular innovation.”

Lubienski, C. (2009), “Do Quasi-markets Foster Innovation in Education?: A Comparative Perspective”, *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 25, OECD Publishing <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/221583463325>.

See also:

- Lubienski, C., *Innovation in Education Markets: Theory and Evidence on the Impact of Competition and Choice in Charter Schools*, *American Educational Research Journal* 40 (2) 2003, pp395-443.
- Lubienski, C., *Public schools in Marketised Environments: Shifting Incentives and Unintended Consequences of Competition-Based Educational Reforms*. *American Journal of Education*. 111(4) 464 2005.
- Lundahl, L. *Sweden: decentralisation, deregulation, quasi-markets – and then what?* *Journal of educational Policy* 17 (6) 2002, pp687-697.
- Fallon G and Paquette, J., *Devolution, Choice, and Accountability in the Provision of Public Education in British Columbia: A Critical Analysis of the "School Amendment Act" of 2002 (Bill 34)* *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, Issue #75, June 25, 2008.

- Larry Kuehn, *School-based Budgeting/Site-based Management*, BCTF Research Report, 2006 <http://bctf.ca/publications/ResearchReports.aspx?id=5614>.
- Gunnarsson, V, Orazem, P, Sanchez M and Verdisco, A., *Does Local School Control Raise Student Outcomes? Evidence on the Roles of School Autonomy and Parental Participation*: Research from eight Latin American countries on the relationship between local school control and student outcomes: *school autonomy has no discernible impact on school outcomes*. *Economic Development and Cultural Change Journal*, Vol 58 No 1 October 2009, pp25-52  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/605209>.  
Note: Authors were from the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank.
- Trevor Cobbold's review of the international empirical evidence on school autonomy, also shows that there is simply insufficient evidence to support the claim that increasing school autonomy will lead to a national improvement in student achievement/outcomes.

*“Two decades of experience and research provide compelling evidence that simply setting schools free and holding them accountable for results is not in itself sufficient to conjure the attributes of effectiveness into being. Detaching schools from the bureaucratic structures within which they are embedded may enable the most privileged or resourceful schools to strike out in new and positive directions, but the rewards of enhanced autonomy for less advantaged schools are uncertain at best.”*

Cobbold, T. *No Compelling Research Evidence For School Autonomy*, January 14, 2011 <http://www.saveourschools.com.au/choice-and-competition/no-compelling-research-evidence-for-school-autonomy>.

*“While some studies suggest improved relations between schools, parents and their communities, this is largely associated with more advantaged schools and not easily replicated in other schools, especially those serving disadvantaged communities.”*  
Quoted by Cobbold.

David N. Plank & BetsAnn Smith, *Autonomous Schools: Theory, Evidence and Policy*. In: Helen F. Ladd & Edward B. Fiske (eds) *Handbook of Research in Education Finance and Policy*, Routledge, New York, 2008, pp402-424.

See also: Cobbold, T., *Charter Schools Are Not a Good Advertisement for School Autonomy*, March 2012 [www.saveourschools.com.au/file\\_download/95](http://www.saveourschools.com.au/file_download/95).

- **Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2009:**

The national study on Australia's PISA results reports a very small positive correlation between school autonomy in allocating resources and student performance [*Challenges for Australia's Education: Results from PISA 2009*, Table 7.31, p274]. However, the multi-level regression analysis in the OECD study on what makes a school successful shows no causal relationship between the two [Table IV.2.4c, p. 169]. That is, greater school autonomy in hiring teachers and for school budgets does not lead to higher student achievement in Australia.



School governance factors incorporating local autonomy, competition between schools and the presence of private schools account for only one per cent of the variation in student performance between schools across all OECD countries [Figure IV.2.5, p. 45; Table IV.2.4a, p167].

- **Queensland Government Submission to the Gonski Review:**

*“Research indicates that teaching quality and school leadership drive student outcomes far more than adjusting structural or governance arrangements in delivering education.”* p5

*“While the PISA report found that overall there is no clear relationship between the degree of autonomy in allocating resources and a school system’s overall performance, it did find that school autonomy over design of curricula and assessment is a key characteristic of successful school systems.”* p34

[http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/ReviewofFunding/SubEip/StateSub/Documents/Queensland\\_Government.pdf](http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/ReviewofFunding/SubEip/StateSub/Documents/Queensland_Government.pdf) .

- **Productivity Commission Schools Workforce Research Report:**

*“...allowing schools greater autonomy has the potential to exacerbate inequalities unless all schools are adequately resourced.”* p44

Schools Workforce Productivity Commission Research Report (April 2012)

[http://www.pc.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0020/116651/schools-workforce.pdf](http://www.pc.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/116651/schools-workforce.pdf).

- **OECD, *Equity and Quality in Education – Supporting Disadvantaged Students and Schools*** (February 2012) warns of the dangers of competitive school markets which can lead to greater segregation of students and have severe equity effects of education outcomes.

*“The highest performing education systems across OECD countries combine quality with equity.”* (Foreword)

*“School choice advocates often argue that the introduction of market mechanisms in education allows equal access to high quality schooling for all. ... However evidence does not support these perceptions, as choice and associated market mechanisms can enhance segregation.”* (p64)

[http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/equity-and-quality-in-education\\_9789264130852-en](http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/equity-and-quality-in-education_9789264130852-en).

- **Ben Levin** on improving our schools and decentralisation and school based decision making:

*“Simply saying that we are going to turn everything over to individual schools, as has happened in England and New Zealand, will result in what you got in England and New Zealand ... which is no real improvement across the whole system. Some schools get better; some schools get worse. The system as a whole doesn’t change. So these drivers [of school improvement] are the wrong ones ...”*

Improving Our Schools Video Chapter 11 “Wrong Strategies”

<http://www.nswtf.org.au/news/2012/02/23/dr-ben-levin-lecture-update-video.html>.

- **John Bangs** comments on devolution policies in his report on the International Summit on the Teaching Profession held March 2012 in New York:

*“In contrast [to other OECD countries], the complete autonomy given to academics and free schools [by the UK government] was exactly where the other countries at the summit did not want to be.”*

This summit was organised by the US Department of Education, the OECD and Education International. It was attended by education ministers from 23 of the most educationally successful countries in the world as well as the international teachers’ union, Education International. The Australian government did not send a representative.

Perhaps Bangs’s most powerful argument is that the capacity of government to influence system-wide improvement is severely diminished in devolved systems.

*“Even if it wanted to develop a system-wide approach to teacher policy, the government now has few, if any, mechanisms for enhancing the effectiveness and self-efficacy of the teaching profession. In short, the education secretary has performed the remarkable trick of professing to liberate the profession while eroding its identity and creating the very system of command and control that the OECD warns against.”*

John Bangs, *Devolving power is simply short-sighted*, Times Education Supplement, 11 May 2012, No 4992, pp44-45.

John Bangs is the visiting professor at the University of London’s Institute of Education and senior consultant for Education International.

## THE IMPACT OF DEVOLUTION ON SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

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### THE PALE RIDER SYNDROME

The dominant paradigm from much of the literature advocating greater devolution/local autonomy and much more control for principals is summed up in a 2011 speech by Sir Michael Wilshaw, head of Mossbourne Community Academy, in Hackney, London.

*“Take that scene in Pale Rider when the baddies are shooting up the town, the mists dissipate and Clint is there. Being a headteacher is all about being the lone warrior, fighting for righteousness, fighting the good fight, as powerful as any chief executive. I’m not that bothered about distributed leadership; I would never use it; I don’t think Clint would either. We need head teachers with ego. You see heads who don’t use ‘I’ and use ‘we’ instead, but they should. We need heads who enjoy power and enjoy exercising that power.”*

*‘Clint and me: Mossbourne head says school leaders are ‘lone heroes’, Times Educational Supplement, 18 February, 2011*

<http://www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=6070585>.

## EARLY RESEARCH ON THE IMPACT ON SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Early research on devolution established that it has led to the shifting of principals' work away from teaching and learning to a greater focus on financial and personnel issues, with an accompanying intensification of their workloads.

- See Whitty, Power and Halpin, *Devolution and Choice in Education. The School, The State and The Market* (ACER 1998) for a review of this research, pp55-60.
- Alan Reid, 'Regulating the Educational Market: The Effects on Public Education Workers', in Alan Reid (ed) *Going Public: Education Policy and Public Education in Australia*, Canberra, Australian Curriculum Studies Association (ACSA), 1998.
- Peter McInerney, *Moving into dangerous territory? Educational leadership in devolving education systems*, Paper presented at the Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) Annual Conference, Perth, 2–6 December 2001.
- Kenneth Leithwood (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education), *Educational accountability and school leadership* (2002)  
<http://www.nationalcollege.org.uk/media/415/CA/educational-accountability-and-school-leadership.pdf>.
- Kenneth Leithwood, *Educational Accountability: Issues and Alternatives* (2005)  
[www.saskschoolboards.ca/old/ResearchAndDevelopment/.../05-01.pdf](http://www.saskschoolboards.ca/old/ResearchAndDevelopment/.../05-01.pdf).

## MORE RECENT RESEARCH ON IMPACT ON SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

- Pat Thomson (University of Nottingham)'s research on principals' work and leadership has highlighted the changes associated with market-driven reforms:

*"Devolution and delegation have given principals in England more power than ever to run their schools as they see fit, and yet league tables, high stakes testing, a national curriculum and school inspections mean they have never been more constrained."*

Thomson, P., *Principals and Black Lagoons: Reflections from England on Headteachers and Power*. AEU Victorian Branch Professional Voice. Autumn 2010.  
[http://www.aeuvic.asn.au/pv\\_7\\_3\\_complete.pdf](http://www.aeuvic.asn.au/pv_7_3_complete.pdf)

Thomson's research on the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the UK shows how the pressures, dilemmas and tensions of reforms are contributing to the diminishing number of applicants for principal positions and their retention.

Thomson, P., *Leadership – Heads on the Block?* 2009.

- Marie Brennan, *Steering teachers: Working to Control the feminized profession of education*, *Journal of Sociology* 2009. <http://jos.sagepub.com/content/45/4/339>.
- Denis Fitzgerald, *School Leadership for the Challenges Ahead*, NSWTF Discussion Paper 2010 [http://www.nswtf.org.au/files/11102\\_dfpaper.pdf](http://www.nswtf.org.au/files/11102_dfpaper.pdf).

- *In simple terms, the current acolytes of principal power and devolution are peddling a giant con.* (p7) **Finnish Lessons** (Pasi Sahlberg Lateline February 28 2012) on

*“...the most important thing in this school autonomy in Finland is that all the schools are both responsible and also free to design their own curriculum as they wish, based on the quite loose national curriculum framework. So financing and managing the school is one thing, but I think... using teachers' knowledge and skills that we have in our system to design how they want teaching and learning to take place is the most important thing ... [and] frankly speaking, one of the keys also to this favourable situation that we have internationally.”*

<http://www.abc.net.au/lateline/content/2012/s3441913.htm>.

- **Education International and the International Summit on the Teaching Profession** EI Background paper 2nd International Summit of the Teaching Profession, New York, March 2012.

*“School systems cannot be successful if principals are given total autonomy to make all the decisions affecting their schools. Schools need external support and to work with each other and their communities. Public education systems publically provided are the best way of both providing support and engaging communities in education.”*

- **Education power transfer – lessons from Victoria**

Ben Jensen on issues associated with transferring more power over staffing and budgets to school principals in a bid to lift student performance:

*“Well I think if you look at Victoria and around the world actually, there's not a huge amount of evidence that says school autonomy has a great impact on student learning because it's really not the end game. ... overall what we see is that it's very hard to identify the connection between autonomy and student performance.”*

March 12, 2012 <http://www.abc.net.au/pm/content/2012/s3451569.htm>