SSTUWA IPS submission reveals full extent of member concerns



By Minh Lam
Journalist

The question of whether the Independent Public Schools (IPS) initiative can lift student academic outcomes is one that still remains to be definitively answered, over six years after IPS was introduced to WA public schools.

With a parliamentary inquiry into the IPS system currently underway, the SSTUWA has expressed its concerns once more that there has been no evidence to show increased student outcomes as a result of IPS.

SSTUWA President Pat Byrne appeared before the Legislative Assembly's Education and Health Standing Committee last month to table the union's submission to the IPS inquiry.

With submissions now publicly released (as the committee works towards its August reporting date), Western Teacher can detail some of the feedback from SSTUWA members that informed its submission.

Issues of concern from members included:

- The IPS as a business model versus educational leadership.
- The creation of a two-tiered system.
- Increased staff workload, stress and low morale.
- Funding inadequacy.
- Staffing, redeployment and transfer issues.
- Student outcomes.

Comments made included (on IPS as a business model): "IPS has made schools into businesses whose main objective is to make money and market their image. What happens in the classroom is secondary"; and "Principals have an extremely worrying and dangerous workload, which impacts on their health" (on school leader workload).

When it comes to staff workload, stress or low morale, members had the following to say about the IPS system: "It is not uncommon to have teachers working on the school premises until 5pm and then head home to continue their work. A family life is all but non-existent"; "Teachers are anxious and many are now reluctant to come to school. Sleepless nights are common – many colleagues are now medicated by concerned doctors."

Another member stated: “With less support staff or flexible money we have less specialist positions such as behaviour manager, literacy support, etc and have less opportunity to reduce class sizes to fit class needs in a complex low socioeconomical school.”

Ultimately the SSTUWA submission questions whether the IPS system has any academic benefits for students: “Despite the IPS policy now being in place for six years, there is no evidence that student outcomes have been improved as a result of the reform,” the submission states.

“NAPLAN data shows that student outcomes across a range of indicators has been ad-hoc and shown mixed results.

“In a comparison of NAPLAN results for schools who became IPS in 2010 and with an ICSEA score of lower than 1,000, and therefore with higher disadvantage, it shows that there is no linear improvement in outcomes across the indicators of reading, persuasive writing, spelling, grammar and punctuation and numeracy.

The SSTUWA submission points out that based on current evidence: “WA’s IPS model performs no better than any other autonomy model that exists around the globe.”

“In the absence of an independent, credible analysis of student outcomes, the current NAPLAN data and member testimony would suggest that student outcome improvement can occur whether the school is IPS or not,” the submission states.

The SSTUWA has recommended in its submission that a thorough, independent analysis in this area be carried out.

To read the SSTUWA submission in full click here.

Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
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