

Devolution, market dynamics and the Independent Public School initiative in Western Australia: 'Winning back' what has been lost (?)

Abstract

The devolution of public sector schooling systems has been a feature of education reform since the 1980s. In Western Australia, the Independent Public School (IPS) initiative has recently been installed, announced by the state government in 2009. Now over 80 percent of the state's public school students attend IP schools. Drawing on interview data from a broader study of devolution and the conditions of teachers' work, this article explores the cases of two schools – one IPS and one non-IPS. While both schools were ostensibly disadvantaged, they proved to be highly contrasting schooling sites, responding to the school marketplace in markedly different ways. We consider the ways in which the IPS initiative is contributing to the operation of market dynamics within the public school sector in WA, and argue that it has created new mechanisms for the residualisation of particular, and specifically non-IP, schools. Furthermore, while one school was apparently more of a 'winner' within the school marketplace, as it was attracting increasing student enrolments, we query what it might actually mean to 'win' in such a policy settlement, with staff at both schools reporting significant dissatisfaction in their work.

Keywords: marketisation, market, devolution, neoliberalism, teachers, principals

Introduction

Devolution within public sector systems of schooling has been an international policy priority. This has been particularly evident in the USA and UK, Australia's common 'reference societies' (Lingard 2010, 143), where greater control over and responsibility for schooling has been shifted to local levels; such attempts have, therefore, also been a priority of the current Australian federal government. In the state of Western Australia (WA), the Independent Public School (IPS) initiative has been the vehicle for such changes, rendering WA something of a flagship state for this particular mode of devolution, which is also currently being taken up in at least two other Australian states and territories (Australian Government 2015). Currently, over 80% of public school students in WA are in IP schools (Government of Western Australia 2017a). These schools, according to the Western Australian government, 'assume greater responsibility for their own affairs and have increased flexibility to respond to their communities. They create more diversity in the public school system and help build strong communities that are more able to respond to

the needs of students' (Government of Western Australia 2016a). They are thus defined in relation to their more traditional public school counterparts, which still exist today – though in dwindling numbers. In this article, we drill down into some of the complexities of this dynamic, through a focus on two school cases. One of these schools was an IPS, the other was not, and despite demographic similarities, these schools were experiencing the new regime in strikingly different ways. Through illustrating these differences and the mechanisms which sit behind them, this article argues that the devolutionary IPS initiative is contributing to a market of schools within the public sector, with residualizing effects for remaining non-IP schools.

Background

Devolution and marketisation in Australian education

This research is situated within a large, and growing, body of work on neoliberal governance of education. Schools, seen as key to economic development, are targeted for reform and improvement, in what Ball, Maguire and Braun (2012, 141) have termed a 'current climate of policy overload and initiativitis'. We understand neoliberalism as an approach to governance that values the individual, and emphasizes choice and competition rather than governmental intervention and support. However, we also understand neoliberalism as 'contradictory and polymorphic' (Peck 2010, 8), the manifestation of particular confluences of history, interest and influence that may be globally resonant, but are also always locally specific. For the purposes of this article, two key neoliberal reform technologies will be canvassed as background – the marketization of schools through the creation and encouragement of 'choice' between them, and the devolution of control over aspects of schooling to principals and other school staff.

Schools in Australia are increasingly set in competition with each other, both across as well as within public and private sectors of education. Parents are encouraged to choose a school for their children, an injunction to which the middle class responds most actively (Campbell, Proctor and Sherington 2009; Doherty, Rissman and Browning 2013), choosing either schools within the private sector, or more desirable schools within the public sector (Stacey 2016). As with other western countries, this process has been progressively fueled by a variety of reforms including the public publishing of school performance data (e.g. Power and Frandji 2010). This and other policies, such as de-zoning (Lamb 2007), have contributed to the development of market-related dynamics between and within schools, and have been argued to lead to a residualisation effect (Preston 1984; Campbell and Sherington 2013). Residualisation is a relational process whereby some schools, typically comprehensive public high schools, are required to cater to increasingly complex and disadvantaged student cohorts, as schools compete to have more middle-class, and less 'difficult' enrolments within their schools (Forsey 2010).

Another aspect to the neoliberal reform of schooling that must be considered here is that of devolution. Such reforms have been visible globally, such as in the Academy schools in England (Chitty 2013; Gorard 2009) and the charter schools in the US (Ravitch 2010), and are often promoted on the argument that they will facilitate connections between schools and local communities. Indeed, in Australia, this was the initial justification for such changes (Karmel 1973). While some research sees devolution and marketisation more as potentially complementary neoliberal technologies (e.g. Blackmore 2004; Brennan 2009), other work defines one (devolution) through the other (marketisation) more explicitly (e.g. Ball 1990; Lamb 2007). In our view, while the two *are* distinct, they are also related, and we see one of the contributions of this article as bringing the mechanics of this relationship to the fore. As Ball (2003, 219) has pointed out, site-based management encourages schools to ‘stand out’ and ‘make themselves different from one another’. In this way, devolution has the potential to open up additional avenues for distinction between schooling sites, and therefore the possibility of distinguishing and choosing between them. This echoes Blackmore’s (2004, 284) argument that devolution in itself may not be ‘inherently bad’, but has the capacity for becoming so in particular political climates, further supporting the need for careful analyses of ‘neoliberalised’ (Peck 2010) policy settlements, which can be understood as globally relevant only through the unpacking of local specificity. Furthermore, while this article frames the neoliberal ‘policy technologies’ of interest slightly differently to Ball (2003) – and as relevant to our particular context – we nevertheless recognize the connection of such neoliberal reform with effects on teacher subjectivity and the creation of the performative self.

Devolutionary policy in Western Australia

The first Australian state to see significant devolutionary reform was Victoria. Here, Lamb (2007, 17) has pointed to disproportionate positive effects on schools in advantaged areas, occurring ‘at the expense of government schools in low SES areas which shed numbers at a growing rate’. Blackmore (2004), meanwhile, writing in relation to the same period of reform, found that greater responsibility was shifted to schools and teachers’ work was intensified, becoming more casualised and less secure. In Blackmore’s (2004) research, this led to some tensions between teachers and principals. More recent reforms in New South Wales (NSW) have seen some similar effects, with work by Gavin and McGrath-Champ indicating an increased workload for principals, despite an appreciation of greater local control (Gavin and McGrath-Champ 2016). Given the apparently shifting role of principals under devolutionary reform in Australia (Gavin and McGrath-Champ 2016), the literature on school leadership can provide additional frameworks through which to understand the work of local actors.

The tension arising from increased workloads and competing leadership requirements (Murphy and Hallinger 1992) has been evident in Western Australia since the early 1990s, as limited aspects of devolution were introduced into the public education system (O'Brien and Down 2002; Trotman 1998; Chadbourne 1996; MacNeill and Cavanagh 2007). Through global policy mobility, the last three decades have been a period of “rampant adjectival leadership” (Gunter 2011, 3) in Western Australian education policy discourse and, as in other jurisdictions, during this time “leadership became closely associated with officially authorised movements for change in schools” (Hall 2013, 269). While other studies have noted the potential symbiosis between instructional and transformational leadership - the most commonly researched leadership models - (e.g. Day, Gu and Sammons 2016), we also note the organizational tension between different forms of leadership – instructional and managerial, transformational and transmissional (Bush and Glover 2014; Hoyle 2008; Hoyle and Wallace 2008). In highlighting these tensions, we would agree with Hall’s (2013, 268) warning that “leadership has acted as a discursive veil mystifying [New Public Management] NPM processes, serving to obscure the directive and highlight the agential aspects of educational reform”.

For within the specific policy context of WA, the Independent Public Schools (IPS) initiative has similarly been argued to be influenced by NPM and to shift risk to the local level (Fitzgerald and Rainnie 2012) in its attempted combination of ‘autonomy’ with what is nevertheless a much-needed ‘system’, given the size and spread of the state (Gobby 2014). The rationale for the IPS program, as announced by the Western Australian Government in August 2009, emphasized ‘autonomy’. The state’s Education Minister argued that by granting greater autonomy to public schools, the policy initiative would bring schools closer to their communities; overcome the constraints of a ‘one-size-fits-all’ bureaucratic model; and ensure greater flexibility for principals who were deemed to have a better understanding of the needs and cultures of their schools. The Minister and WA Department of Education (DoE) stated this would allow schools to create the optimal conditions to improve student outcomes. As such, the initiative would provide social and economic benefits to the people of Western Australia (Fitzgerald and Rainnie 2012).

Policy proposals to devolve the public education system in WA have been evident since the Burke (Labor) government’s *Better Schools* document (1987). However the geographical size of WA’s public education system, which covers more than 2.6 million square kilometres, has posed a major challenge to the goal of introducing a devolved system with more autonomous schools. The system is divided into 8 regions (North Metropolitan, South Metropolitan, South West, Midwest, Wheatbelt, Goldfields, Pilbara and Kimberley). As with other education systems in Australia,

public schools within the two regions that comprise the greater metropolitan area range from lower socio-economic contexts to so-called 'leafy green'¹ schools situated in upper middle class suburbs. However, although 229,000 of the state's 302,000 public school students are located in these metropolitan schools, a third of the teaching workforce is located in non-metropolitan schools in remote and regional schools that can be several thousand kilometres away from the capital city, Perth (Government of Western Australia 2016b).

Managing this dispersed workforce has previously required a highly centralised staffing system that could transfer teachers anywhere in the State and which made permanent employment contingent upon teaching in a rural and remote school for an extended period of time. Through this transfer system, teachers who agreed to teach in remote or hard-to-staff locations would accumulate transfer points to guarantee priority when applying for a city school. Prior to the introduction of the IPS initiative in 2009 this system covered the state's 22 500 state teachers and had overseen between 8000 and 9000 teacher placements per year, the equivalent of just over 41% of the teaching workforce (Western Australian Auditor General 2011). Even when they have retained strong central control over staffing, the DoE has struggled to adequately meet the staffing needs of schools located in rural and remote areas. Such methods for ensuring that hard-to-staff schools have sufficient teachers produce their own geographies of marginalisation, as others have argued (e.g. Reid, Green, Cooper, Hastings, Lock and White 2010), with inexperienced (often newly qualified) staff sent to remote locations whilst more experienced teachers are offered permanent placement in Perth. Meanwhile, higher socio-economic metropolitan schools are staffed by more teachers with more experience, and a greater likelihood of staying long-term, reinforcing these students' pre-existing educational advantage. The present IPS policy is unwinding this transfer system. The IPS initiative and the expanded decentralised staff selection policies significantly extend the process of shifting HR responsibilities to the school level and allow IP schools to select preferred teachers without having to make recourse to the centralised system. Table 1 summarises the pertinent difference in rights, responsibilities, duties and functions of IP and non-IP schools, as currently operating within the state of WA.

[Table 1 near here]

In 2010, 34 schools were selected by the DoE for the first intake into the program. Despite what the DoE claims is 'stringent selection criteria', today there are 524 Independent Public Schools, representing 65 per cent of all WA public schools and accommodating approximately 80 per cent of the teacher and student populations (EHSC 2016; Government of Western Australia 2017a).

¹ Describing a school as 'leafy green' is a common colloquial expression denoting the apparent relative advantage of the area in which the school is situated.

However, in a parliamentary inquiry into the initiative published in 2016, the Director General of the DoE is referenced as having stated that ‘it is unlikely that the IPS initiative will ever be rolled out across all schools as the model is not suitable for all schools, for example remote schools’ (EHSC 2016, 5). This underlying rationale is presumably that the IPS initiative is ‘not suitable’ for remote schools due to the different staffing arrangements under traditional and IPS models, with the latter essentially able to exempt itself from the teacher transfer system which has been retained for the perceived benefit of non-IP, rural and remote schools that rely on it. A corollary of this is that these disadvantaged non-IP schools are required to take re-deployed staff, while IP schools are not. A redeployee is defined by the DoE as ‘a permanent employee whose job function has been abolished because of restructuring, amalgamation or closure, outsourcing, downsizing or changes in Departmental services and operations’ (Government of Western Australia 2009). The mechanics of redeployees in relation to the IP and non-IP school staffing is a thread we take up later in this article.

Another aspect of the WA policy context taken up in this article is the sheer number of significant changes that have been introduced into the WA public school system since the introduction of the IPS initiative. ‘These include year 7 students becoming part of secondary schools, changes to Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE) regulations, and the introduction of the national curriculum. Financial changes have included the August 2013 school budget cuts, and the 2015 roll out of the SCFM [Student Centred Funding Model] and one-line budget to all WA public schools’ (EHSC 2016, 16). While not all schools in WA are IPS, devolutionary measures have been implemented in all schools (such as the one-line budget), thus all schools are to some degree subject to similar policy changes, though, as we shall see, this subjection works differently in different sites, and for a complex range of reasons.

Methodology

This article draws on data from a wider comparative study of NSW and WA, partnered with Sweden for international comparison (e.g. Author Publication 1; Author Publication 2). Here, we focus specifically on a small portion of the WA interviews, from two contrasting school sites – one IPS (Lakeside), and one non-IP school (Blakely). These interviews and schools were selected to provide particular insight, when juxtaposed, into some of the complexities and perplexities of the evolving IPS system. It is in drilling down into the specificities of two distinct, similar-but-different schooling sites that the school level mechanics of market processes can most clearly be drawn out and understood.

As such, the approach taken in this article reflects the structure of a ‘maximum variation’ (Flyvberg 2006, 230) case study, aiming to ‘obtain information about the significance of various circumstances’ (Flyvberg 2006, 230). In this article, the schools are our cases, and the variation in circumstances is principally the status of the schools as IPS, or not, as well as their ‘market position’ – the two things, as we argue, being linked. This is only one point of difference, however; it must be remembered that schools have extensive localised specificities, and are complex and unique institutions: as Ball et al. take care to note: ‘policies are enacted in material conditions, with varying resources, in relation to particular ‘problems’. Policies – new and old – are set against and alongside existing commitments, values and forms of experience’ (Ball et al. 2012, 21). Furthermore, as Ball (2015) has argued, there is an ongoing tension in education policy research between teacher agency and teacher subjection, and recognising that teachers are not merely dominated by policy is important – there is space for resistance (Ball, 2015).

Interviews were semi-structured (Merriam 2009) to allow further probing of ideas raised by participants as necessary, and generally lasted between half an hour and an hour. The study was granted ethical approval by Curtin University, Perth. Participants were provided with an information sheet and signed a consent form prior to their participation. Questions were based around recent policy change, including IPS, and the perceived effects of these on the school, as well as those who staffed it. Transcripts were coded for themes in relation to these topics, a process which led to the establishment of the results and discussion sections below. At each school, we sought to interview the leadership team, beginning with the principal; then requested an additional teacher participant who was suggested in each case by the principal. While use of principals in recruiting teacher participants may be a limitation of the study – in potentially providing us only with those who are ‘on message’ – our interviewing of the entire leadership team proved to be illuminating, as will hopefully be seen below. The end result of our strategy meant four staff members from each school were interviewed – the principal, two deputy principals and a teacher. At Blakely, we interviewed Brenda (principal), Barbara (deputy), Belinda (deputy) and Bonnie (teacher). At Lakeside, we spoke with Leonie (principal), Leonard (deputy), Laura (deputy) and Lily (teacher). All names in this article, including those of the schools, are pseudonyms.

Results and Discussion

School Snapshots

The schools in this study were both public schools with low ICSEA² scores – between 900 and 950, and with more than 50% of their students in the bottom ICSEA quartile. Both schools were located outside of the central city of Perth (one – Blakely Senior High School – being located further from the CBD than the other), and both taught students from years 7-12.

Lakeside College

The IPS Lakeside College was located in a disadvantaged suburb in the Perth metropolitan area. Leonie, the principal, described the school as being ‘not leafy green at all’; a school where ‘you’ve got to work with the community’ – ‘it’s a big job.’ Issues of violence were not uncommon – Laura, a deputy, referred to problems where there could be ‘intruders coming in armed to get kids’ and ‘enormous fights’ due to community disputes. It was a school where ‘you don’t know from one day to the next what really is going to be thrown up at you’.

Nonetheless, Lakeside College was a school on the rise. As principal, Leonie had been at the school for about four years, and was seen to be leading it in a good direction: in the words of one of her deputies, ‘she’s got the vision’. The school had shifted its focus from behaviour, to curriculum and ‘positive culture’. It had recently become an IP school, which to Leonie was ‘just a natural transition’. She’d already been instituting a range of changes within the school; the main advantage of becoming an IPS, according to Leonie, was the increased staffing freedom. Leonie noted the increase in her managerial workload and the effects it had on her capacity for instructional leadership: ‘I’m a curriculum-based person and I don’t get enough time to get out there and be with my staff and my students and that bit I miss... It’s become much harder because there is so much required of you in a sort of a – it’s almost like, I suppose, like a CEO kind of role more than a principal’s role’. IPS for Leonie meant ‘a lot more work, but it’s been fabulous in that you can play around with it a little bit and really look at the needs of your students. Quite honestly though, we were doing that anyway.’ The difference was that there was no longer a third party to go through – ‘the buck sort of stops here basically, which is great.’ Despite Leonie’s claim that IPS hadn’t made that much of a difference, according to Lily, a teacher, it was when talks about becoming an IPS began that the main changes in the school started to occur: ‘from then onwards

² The Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) measures students’ socio-educational advantage as a function of parents’ occupation as well as school and non-school based educational attainment. The measure also includes school-level factors of location and Indigenous student enrolment. The median is 1000, with a score below indicating relative disadvantage, and a score above indicating relative advantage.

it was a humungous change, because it's constantly trying and trying to be what everyone else wanted and not what we actually were.' As outlined below, not everyone was entirely on board with the recent changes in the school; changes which the IPS initiative seems to have had a hand in inspiring. This resonates with Wallace's concern about transmissional leadership in processes of education reform: "What is being sought of school leaders and managers is faithful transmission of political goals and promotion of activity to implement them, not transformation of their schools according to their own diverse beliefs and values and those of local community members" (Wallace 2008, 191).

Blakely Senior High School

The non-IPS Blakeley Senior High School was also described by its staff as not being 'a leafy green'. According to deputy principal Barbara, the school catered to 'kids with really low socio-economic families, generational poverty [and a], huge amount of drug, alcohol and substance abuse'. In the words of Brenda, the principal, 'in Blakely you have got the haves and the have nots'.

As principal, Brenda had been at Blakely for only one year. She had been brought in just prior to the start of an Expert Review Group ³ process, something that was still having its aftershocks within the community. The ERG was instituted, we were told, due to low National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) scores and issues amongst the senior executive at the school. According to Brenda, there had been 'a breakdown within the senior leadership team', and Belinda, a 'level 3' in an acting Deputy Principal capacity, told us that the school had had 'four principals within six months', and there remained a lot of 'ongoing drama' from 'a lot of staff issues' that had originated years before.

The ERG seemed to have been quite a traumatic process for staff at the school. Barbara, the school's other deputy, felt ERGs were 'quite destructive' and 'not good for any school'; a process where 'the iron fist comes in and says - well basically you're crap now go fix it'. Brenda seemed more ambivalent about the ERG process: 'I think that if the principal takes a positive school improvement approach with an ERG and doesn't get caught up in that negative emotion then it's good for the school.' However, the public accountability that came with the ERG process - where a summary of the results were made public online - meant more of an unhelpful focus on the

³ An Expert Review Group (ERG) is a team of reviewers especially composed to bring high levels of expertise to evaluate the school. The declared purpose is to enable the principal and staff to receive detailed feedback about their performance. The Expert Review Groups also prescribe strategies directed at improving school performance. Based on this feedback the principal will be responsible for developing and implementing an improvement plan. This will be supported by the Director Schools who will provide direction and advice as required.

'whole emotion of the findings'. Reeling from lingering staff politics and the aftermath of the ERG process, whilst also dealing with declining enrolments, Blakely was a school in difficulty.

Table 2 provides a summary profile of the schools and study informants.

[Table 2 near here]

'The Great Storm of 2015'

Before delving deeper into some of the clear contrasts between these schools, it is important to note that staff at both sites reported feeling overwhelmed by recent policy change both at federal and state level. These changes sit within a current global climate of 'initiativitis' (Ball et al. 2012, 141) in education. Secondary schools in Western Australia in 2015 were under immense pressure, almost regardless of their local context (though often exacerbated in different ways by it): Lakeside College's staff referred to these changes as 'the great storm of 2015'.

One of the key issues that teachers and schools were grappling with was what they saw as 'higher levels of accountability generally across all elements of teaching', with 'lots and lots and lots of extra checks and balances'. There was a 'please explain' attitude coming from the State Department of Education now, something that Lakeside's deputy principal Leonard saw as directed mainly towards the principal. Indeed the principal's role had changed, something that has also been found in school autonomy research elsewhere (e.g. Gavin and McGrath-Champ 2016), and this was affecting relations with staff, as Blackmore (2004) also found. Brenda, from Blakely, commented explicitly on one leadership model promoted by the Department of Education: "well you have to be more strategic now maybe – I think you have to be – I think your communication – I think you have to have a lot more emotional intelligence I think now and also be willing to be a situational or a distributive leader because you can't do it all. I think your leadership style has to be flexible". Yet, she noted that in practice there was a tension between her accountability and responsibilities and the expectations of staff, who 'still want you to be the principal of yesteryear. But I don't think they fully get it.' Belinda, her deputy, summarized the rise in accountability requirements by commenting that at least there was 'never a dull moment. Well, there's never a moment, let's put it that way. '

In the climate in which these two schools were operating, another pressure was a constant push to improve and be 'effective'. There were pressures on staff to 'upskill, upskill, upskill'. Sometimes new initiatives did not seem well thought-out: at Blakely staff noted that 'we just seem to be having lots of people thinking of fantastic ideas, and they just drop them into schools.' Belinda referred to what she saw as 'change for change's sake'. From Bonnie's perspective, as a teacher at

the school, change was instituted not for any 'educational purpose' but more due to pressures of competition and accountability: '[t]he pressure to perform, the pressure to produce results, the pressure for improvement is enormous'. These comments reflect Ball's (2003) work on teacher performativity: a culture of 'initiativitis' entails an unending 'incitement to improve' (Ball, Maguire and Braun 2012, 141), and ensures that 'perfection is always out of reach and that there is more work to do on ourselves.' (Ball 2015, 308)

As noted, the schools were also grappling both with the introduction of the new national curriculum, and the move of year 7 students from primary school settings into high schools. This latter had caused particular difficulties at Lakeside which, having recently doubled in student numbers, was experiencing problems with overcrowding. This had 'caused a lot of pressure.' Now, 'every class that a teacher walks into is packed to the rafters'; 'they're jam-packed like sardines'. Such findings echo Lamb's (2007) analysis of the growth in school numbers of market 'winners' in the Australian state of Victoria but with important differences that we will return to below.

A corollary of all this was an increased workload for all staff. In Laura's words, 'it just seems like you get to a point where you open up your computer in the morning and you're dreading it'; devolutionary imperatives in general, she felt, had created a sense of 'deer in the headlights'. While principals have been noted to experience increased workload through devolution (Gavin and McGrath-Champ 2016), Leonard pointed out how 'deputies are caught in the middle', 'copping it more from the staff below them and from the principal above them.' For teachers, Laura felt there was 'a degree of disgruntlement creeping in because so much has been asked – no, so much has been told. That's a key thing too. There's very little sell happens these days you know?' Teachers were losing their 'goodwill', reflecting the finding of intensification of teachers' work by Blackmore (2004) in Victoria. This issue was something Leonie also seemed aware of: 'I know my staff are tired right now.' In response to specific interview questions, both Brenda and Leonie found it difficult to recount practices of effective managerial leadership – that is structures and processes which 'take the strain'(Hoyle and Wallace 2005, 68) and modify teachers' working conditions so they could engage as fully as possible in their key task of teaching (Bushand Glover 2014, Wallace 2008). For example, after facetiously observing that 'we just make them suffer', Brenda noted the importance of acknowledging teaching staff efforts: 'Some people like a card'.

All of these pressures were combined with cuts, both to funding and support. Leonie, for instance, felt that they were 'one of the worst schools in the state affected'. Other cuts were also significant: while Leonie had a principals' network that it was intended she would rely on, she commented that 'it's become a little bit fragmented' because people are 'too busy'.

Market Dynamics

Blakely, according to its staff, was a school with a damaged reputation within the local community. They tended to lose students to a nearby IP school called Windfield. Windfield had 'changed a lot of their marketing'; according to Barbara, the drift of students to Windfield and from Blakely occurred, 'before they even g[e]t here', with another 'significant dip' in the transition from year 10 to year 11, due to the small number of subjects Blakely could offer in comparison with Windfield. Good kids were 'creamed off' from Blakely, leaving them with 'a different cohort that has more issues' – a fairly classic description of the residualisation process (Campbell and Sherington 2013; Preston 1984). Belinda told us that 'district office has decided' that, due to being under capacity, Blakely would have to take students from any area, should they apply; for other schools, partial zoning rules applied, with out-of-area enrolments accepted where the school had capacity (Government of Western Australia 2017b). This meant, from her perspective, that they tended to have other schools 'suggesting' that Blakely might be a better option for some of their more troublesome students, echoing findings by Forsey (2010) about school competition for less 'difficult' students. Before Windfield became an IPS, however, Bonnie told us that 'very, very few kids' went there – 'most kids just came, came to Blakely', 'whereas I think now the majority of aspirational students are encouraged to go to Windfield when they start in Year 7 or Year 8.' There was 'definitely a culture', Bonnie said, whereby 'if you're not ambitious for your kid, send them to Blakely and if you are, send them elsewhere'; the idea of the active choice of school made by some groups of parents (Campbell, Proctor and Sherington 2009; Doherty, Rissman and Browning 2013) was clearly apparent here. To counter this, Brenda was 'developing relationships' with nearby principals so that if a parent tried to enrol a Blakely student there, she would be notified.

Lakeside provides a contrasting picture. Here, growth had been noticeable: from about 400 to nearly 1000 students. For Leonie, the school had previously had 'a shocking reputation', which has now been turned around – 'we've won back the community and won back the students and now it's more a case of 'I can't fit you in at the moment''. Previously, according to Leonie, these extra 600 students were going to 'other schools' – 'they'd go anywhere but here'. The renewal in the school was less about competition for Leonie, and more about 'winning back what the school had lost.' While some of this growth had to do with the introduction of year 7 students, it was also related to the improved reputation of the school, as these year 7 students at least did not choose to go elsewhere. Leonie told us that she used to get about 15 students from one primary feeder school; now she gets about 60.

To accomplish something like this, Leonie argued 'you have to work on your marketing, make sure you're out there in the community, in the local paper'. According to Leonard, Leonie had been

'very proactive in getting out to the community and selling the school'. This change in the direction of the school also translated to a greater focus on parents and students as customers, working to create the 'ideal policy subject' of New Public Management who is less the democratic citizen and more the 'individual consumer of goods and services.' (Fitzgerald and Rainnie 2012, 174). Lily, a teacher at Lakeside, commented that she found 'the parental involvement in the IPS system is much, much larger than before'; there was a focus on 'pleasing the customer. The student is not the student; the student is the customer these days.' The teachers' role, she felt, had 'completely changed'. Now, they 'are constantly aware that upsetting a particular parent or whatever could drag us into a very negative light in the media', indicating some of the tensions that can develop between teachers and parents (Stacey 2016).

For Lakeside, such intensive image management also meant working with parents in particular ways: 'fixing' the school seemed to also mean 'fixing' the parents. Leonie spoke of the need to be 'changing the aspirations of the kids', 'to get out of that welfare cycle'. From her perspective, 'you're not only modelling I suppose to the students, sometimes you end up having to model to the parents as well.' Leonard saw this as the opposite of a deficit perspective, however - 'kids have been given opportunities to achieve, rather than kids being thought of as being not able to cope'. In contrast to schools that have sought to improve primarily by attracting the middle class (Forsey 2010), Leonie was keen to retain local students. She was quite insistent that she did not poach and did not exclude – or at least, she did not do so 'lightly'. To her, moving students between schools 'doesn't solve anything'; reflecting some of the contradictions inherent in the IPS initiative, where schools are encouraged to act both 'autonomously' but also as part of a 'system' (Gobby 2014). It seemingly was not the case that the school was trying to court the middle class at the exclusion of the working class; their attempt to find their feet within this competitive space was instead targeted at what was largely their pre-existing clientele.

As part of trying to improve the school, Leonie was introducing 'inter-agency support' – for example, she had recently involved the police in working closely with the school – as well as developing a variety of links with industry. She invited companies into the school to help students with apprenticeships, and in some cases sponsor students to attend university – a 'fantastic opportunity'. These moves to connect with 'industry' are reminiscent of the sponsored academy schools in England (Chitty 2013). Leonie was also establishing important connections via the school's board. Lily explained how the school had been looking at 'having people from tertiary institutions' on the board; Leonie described the 'really fantastic people' she'd been able to 'source'. Much of these connections had been possible before IPS, raising the question for us of whether Leonie may have taken on something of the role of 'policy entrepreneur' (Ball et al. 2012, 49) in her work to advocate, create and integrate in line with the current policy direction and to

her own advantage.

The notion of a policy entrepreneur foregrounds the need to acknowledge the balance between the directive and the agential in the analysis of school reform processes. Bush argues (2008, 2) that “governments would like schools to have visionary leadership as long as the visions do not depart in any significant way from government imperatives”. Leonie was clearly aware of those government imperatives and noted that when she first started as a principal “it was very much you had your superintendents and the policies basically – you didn't have a lot to do with them when you first started out. Now it's very much communicated, it's out there having to be adhered to...” While Leonie appeared to display many of the characteristics of transformational leadership, she also displayed transmissional leadership in that her directions and actions were in line with the overall IPS program and were supported by the Department of Education. Forsey (2009) has highlighted the adverse consequences of attempting transformational leadership in a system (in that instance in WA in the 1990s) that does not support such initiatives or does not support the particular version of transformation that a principal might choose to adopt.

The IPS program marked a new level of support for school autonomy from the Department of Education. As outlined in Table 1, a crucial change was the alteration in staffing practices in IP schools. Leonie had taken the opportunity afforded her to change the staffing profile at Lakeside. The school now had three deputies, instead of one, and had ‘more non-teaching staff than we ever did before’, including a ‘designated Event Coordinator.’ Furthermore, the school had five Teach for Australia (TFA⁴) ‘associates’, something which Leonie described as being a ‘fantastic opportunity to bring [in] really high calibre people’; something which ‘lifts the profile of your school a little bit too’.

While Brenda drew on the language of transformational leadership, it appeared that her capacity to align this leadership style with government's vision (transmissional leadership) was limited because of the differentiation in the public school system. She defined a principal's ‘global responsibility’ as following the ‘broader educational agenda and the government agenda’ and accepted that ‘I have a state – I have a global responsibility as an educator because your PD

⁴ TFA is a programme which aims to place ‘bright’ undergraduate students into disadvantaged and ‘hard-to-staff’ schools, where they simultaneously perform the role of a classroom teacher and complete their teaching certification. Of the 13 public schools in WA that took TFAs in 2016, all were IPS. The TFA program is open to schools that meet certain criteria regarding school disadvantage. While the TFA program itself does not exclude non-IPS schools, the nature of the redeployment system is such that if non-IPS schools have a vacant teaching position they must take redeployees. As such they don't have the capacity to take TFAs. TFA has been widely criticized. It is seen, for instance, to offer ‘simple answers to complex problems’ (Skourdumbis 2012, 314), relying on individuals as savior figures. In the US, it has also been linked to other neoliberal schooling reforms, namely the devolved charter school movement (Lefebvre and Thomas 2017).

[position description] has changed. Your PD was always about your job whereas now it's actually, it's more global'. However, Brenda noted that "I'm probably naughty this way – I've got that much to worry about within my own school I can't then worry about the government's agenda as well". This finding accords with Steinberg and Cox's (2016) findings of the misalignment between school and education department priorities for "non-autonomous principals" in "tiered autonomy" education systems. For Brenda one of the central challenges for Blakely was the unequal staffing dynamic at play between schools in WA in 2015, which we discuss next.

'The Lemon Dance'

As noted above, perhaps the biggest advantage of being an IP school at the time of this research was the increased flexibility and control over staffing. Blakely, a non-IP school, had to take redeployees from the Department, which IP schools did not: a process Barbara memorably referred to as 'the lemon dance'. While we acknowledge the likelihood that not all teachers are equally successful or 'effective' in their work, we also note that this term has its origins in debates about 'teacher quality' in US, and is somewhat emblematic of 'discourses of derision' (Ball 1990) which reinforce the idea that teachers are the 'problem'. Given the declining number of non-IP schools, redeployees were becoming concentrated in the few remaining schools to which they could be sent, and while employees are not redeployed for reasons explicitly related to their performance (Government of Western Australia 2009), there was nevertheless a (perhaps unfair) perception to this effect evident in the interviews in this project. As Brenda described it, in her experience, some redeployees were 'really substandard poor performing people [teachers]', and it was her 'pet dislike of being non-IPS' that she did not have the power to refuse them. The complex needs which these teachers could potentially bring to the school, reflected in Brenda's aversion to them, raised the question of whether this particular aspect of the IPS/non-IPS policy settlement represented a new mechanism of residualisation (Preston 1984) in non-IP schools. There are also obvious concerns here regarding the capacity of such schools to support such staff.

At Lakeside, however, they had 'complete autonomy in staffing so you can hire and not quite fire' – the contradiction in this claim indicating what can perhaps be expected of 'autonomy' in what must nevertheless remain a state-based system (as others have argued, e.g. Gobby 2014). This, from Leonie's perspective, was essential – 'for schools like this you really have to pick your people.' Leonie's remaining staffing woes were, according to Leonard, to do with staff who had been in the school since before she'd arrived, and who weren't the people they 'needed' for 'where she wants to take the school'. For newer staff, Leonie used 'a lot of fixed term' – she explained that 'new people that come in, I normally put them onto a fixed term contract, just have a look, suss them out over the year and if they're okay then we say 'okay we can go for permanency''. The fit

with the school was paramount. 'They see the vision where I want to go and are they part of that and do they want to come on board?' Although the school was 'supposed to be hard to staff', they now 'get a lot of applications to come here', which Leonie attributes to people seeing 'what we're doing', making them 'keen to be involved'. Belinda from Blakely made the comment that some IP schools seemed to have a focus on hiring graduates who 'can be moulded'; this cleaned out the staffing pool of particular types of staff. Four years ago, Fitzgerald and Rainnie (2012) argued that inequitable staffing practices were likely to result from IPS especially in a state the size of WA, and given the current arrangement that includes both IP, and non-IP schools with differential staffing practices, this article provides evidence of this phenomenon now occurring. We would also suggest that, even if all schools in WA were to become IPS, the situation in relation to staffing would still be problematic, as without the transfer system existing in support of rural and remote schools across the vast landmass, many schools would be likely to experience even greater difficulty in being able to find staff.

Realities of Residualisation

There had been talks of closing Blakely for some time – according to Barbara, from eight years prior. In the year before this study, when the school hit a particularly low number of enrolments, this discussion was raised again – 'four buses and we could all be elsewhere.' Residualisation is more a vicious spiral than a vicious cycle, perhaps; moves to IPS will benefit some struggling schools, particularly with 'leadership' such as that offered by Leonie, but it will be at the expense of other schools, like Blakely, or the schools surrounding Lakeside, from which they draw their huge growth in enrolments. Even if schools like Lakeside tried to continue their commitment to the 'system' and their local clientele (Gobby 2014), by becoming competitive, they cannot really avoid contributing to local market dynamics. Furthermore, while Blakely could, indeed, be closed, and all its students bussed elsewhere, it is not clear that over-subscribed 'successful' schools that were 'packed to the rafters' like Lakeside really represent feasible options for them – indeed, overcrowding of schools located in particular (advantaged) areas is a current policy problem in Perth (Bickers 2016). As noted, our findings in part accord with Lamb's (2007) analysis of the growth in school numbers of market 'winners' in the Victorian public education system; a difference, however, is that the 'winners' in Lamb's (2007) research appeared to be mid- and high-SES schools which service what Smyth (2011, 205) refers to as 'savvy, upwardly mobile, middle-class educational consumers'. In contrast, our research suggests that such dynamics are also visible across a narrower range of schools which, while each ostensibly disadvantaged, nonetheless exist in a hierarchy of seemingly increasing disparity; particularly given the current settlement which involves two unequal, overlapping systems of IP, and non-IP schools.

We asked Belinda what she thought would happen if, instead, Blakely were to become an IP school. She responded that she hoped they'd get 'better staff' – but that nevertheless, 'until the parents see Blakely High as a viable education source, whether you're IPS or non-IPS, they won't send them [their children] here.' Indeed much of the (arguable) success of the IPS reform appears to be contingent on how that policy is translated on the ground; as Ball et al. (2012) note, school staff are not mere subjects of policy, but active respondents to it. Belinda told stories of IP schools she knew that had changed greatly after switching status, and others that had barely changed at all. It seemed to us that many of the changes occurring at Lakeside – while perhaps facilitated by the IPS model – were in fact being driven by Leonie. As Leonard, who was supportive of Leonie and her work, explained:

the only drawback on that is that she's trying to do a lot too soon...we can all see where she wants to get to, and she sees opportunities and she takes on those opportunities, and I think that's been beneficial for the school, but it's also impacted on lots of changes. So I see some staff very – a little bit – disgruntled about the changes that are happening so quickly. Some have been here a long time and don't like that change, but others just see that we're doing lots of different things and we're not able to bed down some of the more important things.

This view, that a number of staff were unhappy with the amount and pace of change within the school, was also seen in comments by Lily and Laura. When we asked Lily whether she was happy with the direction Lakeside was going in, she responded that with everything going on, this was 'probably a very bad year to ask that question.' She described the raft of changes that had occurred in the school – within the context of the 'great storm' described above – and concluded that all things considered, her answer 'would not be very positive'. Meanwhile, Laura, the deputy at Lakeside concluded her interview by telling us that for the first time in her lengthy career, she was considering leaving the profession. 'Out, I want out, you know? In that sense, and it's quite remarkable, I've caught myself going, you know, do I really need this? Do I really need this?' So whilst Leonie, as principal, described staff as eager to work at the school, the other interviewed staff described a sense of exhaustion and change fatigue amongst staff.

While Leonie was considered visionary by some staff (evidencing transformational leadership), such comments raise questions about the capacity of Leonie to exercise effective managerial leadership (Hoyle 2008; Hoyle and Wallace 2008). As something of a policy entrepreneur – to use Ball et al.'s term – Leonie was 'personally invested in and identified with policy ideas and their enactment' (Ball et al. 2012, 53). She viewed her efforts as positive for the students of Lakeside and their families, particularly emphasizing the links she was making with industry, and seemed

to view staffing as a key means with which to achieve her goals, for instance referring to her use of fixed term contracts for her new staff, allowing her to 'suss them out over the year' to see if 'they're okay'. Such leadership had allowed her school to 'win' and ensured that, as a school serving comparatively marginalized students, they avoided the extent of residualisation suffered by Blakely. Yet is questionable whether this policy, the competitive parameters it sets, and Leonie's extent of identification with it, was overwhelming her ability to offer 'managerial' leadership through effective communication, practices of engagement and differentiated support. While the data drawn upon in this article is small-scale, the suggestion of discord between principals and teachers, and within leadership teams in contexts of devolved control does accord with research from our wider study of NSW and WA, which in part examines principals' management of working conditions of teachers. (Author publication 3)

Conclusion

Via a case study of two sites this paper has explored the relationships between devolution and marketisation in the school education sector of one Australian state. Devolutionary measures, when begun during the Whitlam Labor government era of the 1970s, were intended as a way of encouraging schools to connect with the local contexts in which they were situated (Karmel 1973). This article argues that the direction of more recent devolutionary initiatives have instead been co-opted into a neoliberal drive towards competition between schools, even within areas that are already geographically segregated along lines of advantage. While it is a limitation of this study that we have only considered the experiences of four staff members in each of two schools, based on the data we present, we would suggest that the apparent competition between schools in WA is contributing to an outcome of residualisation through marketization. It is a further contribution of the study that it demonstrates this phenomenon occurring even between and among schools serving otherwise disadvantaged student bodies. This is seemingly exacerbated by individual schools having more scope to differentiate themselves than others, even if only through the mechanism of being able to select all staff based on 'merit' – Leonie, after all, referred to her hiring of TFA associates as being in part intended to '[lift] the profile' of Lakeside. Such apparent differentiation has been strongly promoted by the DoE (EHSC 2016). It is also possible that devolutionary policies require schools to rely more heavily on their leadership for 'success' – indeed, much of the (apparent, and debatable) success of Lakeside seemed to be contingent on how the IPS policy, as well as the broader policy milieu and its neoliberal values of individual improvement and innovation, had been taken up on the ground. This devolved dynamic may even attract particularly energetic, ambitious or 'visionary' leaders such as Leonie, further contributing to the kind of hierarchy apparent within our data, and this could constitute a fruitful avenue for further research.

For even if Blakely were to become an IP school – though the DoE has stated that not all schools will be able to do so (EHSC 2016) – it is uncertain whether this would affect its future in a positive manner. While Blakely’s staff might welcome a potential end to the dreaded ‘lemon dance’, it must be remembered that market-oriented systems do encourage competition between schools, and therefore have a tendency to create not only ‘winners’ but also ‘losers’, and that even ‘winning back’ what a school might see as its rightful enrolments still requires their loss from somewhere else. Furthermore, despite the apparent success of Lakeside, its staff – or at least those we spoke with – did not seem markedly happier or more satisfied with their work than those at Blakely. The overcrowding of students and the overworking of the staff – whether due specifically to the IPS initiative, other policy changes, or Leonie’s own ventures – created an environment that seemed on the brink of becoming overwhelming for our Lakeside interviewees, echoing experiences of workload excess documented elsewhere (Bridges and Searle 2011; Butt and Lance 2005; Stacey 2017). This, the human cost in contexts of devolved schooling, which seems to either require or attract the ‘entrepreneurial’ leadership offered by principals such as Leonie in order for such policies to ‘succeed’ is, we would suggest, a significant contribution of this research. While working in the residualised context of Blakely clearly had its own challenges and stressors, so did working at the ‘successful’ and increasingly over-subscribed Lakeside, raising the question for us of just what it might mean, in this system, to be a ‘winner’.

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Table 1- Forms of Autonomy for IP Schools

	Independent Public Schools	Non-Independent Public Schools
Line Management	IP school principals 'have a direct line relationship' with the Director General of the Department of Education (Government of Western Australia 2017a). Level of contact with regional offices is optional (EHSC 2016).	Non-IP school principals report to their regional executive director and continue to have a formal relationship with regional offices in relation to 'compliance, complaints management and critical incident support' (EHSC 2016, 6).
Governance	Governance of IP schools is through a three-year Delivery and Performance Agreement (DPA). IP schools self-assess each year and make quarterly school performance reports to the school board. School boards have 'responsibilities of	Non-IP schools continue to be governed as before, and continue to have school councils, which are not legislatively different to the school boards which operate in IP schools. A School Board Development

	endorsing the DPA, the one-line budget, the business plan and the annual report' (EHSC 2016, 8).	Program has been provided to IPS schools.
Curriculum	There is greater flexibility for IP schools in relation to curriculum, however the requirements of the Curriculum Framework and Australian Curriculum must be met (EHSC 2016).	Previous curricula requirements apply to non-IP schools, which must now also address recent changes in relation to the Australian Curriculum (EHSC 2016)
Staffing	IP schools have 'greater flexibility' in staffing (Government of WA, 2017a), being able to merit select all staff and not being required to take redeployees. Moreover, the principal of an IP School has a one-off opportunity to 're-profile' or modify the school's staffing structure. This may occur during the first six months of a school's transition to an IPS (EHSC 2016).	Although since 2012 all public schools in WA can merit select staff, non-IP schools are still obliged to accept 'redeployees' of the system (EHSC 2016, 6).
Budgets	IP schools are allocated a one-line budget; 'are responsible for financial management, procurement, and maintenance of buildings and facilities' (EHSC 2016, 6); and can spend funding for students with additional needs 'flexibly' (EHSC 2016, 7).	Non-IP schools now also operate on one-line budgets (EHSC 2016).
Financial Support	IP schools received \$20,000-\$40,000 for set-up costs and \$25,000- \$50,000 in recurring funding (EHSC 2016, 64).	Non-IP schools do not receive this financial support for increased administrative costs, despite moving to one-line budgets (EHSC 2016). The additional IPS funding has been removed in the 2017 WA State Budget.
Professional Development	IPS principals have different and more targeted professional development opportunities than non - IPS principals. All IPS principals are put through a two-month "advanced leadership" course and can apply for the Independent Public School Principals' Fellowship Program run in conjunction with the Harvard University's Graduate School of Education (EHSC 2016, 48).	Non-IP schools do not have access to these training programs (EHSC 2016, 48).
Marketing & Promotion	The State Government promotes and markets the Independent Public Schools initiative via the Department of Education and through individual schools (including signage and other marketing material) (EHSC 2016, 50)	While non IP schools now share several aspects of the devolved responsibility of IPS, the DoE argues IP schools "will continue to create innovative solutions, test new concepts and generate practical ideas for the benefit of students in their schools and for students in all our schools" (Government of Western Australia. 2016a)

Table 2 – Case Study Schools Compared

Characteristic	Lakeside College	Blakely Senior High School
IPS status	IP school	Non IP school
Staff interviewed and roles	Leonie (principal) Leonard (deputy principal) Laura (deputy principal) Lily (teacher)	Brenda (principal) Barbara (deputy principal) Belinda (deputy principal) Bonnie (teacher)
Perceived character	Described as ‘not leafy green	Described as ‘not a leafy green’
ICSEA (SES status)	900-950	900-950
Enrolments	Increasing	Declining
Staff selection	All staff merit selected	Staff are merit selected, but redeployees must be taken.