LEVERAGING AUTONOMY AND IMPROVING OUTCOMES

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It is a pleasure to deliver the opening address at this important conference. I have followed developments in the Independent Schools (IPS) initiative from its introduction, not just from afar but also through on-the-ground research in Queensland over the last three years. I was delighted several months ago to receive an invitation to spend a day with you and to learn more of the work of the IPS Alliance. I consider the initiative to be one of the most significant of its kind anywhere and schools and school systems have as much to learn from you as you do in learning of what is happening around the world.

This address is divided into two parts. The first summarises the international evidence of how autonomy may be leveraged to improve outcomes at the school level. The second is concerned with the special nature of IPS in Queensland, namely, the expectation that individually and collectively IPS are expected to contribute to the wellbeing of public education, and I take this to mean the expectation that your autonomy is leveraged to contribute to improved outcomes for all.

INTERNATIONAL EVIDENCE

Professional autonomy trumps structural autonomy

Like all with an interest in the topic, it is appropriate to note at the outset some matters related to the use of the terms 'independent' and 'autonomy', but not to diminish in any way the work you are engaged in or the significance of the underpinning policies. No school in a system of public education in Australia is independent or autonomous: all are built, owned, operated, funded, and staffed by the state to which they are accountable. Nevertheless, while the terms are used in public discourse, it is important to be precise in describing policy and practice. As far as autonomy is concerned, we did this in an international research project over the last three years, with the findings set out in *The Autonomy Premium* (Caldwell 2016a).

Autonomy refers to the decentralisation from the system to the school of significant authority to make decisions, especially in respect to curriculum, pedagogy, personnel and resources, within a centrally-determined framework of goals, policies, curriculum, standards and accountabilities.

Structural autonomy refers to policies, regulations and procedures that permit the school to exercise autonomy. Schools may take up such a remit in a variety of ways, or not at all, including ways that are ineffective if the intent is to improve outcomes for students. The granting of autonomy may make no difference to outcomes for students unless the school has the capacity to make decisions that are likely to make a difference, and uses that capacity to achieve this end.

Professional autonomy refers to teachers and principals having the capacity to make decisions that are likely to make a difference to outcomes for students, and this capacity is exercised in a significant, systemic and sustained fashion. Professional autonomy calls for the exercise of judgement, with a high level of discretion in the exercise of that judgement.

These distinctions led to the observation that professional autonomy trumps structural autonomy. More important is that the exercise of professional autonomy is consistent with a high level of professionalism, as illustrated in Figure 1 (adapted from Etzioni cited in Fullan and Hargreaves 2012) which displays the characteristics of a profession. Several practices in

Figure 1 have been addressed in in Australia and elsewhere in recent years, especially 'shared standards of practice', and that others have been given more attention than in the past including 'working together with other professionals to solve complex cases' and 'commitment to continuous learning and professional upgrading'.

Being a professional

Autonomy is a characteristic of a profession

Shared standards of practice

Long and rigorous processes of training and qualification

A monopoly over the service that is provided

An ethic of service, even a sense of calling, in relation to clients

Specialised knowledge, expertise, and professional language

Autonomy to make informed discretionary judgments

Working together with other professionals to solve complex cases

Self-regulation of conduct, discipline, and dismissals

Commitment to continuous learning and professional upgrading
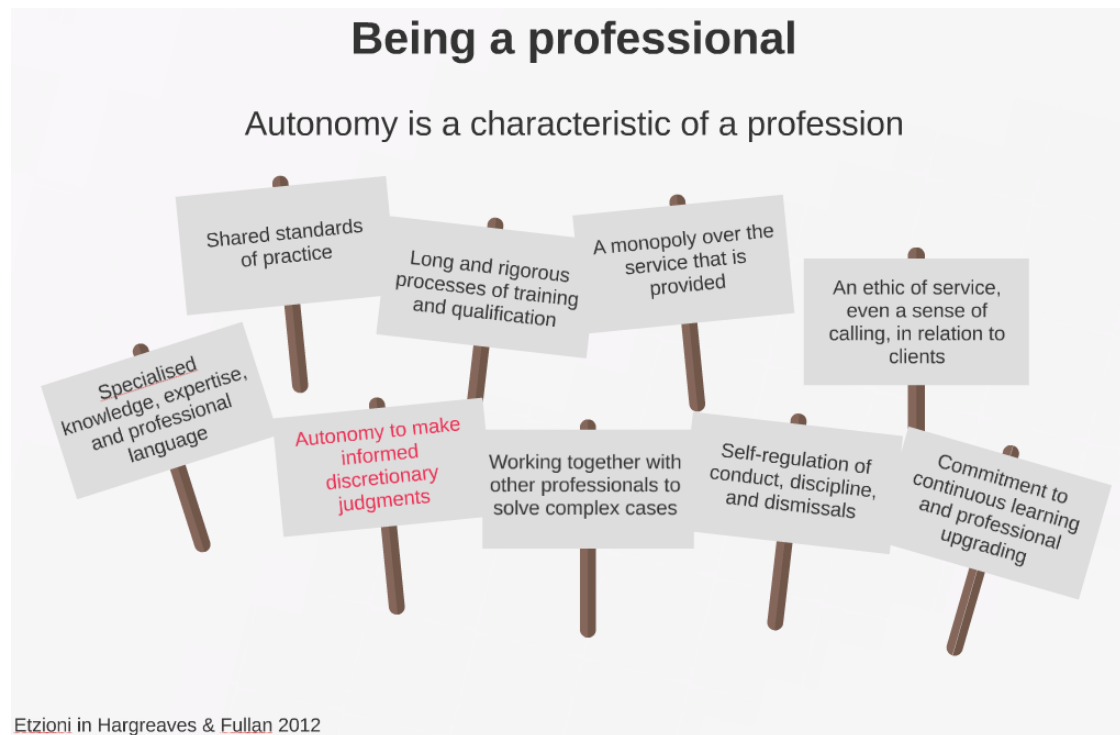
Etzioni in Hargreaves & Fullan 2012

Figure 1: Autonomy is a characteristic of a profession

Autonomy and learning outcomes

The OECD published five volumes in its report on PISA 2015. Volume I is the most widely-quoted because it contained a detailed examination of student performance in scientific literacy (reports for each country are published separately). Volume II provided an analysis of policies and practices for successful (high performing) schools based on information gathered from students and principals of schools sampled in PISA. It described various characteristics of schools and school systems and their association with performance.

The focus in Volume II was on the performance of Year 8 students in science. On the matter of autonomy, the report noted that fewer principals than in 2009 reported responsibility for the school budget, the hiring of teachers and the program offered by the school. While noting earlier studies that advocated a high level of school autonomy in these matters (including Caldwell & Spinks 2013), Volume II noted that:

> PISA 2015 offers a more nuanced picture of the relationship between greater school autonomy and students' performance, which seems to depend not only on the particular areas of school management delegated to principals and teachers, but also on how these areas are related to certain accountability measures and to the capacity of local actors. In particular, students score higher in science when principals exercise greater autonomy over resources, curriculum and other policies, but especially so in countries where achievement data are tracked over time or posted publicly more extensively or when principals show higher levels of educational leadership These findings highlight the interplay between school autonomy and accountability already identified in earlier PISA assessments. When principals lack the preparation and capacity to exercise leadership, transferring authority to schools may inadvertently

work against students, since school staff might then be deprived of the resources and expertise available at higher levels of the system. Students also score higher in science in countries where more teachers have autonomy over the curriculum. This finding underscores the importance of tapping into teachers' expertise. Teachers can not only help design and implement rigorous curricula, but they can also adapt content to students of varying ability. (OECD 2016a: 230-231)

The highest-performing jurisdictions in science for 15-year olds, each performing significantly higher than Australia, were Singapore, Japan, Estonia, Chinese Taipei, Finland, Macao (China), Canada, Vietnam and Hong Kong (China) (in descending rank order). Three scored higher than Australia on the index of school autonomy: Macao, Estonia and Hong Kong. The same three have more autonomy for school resources; Hong Kong, Japan and Estonia have more autonomy for curriculum; Hong Kong more autonomy for policy on school assessment; and Japan more autonomy on student admissions. (OECD 2016a: 115-119)

It may be helpful and certainly sobering to put these comparisons in a broader perspective, noting Australia's performance relative to high-performing nations in PISA 2015 and TIMSS 2015, as summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Top ten rankings in PISA 2015 and TIMSS 2015[#] (derived from data in Thomson, De Bortoli & Underwood 2016 and Thomson, Wernert, O'Grady & Rodrigues 2016, respectively)

PISA 2015	TIMSS 2015
1 *Singapore	1 *Singapore
2 *Hong Kong (China)	2 *(South) Korea
3 *Japan	3 *Japan
4 *Estonia	4 Chinese Taipei
5 *Canada	*Hong Kong (China)
Macao (China)	6 Russian Federation
7 *Finland	7 Kazakhstan
8 Chinese Taipei	8 *England
9 *(South) Korea	9 *United States
10 Slovenia	10 Ireland
Australia average rank is 18th	Australia average rank is 27th

Based on average ranking across tests in each scheme for countries that participated in all tests

* These countries included in research reported in this paper

There were statistically significant and positive correlations between level of school autonomy and performance in science. There are statistically significant and negative correlations between performance and decisions made by a national education authority in the areas of resources, curriculum, disciplinary policies and assessment policies (OECD 2016a: 120).

There were no statistically significant differences between level of school autonomy and equity in science performance (some positive, some negative but not statistically significant for all levels of governance except a statistically significant and positive correlation for discipline policies set by a national authority). (OECD 2016a: 120)

Students performed better in science when principals were more autonomous, especially in countries where measures on an index of educational leadership were higher than the OECD average. 'Schools are expected to benefit more from greater autonomy when their principals are prepared for the role'. (OECD 2016a: 121)

The positive association between principal autonomy and student performance was stronger in countries where students were assessed in standardised tests. 'Granting greater autonomy to schools is expected to entail fewer risks if school outcomes are continuously monitored'. (OECD 2016a: 123)

The limitations of these analyses are acknowledged. They draw from ratings of principals on aspects of school governance. The same limitation was acknowledged in the report of the survey of school principals in Australia (Caldwell 2016b). There are differences in patterns of school governance among jurisdictions but the OECD reports are for countries as a whole. There is no distinction between approaches in public and private schools in the analyses summarised above. Above all, the relationships are correlational not causal.

These findings are entirely consistent with what we found in the Australian case studies reported in *The Autonomy Premium* (Caldwell 2016a) and in the report of a national survey of entitled *What the Principals Say* (Caldwell 2016b).

Role of the principal

The capacities to be built among teachers for the exercise of professional autonomy have been well-documented and are the subject of a host of programs in teacher preparation and ongoing professional development. The evidence base is stronger than it has ever been. However, it is fair to consider the role of the principal at this point.

In late 2016 OECD published an analysis of data gathered in its 2013 Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), in this instance focusing on school leadership (OECD 2016b). The interest in 2016 was the impact of school leaders on the nurturing of professional learning communities and the environment for learning; it was not a broad-based study of school leadership or of the impact of school leaders. However, to the extent that professional learning communities are important for high-performing schools – and the evidence suggests they are – the report is of value.

The report defined certain terms that are helpful in describing what school leaders do when they adopt styles or orientations to their work. The starting point was to describe instructional leadership and distributed leadership, each of which is considered important in creating a professional learning community and nurturing a favourable climate in support of student learning. *Instructional leadership* 'comprises leadership practices that involve the planning, evaluation, co-ordination and improvement of teaching and learning'. *Distributed leadership* is 'a reflection of leadership being shown by the principal, but also of others acting as leaders in school' (OECD 2016b: 15). Four types (styles, orientations) were described:

- *Integrated leaders* are attentive to both instructional and distributed leadership in their schools and spend considerable time on curriculum- and teaching-related tasks
- *Inclusive leaders* engage staff, students and their parents or guardians in decisions at the school, but relatively less often take up a role as instructional leaders and spend less time on curriculum- and teaching-related tasks
- *Educational leaders* are strongly engaged in instructional leadership, but much less in involving stakeholders in decisions
- *Administrative leaders* spend a large portion of their time on school management and administrative issues and are, as a result, less engaged in distributed and instructional leadership activities than integrated leaders (adapted from OECD 2016b: 15)

Table 2, adapted from OECD (2016b: 40), contains the distribution of leadership types as reported by principals in TALIS 2013 for 10 countries. Two sub-national jurisdictions are included: Alberta (Canada) and England (UK). There are important differences among patterns of response illustrated for top-performers in PISA 2015. The dominant patterns are Singapore (62.6 percent reported integrated leadership), Estonia (76.4 percent reported inclusive leadership), Japan (76.9 percent reported educational leadership), Korea (91.1 percent reported integrated leadership) and Finland (73.8 percent reported administrative leadership). However, considering all 10 countries listed in Table 2, all but two have a dominant pattern of either integrated leadership (4) or educational leadership (4).

While the OECD drew attention to these and other differences in various analyses, it is important to go beyond these observations to explain exceptions, for there are implications for

preparation and professional development. Consider, for example, the case of high-performing Finland where Table 2 indicates that the dominant style of leadership is administrative (73.8 percent of respondents), indicating that principals see themselves mainly as engaged in management and administrative matters. An explanation may lie in the capacities of teachers themselves to engage in the listed activities due to the universally recognised strength of initial teacher education and the high level of trust that principals have in their teachers. It may not be necessary or it may not be a high priority for principals or would-be principals to engage in professional development that focused on related aspects of instructional leadership. The other exception to the general pattern is Estonia where inclusive leadership was the dominant type, that is, the focus is more on engagement of stakeholders in decision-making. This may be explained by the structure of schooling in Estonia where more than 200 municipalities control its approximately 600 schools and each school has a board of trustees and a staff council of teachers. Also, like Finland, every teacher completes a master's degree in initial preparation.

Table 2: Principals' engagement in instructional leadership activities in lower secondary education (percentage of principals reporting 'very often' or 'often' as reported in TALIS 2013) (adapted from OECD 2016b: 40)

Country / Jurisdiction (10 of 35)	Integrated (%)	Educational (%)	Inclusive (%)	Administrative (%)
Australia	61.5	26.8	11.3	0.5
Estonia	11.3	1.0	76.4	11.3
Finland	2.3	9.2	14.7	73.8
Israel	9.7	82.6	3.3	4.4
Japan	15.1	76.9	None reported in this category	8.1
Korea	91.1	8.1	0.8	None reported in this category
New Zealand	25.1	69.5	0.7	4.7
Singapore	62.6	36.1	0.7	0.7
Alberta (Canada)	73.6	22.2	3.8	0.4
England (UK)	32.5	63.4	None reported in this category	4.1
OECD Average	45.9	23.8	19.4	10.9

Table 3 summarises responses of principals in their reports of engagement in aspects of instructional leadership for the same 10 countries. Percentages reporting 'very often' or 'often' are listed for actions to support cooperation among teachers to develop new teaching practices, ensure teachers take responsibility for improving their teaching skills, and ensure teachers feel responsible for their students' learning outcomes.

There is a noteworthy dichotomy among the patterns of responses. Except for Estonia, Finland and Japan, percentages are generally above the OECD averages for all participating countries. Expressed another way, barely one-half or fewer principals in the three exceptional cases of high-performing countries reported that they engaged in the three actions. One explanation is that they may not need to. The reasons for Estonia and Finland may be the same as described above for Table 2: they have teachers whose initial preparation and teaching culture does not require a high priority on the part of principals. For the third of the

actions included in Table 3, Finland has a deeply embedded culture in its schools in which a cadre of teachers and others are on hand to provide special assistance to ensure no child falls behind (this is what is meant by the term 'special education' in Finland). Up to one-third of all students require some form of 'special education' during the years of their basic education. In the case of Japan, 'lesson study' is deeply embedded in the culture of teaching and pioneered in Japan, defined as follows:

> It involves small groups of teachers meeting regularly to engage in a collaborative process of lesson planning, implementation, evaluation and refinement. Key to their work is the hypothesising of anticipated student responses, the testing of these hypotheses, and the refinement of the lesson design . . . Skills gained through the detailed process of observation and analysis in lesson study transfer to teachers' work on other lessons. (Hollingsworth & Oliver 2005: 1)

It is noteworthy in Table 3 that Singapore, the highest-performing nation in both PISA 2015 and TIMSS 2015, has the highest percentage of principals reporting their engagement in ensuring teachers take responsibility for improving their teaching skills and ensuring that teachers feel responsible for their students' learning outcomes.

Table 3: Distribution of types of leadership in lower secondary schools (percentage of principals as reported in TALIS 2013) (adapted from OECD 2016b: 38)

Country / Jurisdiction (10 of 37)	Act to support cooperation among teachers to develop new teaching practices Very often/often (%)	Act to ensure that teachers take responsibility for improving their teaching skills Very often/often (%)	Act to ensure that teachers feel responsible for their students' learning outcomes Very often/often (%)
Singapore	65.4	84.4	91.1
Alberta (Canada)	71.1	79.1	84.8
Korea	73.6	77.8	80.5
Israel	67.6	76.0	81.8
Australia	64.0	76.1	82.5
England (UK)	61.4	75.3	82.9
New Zealand	60.2	74.8	81.6
Estonia	41.3	52.0	53.0
Finland	56.6	40.0	44.0
Japan	33.9	38.9	32.6
OECD Average for 36 countries	64.1	70.2	76.6

The OECD report drew implications for policy and practice, especially in respect to the professional development of principals, hence establishing the relevance of the report to the research reported in this paper:

> Integrated leadership, combining instructional and distributed leadership and using student outcomes to develop the school's goals, program and professional development plan, appears to be the most favourable approach to establishing such a

[professional] learning community at schools. Countries and economies may adopt this view of leadership for their schools and can stimulate this through training programs for principals and by encouraging principals to keep up to date with developments in their field through in-service training, attendance of leadership courses or other professional development activities. (OECD 2016b: 17)

It is likely that principals would be bored or frustrated in Estonia, Finland and Japan if there was a priority on building capacities among teachers to practise what is already deeply embedded in the cultures of teaching and for which they were well-prepared in initial teacher education.

What do these findings and conclusions imply for principals of IPS? They certainly suggest that a one-size-suits-all approach may not be effective. Many of you may be bored if you are expected to participate in programs when the level of professional capital of your teachers is already high. On the other hand, many will be engaged intensively in instructional leadership when that level is low.

WELLBEING OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

I turn now to the second part of this presentation in which I explore the contribution that IPS may make to the wellbeing of public education in Queensland, consistent with the three key features of IPS in the policy framework within which you are operating (Queensland Government 2017: 5):

- IPS provide a critical mass for system-wide improvement

- IPS have the capacity to – and are expected to – innovate, trial and share good practice across the state school system

- IPS are accountable to their local communities and the broader state school system through arrangements that value community partnerships

I will draw here on international studies I have conducted in recent years, especially in 2017.

Research foundations

The framework these studies was established in 2007 in the International Project to Frame the Transformation of Schools conducted in Australia, China, England, Finland, United States and Wales. Findings were published in *Why not the Best Schools* (Caldwell & Harris 2008). We concluded that 'schools that have been transformed or have made good progress to transformation are adept at strengthening and aligning four forms of capital: intellectual capital, social capital, spiritual capital and financial capital, achieving this strength and alignment through outstanding governance' (Caldwell & Harris 2008: 10).

This framework was the starting point for a second series of studies from 2014 to 2017 as part of the International Study on School Autonomy and Learning (ISSAL) that brought together a team of researchers from Australia, Canada, China, England, Finland, Israel and Singapore. The focus was on government/public schools. Findings for 2015 and 2016 in Australia were included in two publications cited earlier: a book entitled *The Autonomy Premium* (Caldwell 2016a), and a report of a national survey of principals entitled *What the Principals Say* (Caldwell 2016b). Recall that the distinction between structural autonomy and professional autonomy was an important finding.

[These studies completed four decades of research on the theme of school autonomy. Indeed, three days ago (October 6) was the fortieth anniversary of the successful defence of my doctoral thesis on a limited form of school autonomy in Canada.]

Strategic alignment

Two projects were mounted in 2017, one dealing with strategic alignment among different levels of government, and the other with programs for preparation and ongoing development

of teachers and principals. This section gives attention to the first, with the key question being: How have high-performing jurisdictions achieved strategic alignment across different levels of government when formulating and implementing policy to improve student performance? A sub-question was: What role is played by a higher level of school autonomy, especially professional autonomy, in achieving this alignment?

Narratives were prepared on strategic alignment in 13 countries: Australia, Canada (Alberta, British Columbia, Ontario), China (Hong Kong), England, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Israel, Japan, (South) Korea, New Zealand, Singapore and the United States. Nine are high-performing, the exceptions being Australia, which provides the base for comparisons; Germany which is one of four federations in the study; Israel which is a participant in ISSAL but not high-performing; and New Zealand which is an often-compared neighbour. The narratives reveal that different levels of government make provision and provide support for professional autonomy in different ways. Based on principals' self-reports of school autonomy in PISA 2015 it was evident that some of the 13 countries were above and some were below the OECD average for school autonomy (OECD 2016a).

Fifteen benchmarks were identified in the analysis of findings. Rather than the traditional view that benchmarks specify structures and processes to which all jurisdictions should aspire or learn from, benchmarks refer to domains, structures, processes and outcomes on which nations can be compared in a descriptive rather than normative sense. There is a high level of commonality and interconnectivity across and within the benchmarks.

1. Trust

2. Educational history

3. Societal valuing of education

4. Priority attached to the human resource

5. Innovation in education

6. Alignment of education, economy and society

7. Constitutional arrangements

8. Number of levels of government

9. Establishment of current roles

10. Local government

11. Number of schools administered

12. Disruptive change in education

13. School autonomy

14. Professional capacity

15. Preparing for the future

The findings in these 2017 studies will be published in a new book to be published in 2018 as a sequel to *The Autonomy Premium*. It is likely to have the title of *The Alignment Premium* (Caldwell 2018). A first take on some of the findings and the application of most of the benchmarks as they might relate to IPS are set out below.

Australia does not place a high value on its schools compared to the top performers

Where does Australia stand on how it values its schools? I have selected the first six benchmarks to form a generally disappointing response to the question: trust; educational history; societal valuing of education; priority attached to the human resource; innovation in education; and alignment of education, economy and society. It is important to note that the benchmarks are not values in themselves but there are values at play in the way we deal with them in policy and practice. A more detailed exposition is contained in a paper in the Occasional Paper series of the Centre for Strategic Education (Caldwell 2017a) based on an

Invited Address hosted by Emmanuel College at the University of Queensland in May 2017 (Caldwell 2017b).

I thought for a time that I was a lone voice in offering such a pessimistic view, but the recent intervention of arguably the world's leading authority on international comparisons suggests that the view should be taken very seriously indeed. I am referring to Andreas Schleicher, Director-General of the OECD's Directorate for Education who has led PISA since its introduction. His article in *The Australian* on September 27, 2017 was published under the heading 'Putting a value on education' and compared Australia with the high-performing nations. He offered explanations for Australia's poor performance and had this to say about the value we place on education: 'The first thing I learned is that leaders in high-performing school systems have convinced their citizens to make choices that value education more than other things (Schleicher 2017: 12)'.

I am confident that IPS are well-placed to address this issue in Queensland in a way that can be shared across the system. What follows are some of the findings in our 2017 research with suggestions for how IPS can accomplish this.

Trust (Benchmark 1) among stakeholders is invariably listed as a characteristic of outstanding performance. Narratives on policy in school education in several countries referred to a high level of trust. It is particularly evident in some of the world's top-performing school systems, including Estonia, Finland, Japan and Singapore. There is evidence that principals in Finland do not engage in detailed oversight of teaching and learning to the extent they do or should do in many other countries, including Australia, because they trust their teachers to know what to do and when to do it, and this is related to outstanding programs in initial teacher education and the high level of professional autonomy of teachers.

Public discourse and media headlines often suggest a lower than desirable level of trust in schools and school systems in Australia. Frankly, I have seen no counterpart to the continuous battles between different levels of government that characterise the scene in Australia, and this does little to enhance public trust. I include here the debates and conflicts about funding for schools and approaches to initial teacher education that have raged for more than 50 years.

Most of the high-performing countries have a long educational history extending over many centuries (Benchmark 2). Australia, in contrast, has had systems of public education for less than 150 years. Australia does not value or have confidence in its public schools to anywhere near the same extent, as evident among the top performers where the importance of public education was established or resolved long ago. Settlement about the roles of public and private education has not been reached in Australia.

This does not mean that Australia will or should end up with close to 100 percent of schools in the public sector should it become a high-performing nation. After all, in another international comparison, less than 10 percent of students in high-performing Hong Kong attend a state-owned school. The large majority attend schools owned and operated by a private or not-for-profit entity, including churches.

Associated with the first two benchmarks (trust and educational history) is societal valuing of education (Benchmark 3). While there is acceptance of its importance in Australia, we fall short of societal valuing that is evident in the top performers.

There is realisation in some high-performing countries that the human resource is the most important resource in securing their future (Benchmark 4). Singapore is the stand-out example because the country has no resources other than its people. Education has been a driving factor in the journey from independence in 1965 to it being one of the region's economic powerhouses. A carefully designed and integrated approach to initial teacher education and leader development in Singapore is among the world's best (Darling-Hammond & Associates 2017).

The OECD reports that innovation in schools is generally more extensive than is often understood and this is the case in Australia (Benchmark 5). An important issue is the extent to which innovation in schools contributes to innovation in a general sense. It is noteworthy that all high-performing nations in PISA and TIMSS are in the top 25 of countries on the Global Innovation Index (Australia is 19th of 126 countries/economies).

An interesting variation on the language of innovation was provided by Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who noted in a speech at the World Economic Forum in 2016 that Canada, like Australia, had been known up to that point for the economic strength derived from mining and other commodities. Rather than call for innovation to generate other sources of economic strength he referred to resourcefulness: 'Canada was mostly known for its resources. I want you to know Canadians for our resourcefulness . . . We have a diverse and creative population, outstanding education and healthcare systems, and advanced infrastructure' (Trudeau 2017: 343). Resourcefulness may be a helpful concept for Australians who often baulk at the idea of innovation.

In most of the top-performing nations there is a strong alignment of education, economy and society (Benchmark 6). Where that alignment is not strong there is a high priority in policymaking to make it so. It is most striking in countries where the human resource is pre-eminent. In Australia we currently place a higher value on university education than on vocational education. Many of the top-performing countries have a system of basic education for nine years after which students make a choice between upper secondary education and polytechnic education. They may move from one stream to another if they change their minds, as is possible between continuing in universities or polytechnic colleges. Finland exemplifies this approach.

Did Australian states make the wrong decision to abandon technical schools in favour of a single secondary stream? A modern polytechnic at the upper levels of schooling could be state-of-the-art in terms of curriculum, pedagogy, facilities and equipment and may make a major contribution in addressing concerns about performance in STEM or alleviating the need for overseas recruitment.

Similar questions may be raised in relation to Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and special education, with several of the high performers doing significantly better than Australia.

The agenda for enhancing the value Australia places on its schools can be described in straightforward terms:

- bi-partisan effort everywhere, starting at least symbolically, with joint appearances by leaders of government and opposition in visits to schools, as they do in the bipartisan effort in defence and foreign affairs
- serious reform of initial teacher education
- empowering schools through higher levels of professional autonomy
- declaring and acting on recognition that our most importance resource is the human resource, and not waiting around for another boom, mining or otherwise
- invigorating an innovative culture in our schools by encouraging and rewarding resourcefulness
- securing a better alignment of education, society and economy, especially in re-balancing upper secondary and polytechnic education as well as university and vocational education; similarly, for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and special education

Opportunities for IPS

These are possible responses for Australia but what of Queensland and especially IPS? I hope you were pondering the possibilities as I summarised the international comparisons. It seems

to me – and therefore why I am excited to be with you today – that you are especially well-placed to accomplish great things. How can you do more to build the trust of your community in what is accomplished at your school? How can you do more to honour the history of your school and of public education in Queensland? While in Queensland and in many of your communities there has traditionally been strength in the agricultural and mining sectors but how can you help enhance the view that the human resource is the most important resource? Are innovations encouraged and the findings disseminated widely? How can you build stronger connections between education, economy and society in the program offered by your school and what structures and processes will facilitate this? Related questions may be posed in relation to other benchmarks.

Leadership and governance

International comparisons on another five benchmarks point to Australia's inertia on several issues and the need for new approaches to leadership and governance. I shall express some robust personal interpretations, with some being relevant to IPS, some not and some debatable.

Benchmark 7: Constitutional arrangements

Four federations were considered in the 2017 study. The federal government in Canada may play no part in education; in Germany it plays a limited role. Federal governments in Australia and the United States play an important role by making funds available to which strict conditions are attached. Local government has a role in most of the high performers, with this being a constitutional requirement in Finland. Local government is not mentioned in the Constitution of Australia and plays a minimal role.

A reform agenda that re-balances the roles of federal and state governments has stalled in Australia. There is a role for both levels of government but current arrangements for school education that lead to seemingly endless conflict on key issues such as funding and initial teacher education must change.

Benchmark 8: Number of levels of government

The number of levels of government is not associated with the level of performance in school education. High-performing countries like Japan and Korea have three levels but most have two; others like Hong Kong and Singapore have one. England has two but only one where academies and free schools have been removed from local authority control. Australia has two levels of government involved in schools.

Apart from the re-balancing described in Benchmark 7, new arrangements within states are warranted in Australia, as described in Benchmark 11.

Benchmark 9: Establishment of current roles

While current roles of government have been relatively stable in most countries, including Australia, several of the high-performing countries have established new roles for government only recently, notably Estonia, Finland, Japan, Korea and Singapore. New configurations of networks, federations, chains and trusts are emerging in England, representing an often-conflicting narrative in that country in relation to the role of local authorities. While state governments have established networks of schools, there has been negligible progress in Australia in establishing federations, chains and trusts, as in England, as a means of sharing resources.

New configurations are needed in Australia to ensure schools work together to make more effective use of resources.

Benchmark 10: Local government

A role for local government is a feature in the governance of schools in most countries, with Australia a notable exception. It is surprising that a country like top-performing Estonia has

more than 200 municipalities administering about 600 schools. School districts are considered a level of government in Canada and the United States and these play an important role even though their powers may be changed under provincial or state legislation. There is no level of government between states and schools in public education in Australia. Local government is not recognised in Australia's constitution and this approach is effectively 'blocked', even if was desirable.

New approaches to governance of public education are required in Australia to fill the space between state and school to ensure a better alignment of education, economy and society (see Benchmark 6) and support for schools. This is taken up in the discussion of Benchmark 11.

Benchmark 11: Number of schools administered

Associated with Benchmark 10 is the number of schools administered by a democratically-elected government. This is strikingly small in countries like Estonia and Finland (municipal government), and to some extent England (local authority) and Canada and the United States (school district). It is very large in some *länder* in Germany and states in Australia, notably in New South Wales and Victoria where the state government controls thousands of schools (about 2150 and 1530 government schools in 2016, respectively). Geographic distances are especially large in states like Queensland (about 1230 government schools) and Western Australia (about 800 government schools). Regional levels of administration in state bureaucracies are not considered levels of government.

Consider the distances involved. In Western Australia the distance from Perth to Halls Creek is 2854 km by air, more than the distance from London to Moscow (2500 km). In Queensland, the distance from Brisbane to Aurukun is 1979 km by air via Cairns, more than a flight from London to Helsinki (1822 km). In New South Wales, the distance from Sydney to Broken Hill is 940 km by air, virtually the same as a flight from London to Berlin (932 km). The numbers of schools and the distances involved would make no sense to the top-performers.

New arrangements are needed in Australia to achieve manageability of schools so that each level of governance has responsibility for a much smaller number. New stakeholders from a range of public and private endeavours in sectors other than education should be involved rather than almost exclusive reliance on professional educators at all levels, no matter how skilled and well-intentioned they may be. It is not helpful to claim that arrangements for governance in Australia made sense in the 19th century and that there is no need for change given the way distance is irrelevant in this age of technology. Besides, most states have tried virtually every permutation and combination of organisational arrangements and there is little evidence that one is more effective than another.

It is tempting to go for an option for most states to engage in serious devolution to establish elected autonomous authorities with governing bodies representing diverse stakeholders. Their directors of education would be employed by and accountable to them rather than the current line of authority to a distant CEO located as far away as London is from Moscow or Berlin or Helsinki. Under these arrangements, the 'centre' is engaged mainly in strategic matters. Apart from the disruptive features of such profound change, this option may result in a multitude of bureaucracies with minimal effect, creating the same circumstances that led to a diminution of the powers of local authorities in England.

Another option, following the lead of England (that outperformed Australia on all TIMSS tests in 2015) is to create free-standing academies each with its own elected governing body, or to create federations, chains and trusts (Multi-Academy Trusts – MATs) of publicly-funded networks of schools, each with a common governing authority. The jury is still out, so to speak, on the effectiveness of such arrangements, with Toby Greany, a leader in research on MATs (Greany & Waterhouse 2016) (see also Department for Education 2016, Greany 2016, National College for Teaching and Leadership 2015 for further information about MATs).

A third option [and there are many more] is an Australian response to the question 'Are cities the new countries?' being one of five trends shaping education around the world as identified by the OECD (OECD 2016c) (the others are 'globalisation', 'the future of the nation-state', 'family matters' and ''a brave new world'). 'Some have argued that cities are now the most relevant level of governance, small enough to react swiftly and responsively to issues and large enough to hold economic and political power' (OECD 2016c: 10). We have several big cities in Australia that could be one level of governance in this country. This is an interesting counterpoint to some high-performing countries that are very small, with populations that would make them small cities or suburbs of cities in countries with larger populations. Other levels of governance should bring services closer to schools in regional, remote and very remote settings.

It may be that a hybrid will emerge from efforts to transform the governance of schools in a way that delivers better support and an arrangement that ensures those employed at a system level have realistic and satisfying roles. We have had one-way-suits-all for well over a century and it is time to seriously seek an alternative.

Opportunities for IPS

These benchmarks raise fresh challenges and suggest new opportunities for all governments, schools and school systems. I have been briefed on the findings of the recent survey of principals and council members in IPS and it is evident that good progress is being made in many areas. Perhaps the biggest challenge lies in engaging the local community and creating new partnerships. These are expectations for IPS. As the findings on the benchmarks suggest, it is not a strong or enduring aspect of the governance of public schools in Australia. There are powerful and seemingly intractable historical and cultural issues, yet some of your schools are doing very well. It is important to share information on the underlying strategies that have led to their success.

It is also important not to set too high an expectation in this regard for all schools in all settings. While more time is required to change the culture, it may simply be too high an expectation for some. Therefore, experience in countries like England where federations, chains and trusts have been set up is of interest, with member schools maintaining their own identities. It may be that networked patterns of governance with a range of stakeholder engagement should be trialled, which may also serve to strengthen the link between education, economy and society described earlier. If successful there be many such arrangements across IPS and eventually for all schools. You will be helping set a new standard for leadership and governance of schools in Australia. Design and delivery will of course be a challenge but the effort will be worthwhile.

CONCLUSION

In late 2016 OECD published an analysis of data gathered in its 2013 Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), in this instance focusing on school leadership (OECD 2016b). I cited it earlier. Andreas Schleicher wrote the Foreword and included the following statement that contains a broad if not global view of what effective leaders do, and it captures the essence of professional autonomy.

> It is easy to know effective school leadership when you see it in action, but it is much harder to describe, define and measure it. To make a difference in school and student performance, school leaders need to be able to adapt teaching programs to local needs, promote teamwork among teachers, and engage in teacher monitoring, evaluation and professional development. They need discretion in setting strategic direction, and the ability to develop school plans and monitor progress towards goals, using data to improve practice. They also need to have a say in who gets hired as teachers to improve the match between candidates and their school's needs. Last, but

not least, they need to help build and participate in networks of schools to stimulate and spread innovation (OECD 2016b: 3)

Leaders at all levels must now give thought to arrangements that suit the 21st century. This in no way diminishes what has been achieved for nearly 150 years in this country, but serious questions must now be asked and answered to ensure that Australia can indeed rise to the top ten of high-performing nations. Queensland's IPS have an important role to play.

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