PRINCIPAL AUTONOMY RESEARCH PROJECT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Objectives

The objectives of the project were to:

- Provide an overview of current school autonomy practices and recent trends towards greater principal autonomy in the State and Territory jurisdictions and sectors across Australia;
- Identify strengths and weaknesses in current models of autonomy;
- Document school leaders’ views about school autonomy in relation to improved student outcomes, school staffing, budget and other aspects of school operations; and school leader well-being;
- Identify and analyse international educational research relating to models of school autonomy and improved school effectiveness; and
- Identify effective models of principal autonomy.

Current practice and recent trends in school and principal autonomy

- Different approaches are evident in each state and territory. No school, either government or non-government, has full autonomy.
- Principals in Victoria have a higher level of autonomy than in any other system of government schools.
- All jurisdictions have attempted to provide principals with an opportunity to influence the selection of staff for their schools.
- Complexity in exercising principal autonomy has resulted from increased policy intervention by both the Australian Government and State and Territory Governments.

Strengths and weaknesses in current approaches

- There is general acceptance of the view that a degree of autonomy is necessary if schools are to respond to the expectations of their communities and the mix of student needs in the local setting.
- Principals accept the need for accountability and seek to exercise a higher level of educational leadership.
- There is a wide range of interest and capacity within each jurisdiction in taking up the amount of autonomy that is currently available.
- Administrative support for government schools is inadequate given expectations for schools and in comparison to the support for principals in most independent schools.
- There are less innovative approaches to autonomy of a kind gaining momentum in other places, especially academies in England and charter schools in Canada and the United States.

Principals views on the impact of principal autonomy on student outcomes, school operations and school leader well-being

- Principals acknowledge a relatively centralised leadership approach may be most appropriate for schools in regional and remote areas, but emphasised that a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach is not supported.
- Principals explained the relationship between autonomy and student outcomes, primarily in terms of responsiveness to community expectations and individual student needs.
- Principals generally sought greater involvement in the selection and performance management of staff as well as greater flexibility in the management of school budgets, where this could be managed without substantial additional workloads.
• The workload associated with regulatory compliance was a concern for many
government school principals, who called for additional support with this (in line with that
available to principals in independent schools).
• Surveys of principals conducted by professional associations reveal a high level of
commitment to their work but also high levels of stress, often accompanied by diagnosed
medical conditions. In this study, however, there was no clear causal link between
principal autonomy and dysfunctional stress.

International research on autonomy and effectiveness

• Early research on the impact of principal autonomy on school effectiveness was
generally inconclusive, possibly due to unreliable data and lack of explicit linkages
between autonomy, teaching and learning.
• More recent research at both macro- and micro-levels confirms the links between
autonomy and student outcomes where the focus is on learning, capacity building and
the effective use of data. The importance of the role of the principal is also confirmed in
this research.
• A broad resource base including intellectual, financial, social and spiritual capital
supports strong performance in schools, with intellectual capital (the knowledge and
skills of teachers and those who support them) being most important.
• Factors that appear to affect the influence of autonomy on school outcomes include
principal professionalism, flexibility in governance, a systemic understanding of
leadership, levels of choice and competition, funding arrangements, and accountability
practices.
• Comprehensive and continuous professional development of principals is critical for
establishing and maintaining the link between autonomy and effectiveness.

Effective Models of Autonomy

An objective of the project was to outline effective models of autonomy that reflected the
findings, drawing on research on the links between autonomy and student outcomes, and what
was found in the study of policy and practice in jurisdictions around the country. The findings of
this report suggest that there are several issues that are relevant when considering ways to
frame principal autonomy in Australian schools. These are discussed in more detail in Chapter
15 and include accompanying implications. In summary they are:

Legislation

Current practices in principal autonomy vary between jurisdictions, but all exist within the
provisions of the Schools Assistance (Learning Together – Achievement through Choice and
Opportunity) 2004 Act (the Act). The Act refers to ‘strengthened autonomy’ within a supportive
framework of broad systemic policies. Selection of staff is a key issue, with the Act noting
selection should be made with the approval of the principal or governing body of the school. The
level of autonomy suggested by such an arrangement is less than that available to principals in
comparable countries (such as the US and UK). However, it is more than that available to
Australian principals during much of the last century. The Act provides a useful legislative
foundation on which to further develop policies and programmes supporting principal autonomy.

The ‘default position’ on centralisation and decentralisation

The traditional ‘default position’ in school governance in Australia has been ‘centralisation’. A
more balanced position between centralisation and decentralisation has only occurred in the
face of powerful external criticism, recommendations from major committees of inquiry, and
changes in society that place more value on participation. While acknowledging that frameworks
of curriculum, standards and accountabilities will remain more-or-less centralised, the possibility
of a new ‘default position’ of ‘decentralisation’ for school operations was canvassed, with
exceptions being made on criteria of feasibility and efficiency. There is evidence that some states and territories are moving to this position.

*Complexity in locus of decision-making*

Australia’s federal system means school decision-making involves multiple levels of government, leading to a more complex system than in any comparable country except the United States. School autonomy in Australia must therefore be considered within the context of constitutional arrangements.

The possibility of reducing this level of complexity was canvassed, with particular attention being given to the development of national frameworks with states and territories providing enhanced support for more autonomous schools. Such an approach would require high levels of cooperation between Commonwealth and States and Territories and a significant change in the way decisions are made.

*Unanimous support for not adopting a one-size-fits-all approach to autonomy*

While principals expressed a preference for more autonomy in some matters, there was no call, either from principals or officers in education departments for the same approach to be adopted for all schools in every setting. All interviewees recognised that a high level of autonomy is simply not feasible for schools in remote or difficult-to-staff locations.

*Stress, autonomy and the support of principals*

There is little or no evidence to suggest that higher levels of autonomy for schools and their principals have led or are likely to lead to higher levels of stress. The issue was addressed directly in meetings of executives of principals’ associations and in focus groups and there is near unanimity that the problematic aspects of the principal’s role are directly related to the complexity of schooling, higher expectations for what should be accomplished by schools, and inadequate support. It is apparent that leaders in government and to some extent systemic Catholic schools lack the internal support that is evident in large independent schools.

*Autonomy and governance*

An important and fundamental issue is how governance is conceived. For many, the issue is largely concerned with roles and responsibilities, and what are the respective roles of board and principal. For others it is understood more broadly as the process through which the school builds its intellectual, social, financial and spiritual capital and aligns them to achieve its goals. While government schools in the states and territories have a connection with and draw on the support of bodies such as parents and friends associations and the like, there are few instances where there are governing bodies such as school councils or school boards, with significant authority and responsibility of the kind exercised by counterparts in independent schools and to a lesser degree, systemic Catholic schools. Most independent schools have adopted models of governance that assign the powers of a board of directors to such bodies.

*Impact of autonomy on learning outcomes*

Participants in interviews and focus groups generally described the links between autonomy and student outcomes terms of a response to the particular needs, interests, aptitudes and achievements of students in the local setting. Particular emphasis was given to getting the ‘right mix’ of staff and to building capacity through professional development. Variations in the extent to which schools achieved such a mix were apparent. There was no evidence that principals are, or would like to, attempt to influence schools’ aggregate student outcomes through discriminatory student selection.
Autonomy and needs-based funding of schools

Measures in recent decades to increase principal autonomy in Australia and elsewhere have included increased budgetary autonomy, to allow schools to better meet local priorities. The general trend in Australia has been gradual increases in the discretionary portion, and relaxation of restrictions on how funds are allocated; provided local decisions are legal and consistent with system-wide policies. This trend has been particularly pronounced in Victoria, where about 94 percent of the recurrent budget for schools is available for local decision-making.

There are three major issues to be addressed in the adoption of needs-based funding (the allocation of funds weighted to reflect student and school characteristics). The first is to determine a mechanism for allocating funds to schools. The approach that has been refined in Victoria over the last decade is generally recognised as an international exemplar. The second is to deploy funds within the school in a manner that reflects local priorities. There are many examples of exemplary approaches around the country that focus on strategies to make the links between autonomy and improved learning outcomes. The third is the basis for allocating funds to schools where staffing is included in the resource package. This currently applies to Victoria. Alternatives to ensure a more equitable distribution of intellectual capital across schools in a system of education were canvassed.

Differences among principals in interest and expertise in autonomy

There were variations in the exercise of autonomy between individual principals, and these were sometimes as marked as those between jurisdictions and sectors. There are implications in this for the preparation and professional development of current and aspiring leaders. Professional development should focus to a large extent on areas of knowledge and skill around which there is consensus on how to make the link between autonomy and learning outcomes.

Elements of an effective model of autonomy

Taking into account the above issues and the evidence from research and the case study investigations in this report an effective model for the practice of principal autonomy should comprise the following considerations:

- **Flexibility:**
  - School settings are varied, and guidelines or regulations setting parameters for principal autonomy should allow flexibility in autonomy practices to meet individual school and student needs.
  - A 'one-size-fits-all' approach within a jurisdiction or within a school system is unlikely to be successful.
  - Principal responsibilities include both administrative management and educational leadership activities. The scope of a principal for autonomous action may vary between these two areas of activity.

- **Training:**
  - The unique role of principal requires that aspirants to the position receive appropriate and adequate pre-service training.
  - This may include formal training in financial management, human resource management, and pedagogical leadership.
  - It may also include, where possible, practical pre-service experience of the role, for example through working alongside experienced principals.

- **On-going Support:**
  - Following initial training, appropriate and adequate on-going support must be available to all practicing principals. This could include:
    - Periodic training in all aspects of the principalship, including financial management and educational leadership.
    - In-service support as required, including for example, mentoring from experienced principals.
• Transparency and Accountability:
  o All Australian schools receive some public funding. As such, absolute and unaccountable independence is not possible. Autonomy must operate with reference to transparent legal and procedural norms.
  o There must be clear and mutually accepted methods for communication and accountability between schools/principals and funding providers.

Principal autonomy will be most successful where the principal has the full support of the school community, including the parent body and the school board or council. Effective communication between all groups is important in this regard.

Principal autonomy should be framed in individual school contexts with the explicit aim of furthering student learning and development.
CHAPTER 1  INTRODUCTION

The project had its origins in representations by the national principals’ associations in 2005 to the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) following the publication of *The Privilege and the Price* (Department of Education and Training, 2004), a cooperative study of the Department of Education and Training (Victoria), the Victorian Primary Principals’ Association and the Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals. The study found that principals welcomed the higher level of autonomy that had been achieved in recent years but expressed serious concerns about workload, wellbeing and work-life balance. Surveys in other states led the peak principals’ associations, including those representing Catholic and independent schools, to seek a national study of the issues.

Through the *Schools Assistance (Learning Together – Achievement Through Choice and Opportunity) Act 2004* (the Act), the Australian Government has encouraged greater levels of autonomy for principals. All state and territory education authorities are required to give principals and governing bodies of schools, strengthened autonomy over, and responsibility for, staffing, educational programmes, and other aspects of school operations.

DEST wished to obtain detailed and up-to-date information on the outcomes of principal and school governing body ‘autonomy’, nationally and its impact on student learning across jurisdictions and sectors in Australia. It commissioned the Principal Autonomy Research Project (referred to throughout the report as ‘the project’ or ‘the current project’). There was common ground between principals’ associations and the Australian Government in undertaking the project with the primary interest of the latter being the relationship between autonomy and student outcomes.

Chapter 1 addresses the objectives and intended outcomes of the project, provides summaries of the methodology for the different components of the project, explores the concept of autonomy, summarises the history of school autonomy in Australia along with recent international developments, and concludes with an outline of the 15 chapters and two appendices.

Objectives and intended outcomes

The objective of the project is to provide a report to inform DEST’s policy development relating to school leader autonomy by documenting and analysing the extent of school leader autonomy and its impact on student learning across jurisdictions and sectors in Australia.

Educational Transformations Pty Ltd (referred to throughout the report as ‘the consultant’) was commissioned to conduct the project and deliver a comprehensive report that outlines the extent and success of the current models of school leader autonomy (including current practices relating to the Act) and their impact on student learning in each state and territory in Australia. This report is contained in the pages that follow. The report:

- Provides an overview of current principal autonomy practices and recent trends towards greater principal autonomy in state and territory jurisdictions and sectors across Australia;
- Identifies strengths and weaknesses in current models of autonomy;
- Documents school leaders’ views about school autonomy in relation to improved student outcomes, school staffing, budget and other aspects of school operations; and school leader well-being;
- Identifies and analyses international educational research relating to models of school autonomy and improved school effectiveness; and
- Identifies effective models of principal autonomy.
A Reference Group was established to provide guidance on the conduct of the project. This group included representatives of national primary and secondary principals’ associations, associations for the heads of Catholic and independent schools, and representatives from national parents’ associations and state school organisations. The following are brief descriptions of the seven components of the project and related methodologies.

(a) Conduct a national mapping exercise to determine the current models of school leader autonomy

Information on patterns of principal autonomy was requested of government school systems in each state and territory; systems of non-government schools, of which Catholic systems are one kind, albeit the largest; and organisations that represent independent non-government schools. In addition to information about the extent of school autonomy, details of authorities, responsibilities and accountabilities were also sought, with a focus on the role of the principal. There are different patterns of governance within the different systems of government schools as well as among non-government schools, for example, roles of school councils (government schools) and school boards (non-government schools, including where members have the powers of boards of directors).

A template was developed to map the current models. The template extended and adapted to the Australian setting the approach adopted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The OECD conducted surveys among its 30 members and 20 partner nations to determine patterns of centralisation and decentralisation (OECD, 2004). It considered the locus and mode of decision-making in four domains. Locus referred to which of six levels decisions were made: national, state, regional, municipal, local, or school. Mode referred to which of four ways decisions were made: full autonomy at the level concerned, in consultation with other bodies at that level, independently but within a framework set by a higher authority, or other. The four domains were organisation of instruction, personnel management, planning and structures, and resources. The OECD report provided comparisons among nations participating in the survey but did not differentiate among states and territories in Australia.

(b) Conduct and analyse a number of case studies (up to 12) that demonstrate how school leader autonomy is implemented nationally

These case studies of schools reflected the different models of school leader autonomy throughout the nation. These include one account for each state and territory (8), two from contrasting approaches in systems of Catholic education (2) and two from independent non-government schools (2). While it was not possible to provide a representative sample, each study broadly reflects the approach in the various jurisdictions. For the nation as a whole, there is representation of primary and secondary schools, large and small schools, urban and rural / remote schools, high and low socio-economic communities, and cultural mix of students, including Indigenous students.

(c) Conduct a literature review of national and international research on school leader autonomy and improved student outcomes

The consultant conducted an exhaustive review of research on the impact of school leader autonomy on improved student outcomes and on the workload and personal wellbeing of principals. Issues in design and implementation of approaches to autonomy were identified.

Four people agreed to serve as international corresponding consultants. These were Professor Brent Davies, University of Hull; Professor Michael Fullan, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE); Professor David Hopkins, Institute of Education at the University of London; and Steve Marshall, Director of Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills, Wales. Each has worked in or studied systems of education that have a relatively high degree of autonomy or have engaged in related studies. Each has a familiarity with the Australian scene (Steve Marshall is former Chief Executive, Education and Children’s Services, South Australia). These
consultants provided recommendations on recent literature and reviewed a draft of all sections of the report that drew on the body of related research.

(d) Provide a comparative national review of the roles of principals according to varying degrees of school autonomy

The methodology for (a), above, included a focus on the role of the principal. Interviews and focus group discussions were organised with leaders of principals’ associations and representative groups of principals. Attention was also given to the roles of principals in relation to the authority, responsibility and accountability of governing bodies. Interviews were conducted with senior leaders at the system level to obtain their perspectives on the roles of principals and issues associated with past, present and potential future changes in role. Interactive computer-based technology enabled the participation of large numbers of people in focus group work.

(e) Identify and analyse international educational research related to models of school autonomy and improved school effectiveness

This objective is related to (c) above but has a broader focus on effectiveness, which includes student outcomes but addresses other indicators of school effectiveness. School improvement and school autonomy are different but related fields of research, policy and practice and account was taken of the difference.

(f) Summarise emerging issues related to school leader autonomy

Several issues have been highlighted in previous surveys and publications: the workload for school leaders, the declining number of applicants to the principalship, the amount of management support, and personal wellbeing, as indicated by levels of stress and ill-health for principals. The strength of these concerns was explored in interviews and focus groups. Related findings in research and the literature on school leader autonomy were considered.

(g) Identify implications for education policy

The purpose of this project is ‘to provide a report to inform DEST’s policy development in relation to principal autonomy’. The report includes an account of current practices related to the Schools Assistance (Learning Together – Achievement Through Choice and Opportunity) Act 2004. Target groups/clients include primary and secondary principals across the government and Catholic and independent sectors of Australian schooling in the eight states and territories.

Provisions of the 2004 Act

The project called for a comprehensive report that outlines the extent and success of current models of school leader autonomy, including current practices relating to the Act. It is helpful to set out at this point, and make brief introductory comments on, the requirements of the Act as they pertain to autonomy.

There are two parts of the Schools Assistance (Learning Together – Achievement Through Choice and Opportunity) Act 2004, on matters with which States and Territories must comply, which refer to autonomy – (k) and (l) in Division 4 (government schools) and (k) and (l) (non-government schools). These requirements are set out below:

Division 2: Grants for Government Schools

(k) a commitment by the State to give the principal, and the governing body, of each government school in the State strengthened autonomy over, and responsibility for, education programmes, staffing, budget and other aspects of the school’s operations within a supportive framework of broad systemic policies; and
without limiting paragraph (k), a commitment by the State that appointments of staff in each government school in the State will be made with the approval of the principal, or the governing body, of the school;

Division 4: Grants for Non-Government Schools

(k) a commitment by the relevant authority to give the principal, and the governing body, of the school, or each school in the approved school system strengthened autonomy over, and responsibility for, education programmes, staffing, budget and other aspects of the school’s, or each of the schools’ operations within a supportive framework of broad systemic policies;

(l) without limiting paragraph (k), a commitment by the relevant authority that:

(i) appointments of staff in the school or each school in the approved school system will be made with the approval of the principal, or the governing body, of the school or each of those schools, and

(ii) in the case of a Catholic school, such appointments will take account of the relationship of the school with the bishop, parish priests and the leadership of religious organisations;

Several elements of these provisions are noteworthy. First, they refer only to ‘strengthened autonomy’, which implies a higher level of authority than is currently the case in relation to education programmes, staffing, budget and other aspects of the school operations. Second, there is explicit recognition that the autonomy described in the legislation is not autonomy in its literal sense, for there is recognition in each instance that change will occur ‘within a supportive framework of broad systemic policies’. The concepts of self-management or local management or school-based management as described above may be better descriptors of what is set out in the Act. As far as the mapping undertaken in different jurisdictions across Australia is concerned, as reported in Chapters 5 to 14, there is acknowledgement that it is ‘framed autonomy’. Third, it is also noteworthy that particular circumstances are recognised for Catholic schools and their relationship with individuals and organisations in the Catholic sector, that is, there is a particular aspect of framed autonomy that applies to Catholic schools. Fourth, there is no expectation in the Act that the school itself, or its principal, in government schools should be directly involved in the selection of staff, only that the appointment is to be made ‘with the approval of the principal’. As we shall see, the matter of establishing machinery at the school level for receiving applications and appointing selection committees is a significant workload issue for some principals.

The concept of autonomy

The project is concerned with schools that are typically classified as state, government or public schools rather than those that are normally referred to as private, non-government or independent schools. Charter schools (United States) and academies or trust schools (England) are considered in the first category because they are particular classes of school in a state, government or public school system although they enjoy a relatively high degree of autonomy. It is acknowledged that private, non-government or independent schools in Australia would be described as ‘maintained schools’ within the state, government or public sector in England and Wales because they charge no fees for tuition and are substantially funded from the public purse. Private or independent schools in England and Wales receive no funding from the public purse.

It is important at the outset to clarify the concept of autonomy. The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary defines autonomy as ‘the quality of state of being self-governing or ‘self-directing freedom and especially moral independence’. The Merriam-Webster Online Thesaurus refers to
‘the state of being free from the control or power of another’. The principal concept related to autonomy is freedom which has a second meaning of ‘the right to act or move freely’.

Taken literally, as in the foregoing definitions, school autonomy or principal autonomy implies a degree of freedom that does not exist in any system of public education and it is becoming increasingly rare to find it in non-public schools that receive funds from the public purse. Such schools are constrained to the extent that their autonomy is framed by the requirement of accountability for the use of those funds which, in most countries, are conditional on the delivery or at least a local adaptation of a curriculum that must be followed by all schools in receipt of public funds. Autonomy is constrained even in those schools that have generally been described as autonomous, including charter schools in Canada and the United States, and the now abandoned policies on grant-maintained schools in England or self-governing schools in Victoria.

Despite the foregoing, the concept of autonomy is widely used, although it is qualified in certain ways in both policy and practice. In England, for example, the notion of ‘earned autonomy’ has been adopted and shaped by the Education Act 2002 and Education Act 2005. Former Secretary of State for Education and Skills Charles Clarke described it as follows: ‘I believe it is important to accelerate the process whereby schools can earn still greater freedoms by demonstrating that they really earned it. This is ‘earned autonomy’ where schools can demonstrate that they are really well managed, well led and so are really good performers’ (Clarke, 2002). Freedoms provided by ‘earned autonomy’ were freedom to shape curriculum to the needs of students and the local community, reward teachers and deploy staff in new ways, and greater financial freedom with multi-year budgets. The concept was developed further in the Five-Year Strategy for Children and Learners in 2004 in the context of secondary schools:

[The aim is] to ensure that every parent can choose an excellent secondary school for their child. At its heart is the development of independent specialist schools in place of the traditional comprehensive – a decisive system-wide advance. We are not creating a new category of schools – rather, giving more independence to all schools within a specialist system. Our best schools already have many of the characteristics we want for every school: autonomy, specialism, freedom of heads and governors to manage and personalise their provision, and an ethos of success and community responsibility . . .

For schools that are failing to reach their full potential, it will encourage greater independence as they are able and willing to take it on. In areas of failure and under-performance, it will equip schools with the leadership capacity essential for successful self-governance, while also opening up provision to a range of new sponsors, through the academies program and the creation of other new schools to meet parental demand. (DfES, 2004a, p. 44)

This statement declares an intention to ‘encourage greater independence [for schools] as they are able and willing to take it on’. The key words ‘able’ and ‘willing’ suggest that ‘earned autonomy’ occurs in a framework that prefers all schools to have ‘greater independence’ but that there must be a capacity to take it up and that there is a degree of discretion in the willingness of schools to take up the freedoms that are available. Further background on the concept of ‘earned autonomy’ in England is included in Appendix 2.

In the course of consultations in the current project, the concept of ‘intelligent autonomy’ was proposed by a leader of a national principals’ association. This is a counterpart to the concept of ‘intelligent accountability’ coined by former Minister of State for School Standards in the UK David Miliband which calls for a combination of approaches to accountability that blends a top-down framework and a school capacity for continuous self-review. Michael Fullan includes ‘intelligent accountability’ in his list of eight elements of leadership sustainability (Fullan, 2005, pp. 19-22). ‘Intelligent autonomy’ accommodates the concept of ‘intelligent accountability’ to achieve a balance of centralisation and decentralisation.
The concept of ‘intelligent autonomy’ is similar to the notion of ‘subsidiarity’ that has been widely adopted in Catholic circles. As expressed in classical terms: ‘It is unjust and a gravely harmful disturbance of right order to turn over to a greater society of higher rank, functions and services which can be performed by lesser bodies on a lower plane’ (attributed to Pope Pius X1 cited here from Saskatchewan School Trustees’ Association, 1976, p. ii). Michael Strembitsky, former Superintendent of Schools in the Edmonton Public School District in Canada, a system of public education that was a pioneer in school-based management, suggested that ‘whatever can best be done at the school level should be done at that level, as opposed to having those functions performed from a centralized location removed from the scene of the action’ (Strembitsky, 1973).

It is therefore concluded from an exploration of the concept of autonomy that it is neither desirable nor feasible to have anything other than a constrained or qualified form of autonomy. The central issues are the degree of freedom available to the school or principal and the extent to which such freedom is utilised.

It is for the reasons set out above that concepts other than autonomy have been used in descriptions of policy and practice in different countries. In several countries, the concept of local management has been adopted. This is the case in England and in some parts of Australia. In the United States, the concept of school-based management is preferred. A more generic concept that is evident in reports of policy and practice in many countries is that of the self-managing school.

A self-managing school is a school in a system of education to which there has been decentralised a significant amount of authority and responsibility to make decisions related to the allocation of resources within a centrally determined framework of goals, policies, standards and accountabilities (Caldwell and Spinks, 1998, pp. 4-5).

In this view of the self-managing school, resources are defined broadly to include matters related to teaching and learning, staffing and remuneration, curriculum and educational planning, and finance and facilities.

While the project and much of the report refers to school autonomy or principal autonomy, it is important to state at the outset that this is constrained. The concept of the self-managing school may be more appropriate. It is consistent with the notion of ‘intelligent autonomy’. As noted above, the central issue is the degree of freedom that the school and therefore its principal has or is willing or able to take up in operating in a framework of goals, policies, standards and accountabilities set at a high level.

**Autonomy and governance**

Issues in autonomy are inextricably linked to issues in governance. A shift in the balance of centralisation and decentralisation inevitably involves a change in arrangements for governance, that is, changes in the structures and processes for decision-making. Ron Glatter, Visiting Research Professor in Education and former Professor of Educational Administration and Management at the Open University in England, suggests that changes in governance in school systems results in a number of tensions: between system coherence and fragmentation, between institutional autonomy and the wider community and public interest, between diversity and equity, between competition and collaboration, and between central and local decision-making (Glatter, 2003, p. 229) These tensions are evident in Australia.

Glatter described four models of governance (Competitive Market, School Empowerment, Local Empowerment and Quality Control) that reflect different patterns of autonomy. He puts forward a fifth to reflect emerging interest in ‘learning organisations’ (Learning System). The five models are summarised in Table 1.1.
Table 1.1 Models of governance reflecting different patterns of autonomy  
(based on Glatter, 2003, p. 230 and p. 234)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Models</th>
<th>Competitive market (CM)</th>
<th>School empowerment (SE)</th>
<th>Local empowerment (LE)</th>
<th>Quality control (QC)</th>
<th>Learning system (LS)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indicative policies</td>
<td>Pupil-number-led funding, e.g. by vouchers</td>
<td>Authority devolved to school on finance, staffing, curriculum, student admissions</td>
<td>Authority devolved to locality on finance, staffing, curriculum, student admissions</td>
<td>Regular, systematic inspections</td>
<td>Reform by small steps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More open enrolment</td>
<td>Substantial powers for school council/governing body</td>
<td>Substantial powers for local community council/governing body</td>
<td></td>
<td>Detailed performance targets</td>
<td>Focus on evidence-informed policy and practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Published data on school performance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety of school types</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main perspective(s)</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>Political and/or managerial</td>
<td>Political and/or managerial</td>
<td>Bureaucratic</td>
<td>Developmental</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How the individual school is viewed</td>
<td>As a small business</td>
<td>As a participatory community</td>
<td>One of a ‘family’ of local schools</td>
<td>As a point of delivery/local outlet</td>
<td>As a creative, linked unit within the wider system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main focus within the system</td>
<td>The relevant competitive arena</td>
<td>The individual school</td>
<td>The locality as a social and educational unit</td>
<td>Central or other state bodies</td>
<td>The connections between stakeholder groups and between system levels</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At first sight, some of the earlier initiatives in school autonomy in Australia are consistent with the Local Empowerment model, with more recent developments being an amalgam of Competitive Market, School Empowerment and Quality Control. Recent calls for an evidence base to policy and practice, encouragement of innovation, and networking professional knowledge suggest that the Learning System (LS) model should be added to the amalgam. In a recent presentation to a conference of the Presidency of the European Union, some four years after his initial proposal, Glatter recommended the LS model in the following terms while endorsing aspects of the other models:

The picture of the school in this model is of a creative unit, well-connected to the wider system. The main focus or centre of gravity is not any one unit, whether the school or the centre, but the connections between the various interest or stakeholder groups and also those between the different levels of the system. However you should not see this as a utopian model, purely rationalist and technocratic. It is nothing of the kind. There must be ideological and political dispute within it. The tensions and dilemmas … are real...
and will remain, as will differences of power and ideology. This is not a recipe for bland consensus-seeking because the contest of ideas and solutions plays a vital role in the enhancement of learning. But it assumes a climate of trust and tolerance. The emphasis is on the quality of relationships (Glatter, 2007).

**Autonomy and Leadership**

The distinction between leadership and management was taken up in the course of the project. Kotter’s distinction is helpful, as summarised in Table 1.1.

**Table 1.2 The distinction between leadership and management**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Management</th>
<th>Leadership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planning and budgeting</td>
<td>Establishing direction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organising and staffing</td>
<td>Aligning people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlling and problem-solving</td>
<td>Motivating and inspiring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Producing a degree of predictability</td>
<td>Achieving change</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Leadership involves those activities in the right column of Table 1.1. It is important to note that leadership does not involve actions on the part of one person only. There may be many leaders within a school. There is alignment of management processes, as listed in the left column, with elements in leadership. If leadership involves establishing direction, then moving in that direction calls for planning and the preparation of a budget. If people are to be aligned, then an important aspect of management is securing the best people for the task (staffing) and getting some structure in the operation (organising). A measure of control is required in matters such as implementation of the budget. Problems will arise and these must be resolved to keep the enterprise on track. Change with moral purpose is desired. Barber and Fullan (2005) describe ‘moral purpose’ as ‘constantly improving student achievement and ensuring that achievement gaps, wherever they exist, are narrowed. In short, it’s about raising the bar and narrowing the gap’.

All who work in the organisation, however, yearn for stability and predictability in the way they go about it.

School and principal autonomy are concerned with both management and leadership. As we shall see, undue emphasis on management at the expense of leadership was a concern to members of the project reference group and was evident in discussions with principals in every state and territory.

**Brief history of school and principal autonomy in Australia**

Interest in more autonomy for schools and principals in Australia is not a recent phenomenon and a summary of developments since the establishment of systems of public education in the late 19th century is contained in Appendix 1.

Debates about the efficacy of autonomy, while often presented as ideologically or politically driven at the time they occur, transcend party lines if developments are viewed in a longer time frame. This is particularly the case in Australia following the landmark report of the Interim Committee of the Australian Schools Commission in 1973 (the Karmel Report). While prepared at a time of important social movements that were associated with greater freedom and openness, there was a powerful educational rationale given the serious inequities across government and non-government schools, and evidence to suggest that schools were not well
connected to their local communities and did not offer programmes that reflected the particular mix of educational needs in schools that had more diverse student characteristics than had been the case in the past.

Many of the programmes of the Australian (later Commonwealth) Schools Commission required consultation with local communities and some of the more significant autonomous practices that evolved over 30 years can be traced back to such a requirement and societal expectations at the time that communities should have a greater role in governance.

These developments should also be understood against a broader critique that had been offered in the quarter-century before the Karmel Report, and even back to the time of the creation of state systems of education, when international observers, in particular, drew attention to the highly centralised nature of public education in Australia.

There has been an ebb and flow in the constrained form of autonomy in recent times, most often as part of efforts to restructure systems of public education. Few governments of any persuasion were satisfied with arrangements when they took office. Sometimes the rhetoric, if not the reality of the times were adopted, either by proponents or critics, exemplified in the view that autonomy allowed market forces to prevail and that competition would drive up standards. Such a promise or claim seems more appropriate to decisions to abandon attendance zones allowing parents to send their children to schools of their choice. Different structural arrangements have come and gone over the years, especially in respect to regions and districts and the size of the workforce at the centre of a system of state schools. In a positive sense, this can be viewed as normal if not appropriate as systems designed to deliver public services in an efficient and effective manner respond by continual adaptation.

On the other hand, one could argue that the paradigm for the delivery of public education has remained unchanged for well over a century, that is, it is essentially highly centralised with shifts to a higher level of autonomy at the school level a limited response in keeping with changes on society or major interventions such as the Karmel Report or, in Victoria, still the high point in school and principal autonomy, when the initiatives of the Kennett Coalition Governments were largely maintained by the successor Bracks and Brumby Labor Governments. Changes within this paradigm have been largely at the margins.

Overview of international development

Providing schools and therefore principals with more authority and responsibility to make decisions has been an international trend in recent years, as mapped by the OECD in 2004, and described in more detail in Appendix 1. This mapping highlights a parallel trend to greater centralisation of decisions for some functions so that the general pattern is best described as higher levels of autonomy for decisions related to the manner in which centrally-determined curriculum and standards are delivered at the local level. Within this broad development there have been particular shifts of a centralising or decentralising nature among the countries that participated in the OECD survey.

There have been attempts in two comparable countries to significantly increase the extent of autonomy, namely, England and the United States. While the Blair New Labour government in England abandoned the Thatcher Conservative initiative with grant-maintained schools, which were largely freed from control by their local authorities, two major thrusts in recent times have led to arguably even higher levels of autonomy. Set against a policy background of encouraging ‘earned autonomy’, a class of schools known as ‘academies’ was created to replace failing secondary schools in urban areas. While 400 are proposed just 80 have been established at the time of writing. These schools have opened in new facilities, usually with financial support from private or philanthropic sources, and have a capacity to select or dismiss staff within limits set by legislation. More recently, another category of schools has been created and these are known as ‘Trust schools’. Few have been established at the time of the current project. These schools are existing schools whose governing bodies have decided to secure a higher level of
autonomy by the creation of a trust to govern the school, with different forms of governance to choose from, but each involving representatives from other organisations and institutions, including the corporate sector, philanthropic bodies or universities. In the United States about 3,500 charter schools have been established in 40 states. These are publicly-funded schools that are granted a charter to deliver their programmes with a higher degree of independence from school districts and teacher unions. Some provinces in Canada have legislation that allows the creation of charter schools.

Report outline

Chapter 1 outlined the background, objectives and intended outcomes of the project. Components and methodologies were summarised. The concept of autonomy was explored. Historical and international developments were summarised. Chapter 2 provides a review of national and international research on the links between school autonomy and improved school effectiveness, giving particular attention to school leader autonomy and improved student outcomes. Chapter 3 draws again from national and international research on issues that have arisen in the implementation of school and principal autonomy.

Chapter 4 describes the methodology for mapping patterns of autonomy in different states, territories, Catholic schools and independent schools, including the selection of schools for case study, and how information was gathered in meetings of executives of principals’ associations and focus groups of principals. Chapters 5 to 14 are devoted to the outcomes, with a chapter devoted to each of the states and territories, presented alphabetically, as well as to Catholic and independent schools.

Chapter 15 discusses the findings of the project reported in Chapters 5 to 14 and provides commentary in light of the research reported in Chapters 2 and 3. It reflects the over-arching purpose of the project, namely, ‘to provide a report to inform the Department’s policy development in relation to school autonomy’. Implications are offered to guide the development of an effective model of autonomy.

Summary

The objective of the project is to provide a report, which documents and analyses the extent of principal autonomy and its impact on student learning across jurisdictions and sectors in Australia. This report will inform DEST’s policy development relating to principal autonomy.

Chapter 1 describes in general terms how this objective was accomplished and how the report is organised. An important part of the chapter is the examination of the concept of autonomy. It means the state of being free from the control of another. Taken literally, then, no school in a system of public education in any nation can be accurately described as autonomous. In all but a very small minority of cases, the concept in its literal sense cannot be applied to non-government, private or independent schools for, with few exceptions in most countries, such schools receive public funds, sometimes on the same basis as public schools, and are therefore subject to a form of accountability. Their autonomy is thus constrained or framed by legislation. The concept is therefore best understood in a relative sense or in relation to particular functions. This is certainly the case in requirements for autonomy set out in the Schools Assistance (Learning Together – Achievement Through Choice and Opportunity) Act 2004.

The terms ‘more autonomy’ or ‘less autonomy’ are helpful in comparing the state of affairs at the same point in time in different jurisdictions or trends over time in the same jurisdiction. Different levels of autonomy may exist or may be preferred in the same jurisdiction at the same point in time, as in the case of ‘earned autonomy’ in England. The notion of ‘intelligent autonomy’ was canvassed in the current project, suggesting that there are circumstances where the granting of autonomy, or more or less autonomy, does not stand up to critical or rational scrutiny. Related
concepts have been adopted in different countries, including self-managing schools, local management of schools or school-based management. In each instance these have referred to a constrained form of autonomy. The limitation of these terms is their focus on management, whereas much of what is normally intended in the granting of autonomy is the opportunity to exercise leadership.
CHAPTER 2 RESEARCH ON AUTONOMY AND STUDENT OUTCOMES

Chapter 2 provides a review of research on the relationship between principal autonomy and student outcomes. It was sobering to note the consistent finding in early research that there appeared to be few if any direct relationship between autonomy (local management, self-management or school-based management) and learning outcomes (Fullan 1993; Malen, Ogawa and Kranz, 1990; Summers and Johnson, 1996). Some researchers noted that such a relationship is unlikely to be achieved in the absence of purposeful links between capacities associated with school reform, in this instance, a higher level of autonomy, and what occurs in the classroom in learning and teaching and the support of learning and teaching (Bullock and Thomas, 1997; Cheng, 1996: Fullan and Watson 1999; Hanushek, 1996, 1997; Levačić, 1995; Smith, Scoll and Link, 1996; OECD, 1994).

Stages in research

A review of research suggests that there have been several stages in research on the links between autonomy and learning and it is only recently that evidence of the impact has emerged, and then only when certain conditions are fulfilled. Early research was conducted at a time when impact on learning was not a primary or even secondary purpose of devolving responsibilities to the school level. Further studies were undertaken when such purposes may have been at the fore but the database was weak. Research in the late 1990s and gathering momentum in the early 2000s, coincided with a pre-eminent concern for learning outcomes and the development of a strong database. The most recent research, reported in the current issue of the highly-regarded journal School Effectiveness and School Improvement (Maslowksi, Scheerens and Luyten, 2007), reports a positive relationship between autonomy in personnel management and outcomes in literacy, but the effect disappears when student intake characteristics are taken into account. These developments in research over several decades are summarised in the pages that follow.

The inconclusive nature of the linkage in early studies

Summers and Johnson (1996) provided a meta-analysis of early research on school-based management (SBM). They noted that the practice had so many different meanings and had been implemented in so many different ways that it was difficult to generalise from experience, the only common element being the delegation of authority to the school (Summers and Johnson, 1996, p 77). They located 70 studies that purported to be evaluations of school-based management, but only 20 of these employed a systematic approach and just 7 included a measure of student outcomes. They concluded that ‘there is little evidence to support the notion that school-based management is effective in increasing student performance. There are very few quantitative studies, the studies are not statistically rigorous, and the evidence of positive results is either weak or non-existent’ (p. 80). Apart from the ‘overwhelming obstacles’ in the way of assessing impact, Summers and Johnson drew attention to the fact that few initiatives ‘identify student achievement as a major objective’. They concluded that ‘the focus was on organisational processes, with virtually no attention to how process changes may affect student performance’ (Summers and Johnson, 1996, pp. 92-93).

For Hanushek, the findings were not surprising because of the absence of a purposeful link between SBM and student performance. He noted the review of Summers and Johnson and observes that ‘decentralisation of decision making has little general appeal without such linkage and, indeed, could yield worse results with decentralised management pursuing its own objectives not necessarily related closely to student performance’ (Hanushek, 1996, p 45). In a review of research on the effects of school resources on student achievement, Hanushek (1997, p 156) drew attention to the finding ‘that simply decentralising decision-making is unlikely to work effectively unless there exist clear objectives and unless there is direct accountability’.

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In an early review in England, Levačić (1995, p. 190) found that, of four criteria associated with intentions for the local management of schools (effectiveness, efficiency, equity and choice), ‘cost-efficiency is the one for which there is most evidence that local management has achieved the aims set for it by government’, especially through the opportunity it provides for schools to purchase at a lower cost for a given quality or quantity than in the past, and by allowing resource mixes that were not possible or readily attainable under previous more centralised arrangements. She found evidence for effectiveness to be more tenuous, although the presumed link is through efficiency, making resources available to meet needs not able to be addressed previously.

The next generation of research accompanied the more far-reaching reforms in self-management, with most of the available budget in a school system decentralised to the local level within a comprehensive and centrally-determined curriculum, standards and accountability framework. In general, the findings were as inconclusive as before. In England, for example, there was little early evidence of a cause-and-effect relationship between local management and discretionary use of resources, on the one hand, and improved learning outcomes for students on the other, building on the findings of studies that yielded strong opinion-based evidence that gains had been made (for example, Bullock and Thomas, 1994). Drawing predominantly on evidence from England, but referring also to outcomes elsewhere, Bullock and Thomas concluded that:

> It may be that the most convincing evidence of the impact of local management is on the opportunities which it has provided for managing the environment and resources for learning, both factors that can act to support the quality of learning in schools. What remains elusive, however, is clear-cut evidence of these leading through to direct benefits on learning, an essential component if we are to conclude that it is contributing to higher levels of efficiency. (Bullock and Thomas, 1997, p. 217)

Bullock and Thomas then went to the heart of the issue:

> If learning is at the heart of education, it must be central to our final discussion of decentralisation. It means asking whether, in their variety of guises, the changes characterised by decentralisation have washed over and around children in classrooms, leaving their day-to-day experiences largely untouched. In asking this question, we must begin by recognising that structural changes in governance, management and finance may leave largely untouched the daily interaction of pupils and teachers. (Bullock and Thomas, 1997, p. 219)

**Mapping the links to learning**

The central issue is the extent to which school autonomy or self-management reaches to the level of the classroom and, especially, the student. On this issue, as described above, there was little evidence on how the links could be made and the impact on learning.

One of the most significant developments was in Victoria in the early 1990s. The Schools of the Future (SOF) project resulted in about 90 percent of the State’s education budget being decentralised to schools for local decision-making. This thrust was a significant step forward after nearly two decades of incremental decentralisation. There were similarities between SOF and the local management of schools in England and Wales under the Education Reform Act of 1988, and developments in New Zealand through the Tomorrow’s Schools initiative.

The objectives and purposes of SOF were educational (‘to enhance student learning outcomes’, ‘actively foster the attributes of good schools’); professional (‘recognise teachers as true professionals’, ‘allow principals to be true leaders’); community (‘to determine the destiny of the school, its character and ethos’) and accountability (‘for the progress of the school and the achievement of its students’).
There is a substantial body of research that tracked the processes and outcomes of SOF. This emerged in the Cooperative Research Project conducted by the Education Department (Victoria), Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals (VASSP), Victorian Primary Principals’ Association (VPPA), and the University of Melbourne. The initiative for the project was taken by the principals’ associations and the steering committee was chaired by a primary principal.

Successive surveys in the Cooperative Research Project (1994, 1995a, 1995b, 1996, 1997, 1998) (summarised in Caldwell and Hayward, 1997; Caldwell, 1998; Caldwell and Spinks, 1998) consistently found that principals believed there had been moderate to high level of realisation of the expected benefit in respect to improved learning outcomes for students. In the final survey in 1997, 84 percent gave a rating of 3 or more on the 5-point scale (1 is ‘low’ and 5 is ‘high’). Such findings by themselves do not illuminate the issue of the extent to which the capacities fostered by the reform impact on learning outcomes. However, structural equation modelling using LISREL 8, a statistical data analysis software tool, (Jöreskog and Sörbom, 1993) was employed in the analysis of data in the 1995, 1996 and 1997 surveys. The findings reported here derive from the 1997 survey (Cooperative Research Project, 1998) and they are pertinent to the current project.

The 45 survey items were organised into seven clusters and re-named as variables for the purpose of analysis: Confidence in the Attainment of Schools of the Future Objectives, Curriculum and Standards Framework (CSF) Curriculum Support, Curriculum and Learning Benefits, Curriculum Improvement due to the CSF, Planning and Resource Allocation Benefits, School and Community Benefits, Personnel and Professional Benefits.

The findings revealed that three variables have a direct effect on Curriculum and Learning Benefits, which includes improved learning outcomes for students. These are:

- Personnel and Professional Benefits (which reflected ratings of better personnel management, enhanced professional development, shared decision-making, improved staff performance, more effective organisation following restructure, increased staff satisfaction and an enhanced capacity to attract staff);

- Curriculum Improvement due to CSF (which reflected ratings for improvement of capacity for planning the curriculum, establishing levels and standards for students, moving to a curriculum based on learning outcomes and meeting the needs of students);

- Confidence in Attainment of SOF Objectives.

The pathways of indirect effects are noteworthy. The indirect effects have been illustrated for Planning and Resource Allocation Benefits, which is mediated in its effect on Curriculum and Learning Benefits through the variables of Personnel and Professional Benefits and Confidence in Attainment of SOF Objectives. Expressed another way, achieving the expected benefits objectives, including better resource management, a clearer sense of direction, increased accountability and responsibility, greater financial and administrative flexibility, and improved long term planning, will have no direct effect on Curriculum and Learning Benefits. The achievement of these objectives, however, will have an indirect effect on Curriculum and Learning Benefits to the extent that they impact on Personnel and Professional Benefits. Personnel and Professional Benefits, in turn, have a direct effect on Curriculum and Learning Benefits.

Also noteworthy are the variables that have direct effects on Confidence in Attainment of SOF Objectives: Planning and Resource Allocation Benefits, School and Community Benefits and CSF Curriculum Support. The likely explanation is that unless principals experience benefits in these last three domains, they are unlikely to have confidence in the reform.
The findings in these surveys are limited to the extent that they are based on the perceptions of principals rather than measures of student achievement. This has been a concern in most efforts to determine the impact of reform in recent years. In the case of the Cooperative Research Project, there was no system-wide base-line data on student achievement when the reform was implemented.

Two sets of case studies in Victoria (Hillier, 1999; Wee, 1999) helped illuminate the links described above under conditions where principals reported improved learning outcomes. The consultant investigated whether the linkages were confirmed in deep on-site investigations in particular schools where improvement is claimed. The research design in both studies, thus, started with schools where principals made such a claim. The first task was to test the validity of these claims, drawing on evidence in the particular schools selected for study. The second task was to seek explanations for how such improvement occurred and then to match it against the linkages.

The studies differed in one important respect. Hillier’s study was conducted in two stages, with one round of data collected in 1996, soon after each element of the reform was in place and the pool of indicators was in the early stages of implementation. The second stage occurred in 1998, when Hillier returned to the three schools to assess progress since 1996.

Wee’s study in four schools was conducted in late 1997, when the pool of indicators was well developed and a substantial body of evidence was available to test claims of improved learning outcomes. Findings revealed that schools could cite evidence that their efforts had led to improved outcomes for students. They drew on many sources of data in recognising improved student learning in their schools. This illustrated the capacity being developed in the system to gather information about the performance of schools.

Maps of direct and indirect links were prepared by Wee for each school using the rigorous approach to data collection, data display and data reduction for qualitative research proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994). These maps show how school capacity associated with being a School of the Future had led to improved outcomes for students. Actions at the school level that had a direct impact on student learning are in the domains of professional development, implementation of the curriculum and standards framework, and monitoring. The impact of resource allocation is indirect, mediated through curriculum, professional development, monitoring and staffing.

The findings in these studies in Victoria can be interpreted in the framework for the current project. The variables that had a direct impact on learning outcomes were those that included the capacity of teachers to deliver a curriculum and build their knowledge and skills through professional development, and a coherent set of values and beliefs that underpinned confidence in the efficacy of the reform. The support and involvement of the community has an indirect effect on learning outcomes. The capacity to plan and allocate funds that came with the self-management element of the reform has an indirect effect on learning outcomes, also mediated through building professional capacity and a coherent set of values and beliefs.

Is a consensus emerging?

Recent research on the link between school leadership and learning is focusing attention on the particular strategies that are required to make the link effective and these come to the heart of the matter as far as autonomy is concerned. For example, Bullock and Thomas (1997) observed that ‘structural changes in governance, management and finance may leave largely untouched the daily interaction of pupils and teachers’ (p. 219). Expressed another way, the effectiveness of school and principal autonomy should be judged on the extent to which leaders facilitate the link to learning.
An example of recent Australian research along these lines is the work of Silins and Mulford in their Leadership for Organisational Learning and Student Outcomes (LOLSO) project. They remain sceptical about the impact of decentralisation of decisions about resources but conclude:

Our research on leadership, OL (Organisational Learning) and student outcomes provides the strongest support for the four critical conditions … to refocus school-based management strategies. School leaders need to establish systems and environments that promote improved teaching and learning by involving teachers and the school community in shared decision making, increasing participation of students in school activities and creating a culture of collaboration and trust where leadership sources are distributed throughout the school community. Where teachers believe they are empowered in areas of importance to them, especially in schools where there are collaborative, cooperative, and consultative decision making processes in place, teachers will respond to reform as actors and leaders. Shared learning, empowerment and leadership are pre-requisites for school improvement. Where school-based management is implemented to promote student outcomes, conditions that promote shared learning, empowerment and leadership must first be established. (Silins and Mulford, 2007, p. 655)

Silins and Mulford have affirmed the findings of the later work in the Cooperative Research Project, reported above, but have produced a more fine-grained analysis of the role of leaders and the links to learning.

Silins and Mulford reported their research in The International Handbook for School Effectiveness and Improvement (Townsend, 2007). Writing in the same publication, Caldwell concluded that the field of autonomy and its links to learning may be approaching maturity, with five stages: Stage 1 Values – building a case on the basis of ‘what ought to be’; Stage 2 Reputation – identification of good practice based on early indicators; Stage 3 Modelling – refinement of practice in the light of a better data base and more robust analysis; Stage 4 Dependability – achieving clarity and confidence in what ought to be done at the school level; and Stage 5 Alignment: achieving coherence and certainty in moving forward. It seems that research, policy and practice are moving from Stage 4 to Stage 5.

Findings from international tests of student achievement

This section of the chapter considers the findings from research in several countries, including the analysis of data in the Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), academies in England and charter schools in the United States. The general conclusion is consistent with that for the Australian studies reported above.

Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)

A capacity for local decision-making is included in factors associated with learning outcomes, as found in the analysis of results in international tests of student achievement. Woessmann (2001) undertook a comprehensive study of why students in some countries did better in TIMSS. He found that certain ‘policy settings’ were favourable to student achievement, including:

- Central examinations
- Centralised control mechanisms in curricular and budgetary affairs
- School autonomy in process and personnel decisions
- An intermediate level of administration performing administrative tasks and providing educational funding
- Competition from private educational institutions
- Individual teachers having both incentives and powers to select appropriate teaching methods
- Scrutiny of students’ educational performance, and
• Encouragement of parents to take an interest in teaching matters

It is important to note that ‘centralised control mechanisms in curricular and budgetary affairs’ refer to centrally-determined frameworks, not to the manner of implementation at the school level. In the case of budgets, this refers to the existence of a funding mechanism that specifies how funds shall be allocated to schools; schools then determine how these funds are deployed at the local level.

Re-examination of data from tests of international student achievement

The September 2007 issue of School Effectiveness and School Improvement contains a report of research by Maslowski, Scheerens and Luyten (2007) that warrants the most careful consideration because it re-examines the findings of Woessmann reported above and a more recent study by Fuchs and Woessmann (2004) based on data from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (2004).

In addition to their challenge to the findings of Woessmann and his colleagues, Maslowski, Scheerens and Luyten (each based at the University of Twente in the Netherlands) noted a limitation of research in the Schools of the Future initiative in Victoria, also reported above, that was based to a large extent on the perception and opinions of principals. The University of Twente team examined the effect of school autonomy and school internal decentralisation on reading literacy by drawing on PISA 2000 data for 15 year-old students from at least 150 schools in each of 25 OECD countries, involving a total 5,269 schools and 137,526 students. Measures of autonomy and internal decentralisation were based on principals’ self-reports in PISA 2000. Four kinds of autonomy were considered: personnel management (including hiring, firing and determination of salaries), student policies (including discipline, assessment and admissions), financial resources (including formulation of the school budget) and curriculum (including determination of course content and selection of textbooks).

The analysis reveals that schools with autonomy on personnel management issues have, on average, higher mean reading literacy scores than schools with lesser autonomy in this domain. For autonomy on financial resources, student policies, and curriculum, no significant effects on students’ reading literacy were found. For school internal decentralisation of decision-making processes, an almost similar picture emerges. Schools that decentralise decisions on personnel management issues, on average, have higher mean student literacy scores. . . . [but] a negative effect was found for school internal decentralisation of student policies. Schools that delegate control over these decisions to a lower level of the organisation, often to either department heads or teachers, show a more moderate score on mean reading literacy for their students than schools that keep these decisions at a more central level. (Maslowski, Scheerens and Luyten, 2007, p. 314)

However, in a very important further analysis of findings, the researchers found ‘a substantial relationship between autonomy on personnel management issues and average parents’ occupational status of students at the school’. The positive effect described above disappears when student composition is controlled in the treatment of data. They suggested that this indicates that ‘schools which have relatively high discretion to decide on the selection of their staff, and on decisions regarding their staff’s salaries, attract students from more advantageous social strata’ (p. 318). Of particular interest in the current study is their finding that the ‘substantial significant relationship between autonomy and student composition’ exists in only six of the 25 countries: Mexico, Spain and Australia and, to a less significant extent, Scotland, Finland and Ireland (p. 318, 320). They urge caution in interpretation, however, as the relationship between school autonomy and student composition is insignificant in some countries that have much higher discretion on personnel matters than the six mentioned above: the USA, Czech Republic, England and Wales, The Netherlands, Sweden and Hungary (p. 323).
The researchers conclude that ‘it is extremely difficult to formulate straightforward policy recommendations’, that findings such as those by Woessmann and his colleagues should be treated with caution and, generally, that ‘it seems to be premature to legitimate any policy measures based on current research on the effects of school autonomy’ (p. 323). They suggest that further research should take account of factors such as teacher morale and contend that ‘in case autonomy on personnel management turns out to have neither a positive not a negative effect on student achievement, its effect on morale and commitment may be a valuable end in itself’ (p. 324).

Several observations can be made about this study. First, the researchers are eminent in their work on school effectiveness and school improvement and their findings are reported in a prestigious journal. Second, there are some notable limitations in their work, including reliance on self-report on school autonomy and school internal decentralisation. For example, USA is reported in the study as having the second highest level of school autonomy among the 25 countries included in the analysis, but this is patently not the case, given the still highly centralised nature of school districts in that country and the iron-clad nature of collective agreements that give schools virtually no leeway on payments of salaries and allowances. As explained in more detail in Chapter 4, the current project took care to include the perceptions of system personnel as well as principals on locus and mode of decision-making for nine kinds of decisions in each of four domains. Third, there is an assumption that practice is uniform within each of the countries involved in the study. As was observed in Chapter 1, it should be recognised that a range of policies and practices in autonomy exist in different countries, especially in Australia (where the level of autonomy in Victoria is relatively high) and the United States (where less than one percent of school districts have a level of autonomy comparable to Victoria). Nevertheless, there is an important finding that warrants further consideration in the current project, namely, that the relationship between school autonomy and higher student achievement on reading literacy disappears when schools use their autonomy to be more selective in student admissions. This issue is taken up in more detail in the discussion of findings in the current project, as set out in Chapter 15.

Preliminary analysis of PISA 2006

The results of PISA 2006 were released in the final stages of the project. Particular attention was given to knowledge and skills in science of 15-year olds. More than 400,000 students participated from 57 countries covering 90 percent of the world’s economy. School principals reported on the extent of autonomy on a range of matters. Of particular interest are the findings on the relationship between autonomy and student achievement. The following are noteworthy:

After accounting for demographic and socio-economic background factors, school level autonomy indices in staffing, educational content, and budgeting do not show a statistically significant association with school performance. However, a system-level composition effect appears with regard to school autonomy in educational content as well as budgeting. Students in educational systems giving more autonomy to schools to choose textbooks, to determine course content, and to decide which courses to offer, tend to perform better regardless of whether the schools which individual students attend have higher degrees of autonomy or not (an increase of one unit on the index corresponds to an increase of 20.3 score points in science). Similarly, students in educational systems that give more autonomy to schools to formulate the school budget and to decide on budget allocations within the school tend to perform better regardless of whether the schools that individual students attend have higher degrees of autonomy or not (an increase of one unit on the index corresponds to an increase of 22.5 score points in science). School autonomy variables do not appear to have an impact on the relationship between socio-economic background and science performance, that is, greater school autonomy is not associated with a more inequitable distribution of learning opportunities. (OECD, 2007, p 252-253)
The findings reported above can be interpreted in the context of the range of scores for science. Finland was the top ranked nation (score of 563) and, among OECD nations, Mexico was the bottom ranked (score of 410). The OECD average score is defined as a range from 495 to 504.

The report of PISA 2006 goes further to construct a model to explain the joint impact of school and system resources, practices, and policies on student performance. Of the 15 factors in the model, the system average on the school autonomy index in budgeting is by far the most powerful, associated with a net increase in score of 25.7.

Care should be taken in interpreting these findings as there are many factors associated with achievement. The issue is how these factors are aligned. The performance of Victoria in Australia illustrates the point. As observed elsewhere in this report of the current project, Australia's school systems taken as a whole are relatively centralised. However, Victoria is one of the most decentralised systems as far as budget autonomy is concerned, with more than 90 percent of the state’s recurrent budget available for local decision-making in government schools. However, Victoria was the lowest performing mainland state in science in PISA 2006. Despite these qualifications, the results in PISA 2006 are particularly positive in respect to school autonomy in budgeting, all other things being equal.

Impact of academies in England

The greater autonomy of academies in England was noted in Chapter 1 and explained in more detail in Appendix 1. There are currently about 80 academies in 50 local authorities, still well short of the target of 400 to be achieved over the next decade. Early evidence suggested that their introduction had little or no impact on levels of student achievement. For example, Gorard (2005) studied outcomes for the first three academies that opened in 2002 and, using data from 1997 to 2004, found that there was no evidence that these schools were securing better outcomes for ‘equivalent’ students than for students in the schools they replaced. He acknowledged that it was still early in the life of the initiative but argued that the findings raised doubts about the claims being made for its efficacy.

However, the initiative has been studied systematically since its introduction, with PricewaterhouseCoopers commissioned to do the research over five years commencing in 2003. Four reports have been released, with the most recent in July 2007 (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2007).

The recent report describes how the student profile of academies is changing. While the proportion of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds continues to be higher than across all secondary schools, as indicated by the number receiving Free School Meals (FSM) or having Special Educational Needs (SEN), and prior educational achievement on entry is correspondingly lower, the report notes that prior achievement on entry at Year 7 is increasing. It urges caution in comparing student profiles with comparator schools and schools across England as a whole (p. vi). Such caution is wise, given the finding of the international study by Maslowski, Scheerens and Luyten (2007) reported in the preceding section that found that the positive relationship between autonomy and reading literacy disappeared when student composition was taken into account. These researchers raised the possibility that schools were using their autonomy on student admissions to increase the proportion of students from a higher socio-economic background and therefore likely to achieve at a higher level. Academies are constrained in the extent to which they can select their students, so changes in their student profiles may be explained by their increasing attractiveness to the community, re-opening in new facilities, often under new leadership and staffing arrangements. This explanation is consistent with an important conclusion of the report that ‘the independent status of Academies has been shown to be an overarching enabler’ (p. xi) in explaining the improvement. This independence is being ‘utilised to various degrees by Academies’.
Changes to the school day, teachers’ pay and conditions, and the flexible use of support staff have been noted as positive benefits linked to the Academies’ independence. Furthermore, independence has been seen as a key driver to raising the confidence of the Academy to encourage the exploration of new partnerships with business and the local community. (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2007, p. xi)

The report concluded that ‘Academies’ progress in terms of pupil achievement has generally exceeded corresponding improvements at a national level amongst all other similar schools’ (p. xi). The conclusion was based on results at all stages of secondary schooling. In addition to the changing intake and new curriculum developments, several factors were identified to explain this outcome including strong and stable leadership, new buildings, the (growing) size of academies, the adoption of a specialism, engagement of school sponsors, and improved student behaviour (p. ix-x). The study found that new leadership models are beginning to emerge, arising from new sponsorship and governance arrangements.

The report acknowledged that a number of challenges remain for academies including time, resources and completed buildings; securing high levels of engagement of pupils, parents and their local communities; and ensuring more effective adoption of specialisms (p. xi).

**Impact of charter schools in the United States**

Murphy and Shiffman (2002) provide a comprehensive and balanced report on charter schools. They conclude that neither the expectations of the charter purists nor the strident criticisms of the detractors are supported by the evidence that has accumulated over the last decade:

All in all, charters at this point in time are probably working a good deal better than might be expected given the barren landscape of school reform in the United States and the constraints laid on charters through the political actions of their opponents and the zealous pronouncements of their advocates. (p. 217)

On the positive side of the balance:

Charters are not the sorting and segregating mechanisms that critics envisioned.

Charters are quite effective in building unified communities that are energised by common purpose and mission, two elements on the short list of conditions known to promote school improvement and enhance student learning. Charters are also fairly effective in nurturing the development of professional cultures … (p. 216)

On the other hand, important expectations have not been realised:

Although explainable, the inability of the charter movement to power improvements in the larger educational system is a major problem … The data on student achievement and school accountability, while quite limited, are not nearly as positive as charter advocates had hypothesised. The best that can be said here is that … charters appear to be holding their own on the critical test of whether they can improve student performance. (p. 216)

The RAND Corporation conducted a comprehensive review of the impact of charter schools and voucher programmes in the United States (Gill, Timpane, Ross and Brewer, 2001). The following conclusions were drawn.

Our review of the evidence leaves us without a crisp, bottom-line judgment of the wisdom of voucher and charter programs. To be sure, those in favour of autonomous schools can point to strong demand and parental satisfaction, especially among minority parents, and (particularly in targeted programs) to a demonstrated ability to focus on
disadvantaged students. They can also point to promising indications of modest, short-run achievement gains …

Those opposed to vouchers and charters can point to the existing studies of the performance of autonomous schools, describing how those studies are uneven in quality and how the results are both early and inconclusive. They can point as well to a growing number of studies of other sorts of interventions – state policy reforms, urban reform efforts, class-size reductions, and innovative curricula – that demonstrate outcomes similar in scale and significance without the trauma of major changes in governance.

(Gill, Timpane, Ross and Brewer, 2001, p. 232)

A review of recent research by the consultant in the current project uncovered evidence of powerful impact in some settings, with initiatives drawing more widespread support from some stakeholders than in the past, including teacher unions. For example, the system of public education has been declared by the Broad Foundation to be the most improved urban school district in the United States. Under an initiative of Mayor Michael Bloomberg, early success with the city’s 60 charter schools has led to plans to ‘charterise’ the whole system. Schools have much greater autonomy and accountability, there is strong philanthropic support including the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, there are bonuses for principals of schools that do well, and closure of big schools that consistently under-perform, with replacement by smaller schools. The Economist reports that:

Equally critical has been Mr Bloomberg’s success in winning hitherto reluctant principals, who have agreed to sign a new accountability contract, and the teachers’ union, which despite quibbles broadly support the new system. The fact that teachers’ starting salary is up on average by 43 percent since Mr Bloomberg took office may have helped. (The Economist, 2007a, p. 46)

One of the most significant developments has been in New Orleans where the majority of schools became charter schools following Hurricane Katrina (when large numbers of impoverished and under-performing schools were destroyed). ‘So far, test results suggest that the charters are doing better than the competition’ (The Bulletin, 2007b, p. 47).

Conclusion

The findings in three of the four sets of studies in the international domain reported above are consistent with those from research on impact in Australia, namely, there will be no impact on learning unless purposeful links are made at the student and classroom levels. In offering conclusions that can be applied in all settings, Fullan, Hill and Crévola, (2006) demonstrated the limits to improvement through a higher level of school autonomy by describing how gains in literacy have reached a plateau in England, and how decentralisation of decision-making in Chicago, Milwaukee and Seattle has not led to large-scale improvement: ‘They contain glimpses of what will be required, but they fail to touch deeply day-to-day classroom instruction, and to touch it in a way that will get results for all’ (Fullan, Hill and Crévola, 2006, p. 6). The fourth and most recent study of work at the University of Twente in The Netherlands raises new questions about the evidence base for school autonomy and internal school decentralisation.

A new conceptualisation of school autonomy

Over the last three years the consultant in the current project has been involved in the further study of developments in school autonomy. The starting point was to study how the concept of and practice in self-managing schools had changed over 15 years and then to explore various issues that emerged in the course of the investigation. An innovative approach utilised case studies, master classes, seminars and workshops involving school and school system leaders from 11 countries. A feature of most workshops was the invitation to school and school system leaders to respond to key questions on design, implementation, issues and outcomes of self-
management using an interactive computer-based technology that enabled large numbers of individual and group responses to be gathered for subsequent analysis. The same technology was used in several focus groups in the current study, as described in Chapter 4.

The workshop programme began in 2005 with 14 events in Australia, Chile, England and New Zealand from which an initial framework of emerging practice was constructed and published in *Re-imagining Educational Leadership* (Caldwell, 2006). This framework provided the starting point for further study in 19 workshops in every state and territory of Australia in 2006. A sharper focus on resources was adopted in five workshops in England, also in 2006. The outcomes are reported in *Raising the Stakes: From Improvement to Transformation in the Reform of Schools* (Caldwell and Spinks, 2008). A broader view of resources was adopted, with the concept of ‘alignment’ introduced in the manner described below. The applicability of the model for alignment in self-managing schools in different countries was explored in 22 workshops or seminars in 2007 in or for school and school system leaders in Australia, Croatia, England, Malaysia, Mauritius, Netherlands, Philippines, Singapore and Wales.

Participants in these events were mainly school leaders in systems where self-management was well-established or was in the early stages of planning and implementation. Forty case studies were presented by school leaders in 13 of the 60 workshops. Nine other case studies were contributed through master classes or in on-site visits. The interactive technology was utilised in 50 of the 60 workshops involving about 2,500 participants, generating about 10,000 responses for subsequent analysis.

The main finding in these studies was the manner in which self-management had been implemented and had gone far beyond the initial conceptualisation that tended to focus on structural change and a narrow view of resources. It was found that four kinds of resources or forms of ‘capital’ are required for success and that each must be strong and aligned with the unique mix of needs, interests, aptitudes and aspirations that exist among students in each school. To build this strength and secure such alignment requires outstanding leadership and governance.

- *Intellectual capital* refers to the level of knowledge and skill of those who work in or for the school.
- *Social capital* refers to the strength of formal and informal partnerships and networks involving the school, parents, community, business and industry, indeed, all individuals, agencies, organisations and institutions that have the potential to support and, where appropriate, be supported by the school.
- *Spiritual capital* refers to the strength of moral purpose and the degree of coherence among values, beliefs and attitudes about life and learning. For some schools, spiritual capital has a foundation in religion. In other schools, spiritual capital may refer to ethics and values shared by members of the school and its community.
- *Financial capital* refers to the monetary resources available to support the school. It is acknowledged that some schools are in more challenging circumstances than others so the concept of needs-based funding is typically addressed in the formation of financial capital.
- *Governance* is the process through which the school builds its intellectual, social, financial and spiritual capital and aligns them to achieve its goals.

The relationship among these forms of capital, with a focus on the student, is illustrated in Figure 2.1 and explained in more detail by Caldwell and Spinks (2008). The following is a summary of research that supports the configuration.
Intellectual Capital

Rowe’s review of literature on student achievement concluded that:

In every case more variance [among measures of student achievement] was accounted for at the department level than between schools, and the proportion of variance at the class level was more than at the departmental level. A general principle emerges from data such as these and that is the smaller the unit of analysis and the closer one gets to the pupil’s experience of education, the greater the proportion of variance explicable by that unit. In accountability terms the models indicate that teachers have the greatest influence (adapted from Rowe, 2004, p. 9).

This finding is supported in research by the OECD between 2002 and 2004 on aspects of teaching in 25 countries. Entitled Teachers Matter, the report demonstrated that teacher quality ‘is the single most important school variable influencing student achievement’ (OECD, 2005, p. 26). Hattie drew on an extensive review of literature and a synthesis of findings in more than half a million studies and reached a similar conclusion:

We should focus on the greatest source of variance that can make the difference – the teacher. We need to ensure that this greatest influence is optimised to have powerful and sensationenally positive effects, but they must be exceptional effects. We need to direct attention at higher quality teaching, and higher expectations that students can meet appropriate challenges – and these occur once the classroom door is closed and not by reorganising which or how many students are behind those doors, by promoting different topics for teachers to teach, or by bringing in more sticks to ensure they are following policy (cited in Rowe, 2004, pp. 12-13).

An exemplar is Finland (Harris, 2006). One of several factors accounting for the success of Finland in PISA is the quality of its teachers. Finnish teachers are highly valued professionals who are expected to have high levels of pedagogical expertise and flexibility within a national curriculum framework in order to achieve success with students who learn in heterogeneous groups. All must have a master’s degree. Applications to tertiary education studies are so high

Figure 2.1: Aligning the four forms of capital (Caldwell and Spinks, 2008)
that just 10-12 percent of applicants are accepted in teacher education programmes. The high quality of pre-service training is said to contribute to the social status of teachers in Finland and is an attraction to capable students (OECD, 2005, p.100).

The importance of intellectual capital has recently been given world-wide prominence in a report of McKinsey & Company (Barber and Mourshed, 2007) that examined ‘how the world’s best-performing school systems come out on top’. Particular attention was given to Canada, Finland, Singapore, South Korea and some districts in the United States (notably Boston and Chicago). It found that:

The experience of these top school systems suggests that three things matter most: (1) getting the right people to become teachers, (2) developing them into effective instructors and, (3) ensuring that the system is able to deliver the best instruction for every child. (Barber and Mourshed, 2007, Executive Summary).

The study confirmed the factors identified by Harris for Finland including the status of the profession. It is important to note that principals in Finland have the opportunity to interview teachers who wish to work in their schools. Those in larger cities have the authority to appoint and contract while in smaller jurisdictions, their recommendations are forwarded to the municipal authority which formally appoints. The administration of schools is a municipal responsibility in Finland. There are more than 400 municipalities in this country of just over 5 million people.

The research findings and experience in Finland confirm the importance of building the intellectual capital of the school and much of the work of school and system leaders should be concerned with this task.

Social capital

Fukuyama defined social capital as ‘the ability of people to work together for common purposes in groups and organisations’ (Fukuyama, 1995, p. 10). Fukuyama and Putnam (2000) have written of the loss or absence of social capital, especially in western democracies.

There has been growing interest in recent years in family- and community-school partnerships, one type of relationship that can enhance a school’s social capital. The assumption is that schools and their efforts to secure success for their students can be supported by members of the local community who, in turn, may be supported in their activities by the school. In the example of Finland, the local municipality funds both school and extra-curricular activities, such as music tuition for students. Many local schools, in turn, allow their facilities to be used by members of the local community for adult education classes and support providers by assisting them to maintain low cost adult education programmes (Harris, 2006). To paraphrase Fukuyama’s (1995) definition of social capital, the local councils, schools and adult education providers in Finland work together for the common purpose of providing many forms of education to the community.

Interest in creating partnerships between schools, families and communities is founded primarily in research that suggests that by improving social capital, schools may be able to secure higher levels of success for their students. Coleman’s (1988) study found that students from schools with high levels of social capital achieved better outcomes than schools with low levels. He found the link between social capital and achievement was particularly strong in church-based schools which had strong community networks. While there have been a number of inconsistencies in the findings of research into the relationship between social capital and academic achievement, research has consistently shown that there is a link between parent and community involvement in schools and improvements in student outcomes, including student behaviour, attendance and retention (Harris and Goodall, 2006). Increased community involvement in the school also has the potential to assist student learning and increase the school’s intellectual capital through the specific skills, expertise and enthusiasm that members of the community can offer.
In terms of capital formation, there is a connection between social capital and intellectual capital. Edward Lesser, a consultant at the IBM Institute for Knowledge Management, described the importance of social capital in these terms: ‘Knowledge in organisations is typically thought of as being either explicit (relatively easy to capture while maintaining its value) or tacit (difficult to articulate and document without losing its value). According to Lesser, social capital is necessary to enable the effective management of both explicit and tacit knowledge’ (Lesser, 2000, p. 9).

There is thus a sturdy research base that confirms the importance of the school drawing on and helping to build social capital, as found in the project that led to the relationships illustrated in Figure 2.1. Successful self-managing schools have tended to do this well after being relatively isolated from their communities when they were operating under more centralised arrangements.

**Financial capital**

While his message is often greeted with puzzlement, the Hoover Institution’s Eric Hanushek found that increases in funding for schools have had, with few exceptions for some programmes, little impact on educational outcomes over many decades. His conclusion could not be clearer:

The aggregate picture is consistent with a variety of other studies indicating that [financial] resources alone have not yielded any systematic returns in terms of student performance. The character of reform efforts can largely be described as “same operations with greater intensity” (Hanushek, 2004, p. 12).

While Hanushek was dealing with financial resources on a nation-wide or system-wide basis, a similar line of argument can be put when the focus is the school. If reforms intended to have an impact at the school level amount to no more than ‘same operations with greater intensity’ there may be no impact on outcomes for students. The relationship between financial capital and other forms of capital is immediately apparent if one reviews the evidence summarised above on the importance of building the intellectual capital of the school. Increasing the levels of funding available to support schools may help secure and sustain the best teachers. Internal deployment of funds in the self-managing school may achieve the same outcome along with strategies for continuing professional development that ensure all are at the forefront of knowledge and skill. An outstanding example of how this has been accomplished at Bellfield Primary School in Victoria is described by Fleming and Kleinhenz (2007).

**Spiritual capital**

Emerging research into spiritual capital builds on current understandings of social capital. In his influential research into social capital, Putnam (2000) reported that shared religious beliefs and practices accounted for more than half of the social capital identified in his research. Coleman’s (1988) influential study of social capital in schools also noted that religious beliefs were one element in a community which had an influence on social capital.

The strength of spiritual capital in a school community has a number of benefits for the school. Van Galen (1997) found that members of a school community who share school values are more likely to participate in school activities. When they share the school’s beliefs about life and learning, parents are more likely to feel a connection with the school and, based on this connection, have been found to be more active in advocating for school improvement and promoting school achievement. Furthermore, Van Galen (1997) found that when the school and school community are shaped by shared norms and values there are fewer discipline problems and higher levels of achievement for all students.
Some form of spiritual capital is inherent in our understandings of both social and intellectual capital. According to Malloch:

The often used terms social capital and human (intellectual) capital themselves are based to a large extent on the existence of good faith, trust, stewardship, a sense of purpose and other moral characteristics which cannot persist in the absence of piety, solidarity and hope that come from religious and spiritual sentiments. When this is lost, societies and economies often decline rather than grow. When this abounds societies and economies prosper. (Malloch 2003, p. 8)

In summary, in the case of schools, school systems and, indeed, entire nations, such as Finland, high levels of social capital would not be achieved without shared trust and ‘other moral characteristics’. Similarly, intellectual capital cannot be effectively implemented without a strong moral purpose and shared values. The influence of spiritual capital on social and intellectual capital shows the need for alignment between all types of resources in the manner illustrated in Figure 2.1.

Summary

Early research on the links between autonomy and its variously named manifestations and student outcomes failed to show in a consistent and convincing fashion the nature of a direct or indirect relationship. Setting aside for a moment the possibility that none existed, the absence of links has been explained by the reasons for adoption, which often did not refer explicitly to learning but were more concerned with matters such as empowerment of those close to the action or re-structuring to reduce the size of the centre. Moreover, there was no robust data base to enable large-scale or meaningful research on impact to be undertaken. Methodologies were often weak.

Evidence of a link, both direct and indirect, has emerged in the last decade but only where there has been a purposeful association between autonomy and learning. The logic of the link is relatively straightforward: each school contains a unique mix of student needs, interests, aptitudes and aspirations, and those at the school level are best placed to determine the particular mix of all of the resources available to the school to achieve optimal outcomes. Research at macro- and micro-levels tends to confirm the association but it requires skillful efforts by a committed profession to make it effective.

For large-scale macro-level research, such as that undertaken on the basis of findings in TIMSS, a positive relationship has been reported between student achievement and a balance of centralisation and decentralisation in the distribution of authority, responsibility and accountability, with a relatively high level of autonomy on operational matters, including personnel, a part of the decentralisation component in the balance. However, recent re-analysis of data in the PISA conducted at the University of Twente in the Netherlands suggests the need for caution in basing policy on initial findings in large-scale macro-level research based on TIMSS or PISA. While a positive relationship between school autonomy and reading literacy is evident, the relationship disappears if schools are using their autonomy to select students from higher socio-economic backgrounds or higher levels of prior attainment.

For small-scale micro-level research, the findings yield evidence of a connection between outcomes and widely distributed leadership, considerable and continuous capacity-building of teachers and others who support them, and an unrelenting focus on what occurs in classrooms.

These findings suggest that a consensus is emerging on the conditions under which higher levels of autonomy, set in a balance of centralised and decentralised decision-making, can make a contribution to improved outcomes for students.
Modelling the links between aspects of autonomy and learning outcomes, in addition to a re-examination and up-dating of the practice of self-management, suggests that a focus on the student calls for a broader view of resources than simply the allocation of money, and that strength in and alignment of four kinds of capital are important (intellectual capital, social capital, spiritual capital and financial capital). Building strength and achieving alignment requires effective leadership and good governance.

There is evidence of improved outcomes for students after three years of experience with academies in England, exceeding those in comparable non-academy schools, with factors accounting for the gain including strong and stable leadership, new buildings, the (growing) size of academies, the adoption of a specialism, engagement of school sponsors, and improved student behaviour. New leadership models are beginning to emerge arising from new sponsorship and governance arrangements. The independent status of academies has been shown to be an ‘over-arching enabler’. No conclusions can be drawn from research on charter schools in the United States where factors such as those identified in the review of academies have not been evident or have yet proved effective.
CHAPTER 3  ISSUES IN SCHOOL AND PRINCIPAL AUTONOMY

Chapter 3 is concerned with issues in school and school leader autonomy as reported in surveys and studies in Australia and other countries. These issues impact on professional practice in the principalship, flexibility and adaptability in governance, and the broader view of system leadership that is emerging in some settings. There is also the impact of choice and competition and their association with developments in school and principal autonomy, needs-based funding of schools under conditions of autonomy, and the extent to which autonomy may lead to higher levels of corruption. An important consideration is whether issues related to implementation of greater principal autonomy could override potential benefits.

Impact on professional practice

An important issue is the extent to which increasing the level of autonomy impacts in undesirable ways on the role of the principal and other leaders at the school level. It is in some respects pre-eminent because it was an issue that led to the current project. As described in Chapter 1, a study was conducted in Victoria (The Privilege and the Price, Department of Education and Training, 2004) on the workload in government (public) schools and its impact on the health and wellbeing of the principal and assistant principals. On workload, the number of hours per week for principals in Victoria was similar to that for counterparts (headteachers) in England, as reported in a survey at about the same time, being about 60 hours per week. The report contained evidence of a negative impact on the emotional and physical wellbeing of principals.

There is also evidence that fewer people are seeking appointment to the principalship in Australia and elsewhere. In England, for example, a typical school seeks a new headteacher once every seven years, which means about 14 percent, advertise each year. The number advertising in 2005 was 12 percent, but about one-third of these schools were unable to make an appointment after the initial advertisement. Education Data Surveys (EDS) reported that re-advertisement reached record levels (Smithers, 2006). Studies on the decline of applications for the principal position in Australia have shown that although aspirants may see many rewards, there is a perception ‘that the salary of the principal does not recompense the principal for the demands and complexity of the role’ (D’Arbon et al. cited in Kidson, 2007). The decline in the number of applications for principal positions is not restricted to the government school sector. Kidson indicates that in 2006, the average ratio of applicants to principal vacancies in New South Wales Catholic systemic schools was 4.16:1, with less than one application for each vacancy in some diocese (Kidson, 2007).

School Leader Welfare Research Survey

The School Leader Welfare Research survey is an initiative of the peak principals’ associations in Australia representing members of the government, independent and Catholic sectors. The consultant for the current project was briefed on preliminary findings. Formal reports and a more comprehensive analysis will not be available until late 2007 or early 2008. Information was gathered through an online survey of the principal class (principals, deputy principals, assistant principals) that drew about 1100 responses, with 72 percent of respondents being principals. The largest group of respondents (58 percent) were aged between 50 and 60, 54 percent were male, and 47 percent had ten or more years experience in school leadership. All states and territories were represented in rough proportion to the total numbers in these jurisdictions.

A total of 80 percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that ‘my job is a way of life’. It was found that 95 percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that ‘I do it to make a difference’. In terms of self-assessment of performance, 79 percent considered that they were
doing ‘great’ or ‘well’. As to whether there was a good work-life balance, 34 percent agreed and 51 percent disagreed.

Respondents were asked to indicate which of a list of factors were ‘stressors’. The following rankings are of particular interest: (1) Sheer quantity of work (82 percent of respondents), (2) lack of time (80 percent), (3) state/territory government initiatives (75 percent), (6) federal government initiatives (62 percent), (12) lack of autonomy / authority (48 percent), (16) declining enrolments (20 percent), (18) union/industrial disputes (15 percent). Almost one-third indicated they had a diagnosed medical condition related to their work, with the most frequently mentioned being cardio-vascular. The main concern is physical rather than psychological.

Workshops on ‘exhilarating leadership’

Five workshops on ‘exhilarating leadership’ were conducted by Brian Caldwell over twelve weeks in two states in 2005 (reported in more detail in Caldwell, 2006). Three questions were posed at each event:

1. What aspects of your work as leader are exhilarating?
2. What aspects of your work as leader are boring, depressing, discouraging or dispiriting?
3. What actions by you or others would make your work as leader more exhilarating and less boring, depressing, discouraging or dispiriting?

Most of the 185 participants were principals. They came from a representative cross-section of schools, with most from government or state schools, and the others from non-government subsidised schools, either Catholic systemic schools or independent schools. They came from a variety of socio-economic settings. There was a balance of male and female participants. There were two distinctive governance patterns among leaders from government schools. Most were from Victoria, which is one of the most decentralised systems in the world, with a high level of principal autonomy. The others were from the south-east corner of Queensland, a state which, in contrast to Victoria, has a relatively centralised pattern of governance and only modest levels of principal autonomy. The technology was the same as that used in several of the focus groups in the current project.

Participants generated 509 responses to the question ‘What aspects of your work as leader are exhilarating?’ There were some striking features in the pattern of responses. Each of the three top-ranking themes attracted at least 20 percent of responses, together totalling 67 percent. Each is concerned with good outcomes. Top ranking (26 percent) is exhilaration associated with success in a particular project, challenge, problem or grant; second ranking (21 percent) is associated with good working relationships with and among staff; the third for experiencing and celebrating the accomplishments of students (20 percent). The dominant pattern is therefore associated with the core purpose of schooling that can be summarised as ‘success in tasks related to learning and the support of learning, characterised by fine working relationships with staff, and enjoyment that accompanies good outcomes for students’.

A total of 527 responses were received for the question ‘What aspects of your work are boring, depressing, discouraging or dispiriting?’ The top ranked theme was ‘performance of staff’ (24 percent) and this described the way respondents experienced the work of some of their colleagues: not making an effort, resisting or blocking change, not keeping up-to-date, or complaining. Second ranking was ‘administrative work’ (23 percent), referring to such matters as form filling, surveys, email, unnecessary meetings and the use of online recruiting procedures. Third rank was the perceived lack of support (22 percent) from different levels of the system, lack of resources, complexity in bureaucratic arrangements, and lack of feedback.

There were 377 responses to the question ‘What actions by you or others would make your work as leader more exhilarating and less boring, depressing, discouraging or dispiriting?’ The largest category of response reflected the view that the keys to shifting the balance to exhilaration lay in their own hands. It calls for a personal response. With 33 percent of
responses, this is the strongest theme of any for the three questions posed in the workshops. There were two kinds of personal response. One refers to personal lifestyle: to become more tolerant, secure a better balance in life, and have fun. The second referred to the way participants carried out their work. A frequently mentioned response was to delegate more. Others could see the benefit of mentoring and coaching and seeking greater clarity in their role.

The issue of school autonomy was an important one. On the one hand, just nine percent of participants expressed a wish for more, although this number was 25 percent in the more centralised Queensland setting. It seems that the amount of autonomy was not a concern for most participants in Victoria. For leaders in Catholic schools in Victoria it was 0 percent. On the other hand, however, there is clearly a wish for more authority in respect to personnel matters, ranging from selection and, where necessary, removal of staff, to the gamut of activities related to performance management. Most important, however, is that there was no indication of any kind that participants sought total autonomy for their schools so that they existed alone and were self-sufficient.

**Administrative work**

The most frequent responses about discouraging and dispiriting aspects of the work in the workshops reported above concerned the performance of staff (24 percent). The second most frequently mentioned response was concerned with administrative work (23 percent) and this is a recurring theme in recent publications. John Fleming, former principal of Bellfield Primary School, where student achievement improved dramatically as a result of building the intellectual capital of the school, has described how this was accomplished and reflected on the role of the principal:

> Leadership is about being involved in school planning, professional development and general school activities. It is about showing that the effective delivery of curriculum is the key school focus. In my mind, the shuffling of papers in the Principal’s Office never supported the development of student achievement that is education’s core business. The Principal needs to lead curriculum development rather than focus on the administration of the school. Administration is important but it is not the school’s core business (Fleming and Kleinhenz, 2007, p 85).

Fleming’s observations and preferences are consistent with those in *The Privilege and the Price* (Department of Education and Training, 2004) and the position taken by Michael Fullan in *What’s Worth Fighting for in the Principalship* (Fullan, 2007). Fullan presents a powerful case that principals are ‘currently locked in a vise-like grip of frustrated inertia at the very time that the moral purpose of society is in jeopardy’ and that ‘the principalship is being shackled at the very time the principal is expected to be the lead change agent’. He cites findings from a study of the Wallace Group in the United States that ‘54 percent of superintendents, and 48 percent of principals believe that they need to work around the system to get things done. Fewer than one-third believe “the system” is on their side’ (cited from the pre-publication manuscript made available to the consultant). It is important to note Fullan’s view that ‘the solution is not to free the principals to be autonomous saviours of the day’.

Preoccupation with paperwork is one of several factors that Watson suggests are responsible for the declining interest in the principalship in Australia and elsewhere:

> Major changes in the role of school principal over the past two decades are identified as increased local site management, including global budgeting in some jurisdictions; increased accountability requirements from employing authorities, particularly in the domain of student achievement; altered relationships with the school community, partly influenced by school choice; and a general increase in time allocated to management and paperwork compared to time spent on educational leadership’ (Watson, 2007, p 30).
However, care must be taken in concluding that a cause-and-effect relationship exists between autonomy and willingness to seek or stay as principal. A study by Duke in 1988 found that 22 percent of principals who were employed in Vermont, a state in the US with minimal levels of autonomy, had left the school system within a year of appointment to the principalship. On the basis of interviews with principals, Duke concluded that:

Principals need autonomy and support. The need for autonomy may require supervisors to treat each principal differently; the need for support may require supervisors to be sensitive to each principal's view of what he or she finds meaningful or trivial about the work (cited by Fullan 2000, pp. 5-6).

The central issue may be the increasing complexity in school education in most countries in recent decades. There is a heightened concern among the public and a range of stakeholders that more should be expected of schools in a time of rapid societal change and demands for new skills in an era of globalisation. Schools also face a demanding scheme of accountability requirements which range from data on student outcomes to the local of enforcement of occupational health and safety requirements. These pressures on schools apply regardless of the degree of autonomy.

An international perspective on the workload issue was provided by Peter Hyman (2005) in 1 out of 10: From Downing Street Vision to Classroom Reality. Hyman left 10 Downing Street after many years as speech writer and advisor to former Prime Minister Tony Blair to work as an assistant to the headteacher at Islington Green School. He has seen education reform from both sides of the policy fence. He concluded that 'For lasting change to occur in public services, politicians need to show more humility and bring on board the professionals' and 'government must take the need to let go more seriously, and to empower the frontline. It must produce a climate where frontline public servants do not become risk-averse. This means less dictating, less putting up pots of money to be bid for – ambitious targets yes, accountability yes, but also back creativity and imagination' (Hyman, 2005, p 390 and p 385).

Despite the workload and declining numbers seeking appointment to the principalship in some countries, it is clear from the results of surveys over a decade that most serving principals in systems of self-managing schools would not wish to return to more centralised arrangements (Bullock and Thomas, 1997; Caldwell and Spinks, 1998; Department of Education and Training, 2004).

**Flexibility and adaptability in the governance of education**

An important issue for all stakeholders is whether higher levels of autonomy are consistent with a sense of system in a nation that values public education. In a broader sense, the issue has been explored in a number of publications that deal with the role of the state and the provision of public services. Michael Barber, former head of public sector delivery in the Blair Government, outlined the need for flexibility and adaptability in the following terms. 'The era of the large, slow moving, steady, respected, bureaucratic public services, however good by earlier standards, is over. In the new era, public services will need to be capable of rapid change, involved in partnerships with the business sector, publicly accountable for the services they deliver, open to diversity, seeking out world class benchmarks, and constantly learning' (Barber, 2003, p. 115).

Flexibility of a kind that Barber had in mind was advocated by Bentley and Wilsdon (2004) who suggest the ‘adaptive state’ is required if the best approaches to service delivery are to be achieved at a particular point in time. ‘We need new systems capable of continuously reconfiguring themselves to create new sources of public value. This means interactively linking the different layers and functions of governance, not searching for a static blueprint that predefines their relative weight. The central question is not how we can achieve precisely the right balance between different layers – central, regional and local – or between different
sectors – public, private and voluntary. Instead, we need to ask How can the system as a whole become more than the sum of its parts?’ (Bentley and Wilsdon, 2004, p 16).

In traditional arrangements there are three levels of a school system: the state, the district or other local or regional authority, and the school. This arrangement is assumed in commentaries on educational reform. Michael Fullan refers to a ‘tri-level model’ in describing the shift from whole school reform to whole system reform (Fullan, 2004; 2005).

As far as authority, responsibility and accountability are concerned, a system of public education may be considered to comprise two levels: the state and the school. The state is the level of government at which constitutional powers for education reside. In most nations this is the national government (in some nations such as Australia, Canada and the United States, these constitutional powers lie at the level of state or province). Other levels of government, or agencies of other levels of government, are defined in legislation and these include districts and other authorities at the local or regional levels. While those subsidiary authorities have power to direct and provide support to schools, it is evident that they are rapidly becoming just one of many sources of support and the authorities concerned are providing a ‘light touch’ when it comes to direction. It is noteworthy that in England, in research reported by Caldwell (2006), local authorities were rarely mentioned by principals, and participants described a range of ways in which they were networking to share knowledge, address problems and pool resources. These arrangements were facilitated in some instances by a local authority.

**System leadership**

When it comes to the exercise of leadership across a system, the traditional approach has been to appoint successful principals to formal positions in a central office, from where they are expected to influence developments across the system, in whole or in part. It remains the most widely-practised approach to system leadership and it has generally worked well. In terms of the scenarios generated by the OECD (2001), it is part of a ‘status quo’ scenario (‘bureaucratic systems continue’). The preferred scenarios among key stakeholders (‘schools as core social centres’ and ‘schools as focussed learning organisations’) call for a high level of professional networking. An approach that is consistent with these scenarios is for successful principals to remain in their posts but exert influence across all or part of a system, rather than leave for an appointment in a central office. This is a new view of the ‘system leader’, defined by David Hopkins, HSBC iNet Chair in International Leadership at the Institute of Education in London, in the following terms:

‘System leaders’ are those head teachers [principals] who are willing to shoulder system leadership roles: who care about and work for the success of other schools as well as their own. System leaders measure their success in terms of improving student learning and increasing achievement, and strive to both raise the bar and narrow the gap(s). They look both into classrooms and across the broader system, they realise in a deep way that the classroom, school and system levels all impact on each other. Crucially they understand that in order to change the larger system you have to engage with it in a meaningful way (Hopkins, 2006).

Hopkins includes the nurturing of ‘system leaders’ in a range of strategies that support a vision of ‘every school a great school’, adapting to education the terminology of Jim Collins in *From Good to Great* cited above (Collins, J. 2001).

The role of the system leader in this image is already taking shape in England, as illustrated by Hopkins:

- Partnering another school which is facing particular difficulties i.e. to run two schools. This role is now commonly referred to as being an Executive Head or when more schools are involved in a Federation as the Chief Executive.
• Choosing to lead a school that is in extremely challenging circumstances or becoming an Academy Principal.

• Acting as a ‘civic leader’ to broker and shape the networks of wider relationships across their local communities that can support children in developing their potential. In England this role currently relates to leading an Education Improvement Partnership or a cluster of Extended Schools.

• Working as a ‘change agent’ within the system such as a consultant leader with a school leadership team to improve levels of attainment, or operating as one of the new School Improvement Partners (Hopkins, 2006).

Hopkins does not see every school leader as a system leader. He calls for a segmented approach that visualises a school’s capacity to lead reform as increasing as the school succeeds.

Choice, competition and admission of students

The critique of school autonomy or self-management has included the view that it can result in increased competition among public schools especially in a policy framework that allows parental choice. The analysis of TIMSS data by Woessmann (2001) reported in Chapter 2 included ‘competition from private educational institutions’ as a factor associated with high student achievement. Recent studies in Britain and the United States suggest that there are benefits for students in communities where there is competition among schools.

A study of competition among secondary schools in Britain in the late 1990s (Levačić, 2001) found that schools perform better, as indicated by the proportion of students achieving high grades in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examinations, in communities where there are a number of perceived competitors. It appears that this outcome is not determined by unfair ‘rivalrous’ conduct but by the greater stimulus to improve and maintain the school’s position and by the taking up of opportunities for cooperation in matters that may improve outcomes for students. The finding in relation to cooperation is interesting, suggesting that competition and cooperation are not mutually exclusive.

There is however conflicting evidence on the impact of choice on the achievement of students in the new environment. On the one hand is a study at Lancaster University (Bradley, Johnes and Millington, 1999; see also related studies on school size reported in Bradley and Taylor, 1998 and Taylor and Bradley, 1999). Data envelope analysis was applied to four data sets: performance (student achievement and truancy rates); school characteristics (student-teacher ratio, school type and socio-economic circumstance of students); expenditure (teachers, books and materials); and local demographic conditions (unemployment rate, socio-economic composition). Data for all secondary schools in England over the period from 1993 to 1997 were analysed. They found that:

The greater the degree of competition between schools, the more efficient the schools tend to become. Moreover, differentials in efficiency between the most and the least efficient schools appear to narrow in response to competition. These effects have strengthened over time, a finding which is consistent with the evolution of the quasi-market. Competition between schools is also found to be an important determinant of the change in relative efficiency over time. (Bradley, Johnes, and Millington, 1999, p 18)

One implication, according to the authors, is that ‘policymakers should take care when deciding whether to close a particular school, since the gains from reduced public expenditure may be outweighed by the loss of efficiency in neighbouring schools because of the reduction in competition between schools’ (p 18).
On the other hand, a study at the Open University revealed that the provision of choice between the former grant-maintained schools and locally-managed schools yielded no significant difference between examination results of students who attended the two types of schools once the students’ social backgrounds are taken into account (Doe, 1998; Levacic and Hardman, 1999; Levacic, Hardman and Woods, 1998). Researchers compared results of students in secondary schools for 91 grant-maintained schools and 206 locally-managed schools. They noted that results in grant-maintained schools increased faster in the early 1990s because their more flexible admissions policies meant that they were ‘better placed to covertly select pupils by ability’. They also concluded that grant-maintained schools have been ‘poor value for money’ and that the policy that led to their creation was ‘yet another example of how additional expenditure on education does not of itself deliver concomitant improvements in learning’ (as cited by Budge, 1999).

It may be concluded that the evidence from England is finely balanced as to whether choice (competition) among schools leads to differences in learning outcomes between students in communities where there are high levels of choice and those where there are relatively low levels of choice.

A related issue is the impact of school choice on student achievement. The most significant study in the international setting is one carried out in Britain, with data from every secondary school in England and Wales from 1989 to 2000. The authors seem justified in their claim that it is the largest study of school choice in publicly-funded schools ever conducted.

Our finding, in contradiction to some smaller studies reported previously, is that the socio-economic stratification of school students declined after the introduction of choice policies. We also show that standards in publicly funded schools rose relative to those of private schools over the same period. (Gorard, Fitz and Taylor, 2001, p 18)

The authors wrote that ‘the school system in England and Wales is certainly fairer than it was in 1989’ but rejected the argument that the findings are solely an outcome of government policy on parental choice. On the other hand, they concluded that ‘market forces in education clearly do not lead, necessarily, to the kind of increasing stratification that we had feared’ and that choice ‘is certainly no worse, and probably a great deal better, than simply assigning children to their nearest school to be educated with similar children living in similar housing conditions’ (p 22).

Most states in Australia have allowed out-of-catchment enrolments since the 1980s. While there are no counterpart studies to that reported by Gorard, Fitz and Taylor, it is likely that similar conclusions can be drawn. The evil often attributed to choice and market is no more likely to be found here than it is in Britain.

Another related issue is the extent to which schools with higher levels of autonomy will control the admissions to change the profile of the student population. A study by West and Hind (2005) in London found that:

Schools whose admissions were controlled by the local authority were more likely to report giving priority to children with medical/social needs and special educational needs than were schools that controlled their own admissions; the latter were more likely to report the use of various potentially ‘creaming’ criteria. There was also more ‘selectivity’ among London comprehensive schools with autonomy over admissions, with higher proportions using potentially selective admissions criteria than in the rest of England. Moreover, it was found that schools with responsibility for their own admissions had lower proportions of pupils with special educational needs and obtained higher scores in public examination ‘league tables’ than schools whose admissions were controlled by the local authority. The findings suggest that some schools, although nominally ‘comprehensive’, appear to restrict access to certain groups of pupils (West and Hind, 2005, p 145).
Needs-based funding of schools

A key issue is the determination of a funding mechanism to allocate resources from central sources to schools in systems of self-managing schools through mechanisms known variously as ‘global budgets’ or ‘student resource packages’. Allocations typically include a per capita component, with weights that differ according to stage of schooling, and needs-based components that reflect student and school characteristics. Allocations for the per capita component generally reflect historical approaches, especially in respect to a class rather than student focus and assumptions about student-teacher ratios. Allocations that reflect school characteristics invariably take account of size and economies of scale; location, especially in remote or rural settings; and stage and specialisation in schooling, where there are different resource requirements. Allocations that are more student-focused typically take account of the socio-economic status of the families or communities of students and the extent of special education needs, including disabilities and impairments. Good progress was made in the 1990s in several countries. Levačič and Ross (1999) provide a summary of approaches in Australia, Canada, England, New Zealand, United States and Wales. A survey conducted by the International Institute for Educational Planning (UNESCO) in 2004 found that: ‘England and Victoria have the systems with the greatest level of delegation with Victoria offering the clearer and more stable needs-led funding methodology’ (Levačič and Downes, 2004, p. 131).

By 2007, attention was shifting in extensively decentralised systems of self-managing schools, especially Australia and England, to how allocations from the system to the school level could take account of efforts to secure success for all students in all settings and to personalise the learning experience as far as possible. Critically important is how resources, once received, are best allocated at the school level. Student-focused planning models are emerging (Caldwell and Spinks, 2008).

Opportunities for corruption

An important issue is whether the introduction of a higher level of autonomy with decentralisation of funds to schools leads to corruption at the local level. This was the subject of a major study of the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) of UNESCO (Levačič and Downes, 2004). Case studies were provided of formula funding for schools under conditions of decentralisation in Australia (Victoria), the United Kingdom (England), Poland (Kwidzyn and Swidnik) and Brazil (Rio Grande do Sul).

The reason for the study was stated in the following terms. ‘Given that the proportion of the national budget devoted to education is significant for both developed and developing countries, it is essential that public funds be directed effectively and used for the purposes for which they are allocated. The misuse of public funds is a serious matter both in terms of ethical and criminal implications of the abuser and in terms of the deprivation of funding inflicted on students’ (Levačič and Downes, 2004, p. 15). The focus of the study was on practice in systems of self-managing schools. Particular attention was given to transparency, the accurate collection of data, the avoidance of fraud, and the need for a range of auditing procedures at different levels. Few instances of fraud were uncovered in the study.

Recommendations were concerned with training, preparing manuals of financial procedures, removing opportunities for collusion, designing an agreed format for financial reporting across the system, local monitoring that is frequent and independent of the principal and administrative staff, the use of independent auditors, external checking of statistics that are used in determining allocations, and clarity in explanations of funding formulae so that they can be readily understood by all stakeholders. The report concluded that ‘formula funding for schools reduces the potential for corruption by increasing transparency as the amount each school should receive and the basis for this is public knowledge’ (Levačič and Downes, 2004, p. 145).
Summary

While recent research reported in Chapter 2 has revealed the conditions under which autonomy for some kinds of decisions may help improve outcomes for students, an important consideration is whether issues related to implementation may over-ride this potential benefit. A range of national and international literature was reviewed in Chapter 3 to identify such issues.

A recent online survey of principal class personnel from all states and territories and in all sectors yielded evidence of a highly committed experienced profession moving toward retirement, with the majority seeing their work as a way of life and about half considering that there was not a good work-life balance. Heavy workload and dealing with initiatives from different levels of government were stressors, with about one-third reporting a work-related diagnosed medical condition.

Findings from five workshops conducted in Australia in 2005 also shed light on positive and negative aspects of the role of the principal. On the one hand, principals were ‘exhilarated’ when success in the core business of the school was experienced. They enjoyed working with highly motivated colleagues and students. On the other hand, they were dispirited and discouraged by the poor performance of some staff, the burden of administrative work, and the perceived lack of support from ‘the system’. They recognised that minimising the negative aspects lay to some extent in their own hands through a better work-life balance and change in leadership style. These workshops were conducted in Victoria (4) and Queensland (1). Only nine percent expressed a wish for more autonomy, although this number was 25 percent for participants in the Queensland event.

Another issue is concerned with the support and role of intermediate levels such as local authorities in England and districts or regions in Australia. Arrangements seem to change on a regular basis and some commentators have pointed out that this may be desirable as conditions change. It is evident that these levels are becoming just one of several sources of support for schools, with developments in England including the emergence of a new concept of ‘system leadership’ whereby principals and other school leaders provide support to other schools through federations and networks.

Concerns have been expressed from time to time that higher levels of autonomy for schools will lead to higher levels of competition, especially where there is more opportunity for choice among schools, and that schools with freedom to determine which students shall be admitted may opt to exclude students at risk, variously defined. Findings on the effect of competition have been mixed in England, with some suggesting that it may in fact lead to improved outcomes for students. There is evidence in England that increasing the amount of parental choice has reduced the social stratification of schools. One study in England suggests that school discretion on admissions may result in a higher rate of exclusion of students with special educational needs than if admissions are determined by the local authority.

An important issue to be addressed in all settings where a higher degree of autonomy has been implemented or is contemplated is how financial resources will be allocated to schools. Mechanisms for student needs-based funding must be devised. A study of the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) of UNESCO suggests that the approach in Victoria has particular merit. Another study by IIEP has investigated the extent to which a higher level of autonomy may create more opportunities for corruption in the use of funds. Case studies in several nations, including Australia and England, concluded that it did not. On the contrary, the weight of evidence is that it may reduce opportunities for corruption through the greater transparency in the use of funds that is normally associated with a higher degree of autonomy.
CHAPTER 4 METHODOLOGY

Chapter 4 describes the methodology for mapping patterns of autonomy in different states, territories, Catholic schools and independent schools, including the selection of schools for case study, and how information was gathered in meetings of executives of principals’ associations and focus groups of principals. Chapters 5 to 14 are devoted to the outcomes, with a chapter devoted to each of the states and territories as well as to Catholic and independent schools.

Mapping

Information on patterns of school leader autonomy was requested of government school systems in each state and territory; systems of non-government schools, of which Catholic systems are one kind albeit the largest; organisations that represent independent non-government schools; and executives of principals’ associations.

The OECD conducted surveys among its 30 members and 20 partner nations to determine patterns of centralisation and decentralisation (OECD, 2004). It considered the locus and mode of decision-making in four domains. Locus referred to which of six levels decisions were made: national, state, regional, municipal, local or school. Mode referred to which of four ways decisions were made: full autonomy at the level concerned, consultation with other bodies at that level, independently but within a framework set by a higher authority or other. The four domains were organisation of instruction, personnel management, planning and structures, and resources. The OECD report provided comparisons among nations participating in the survey and this will place the different models in Australia in an international context (the OECD report did not differentiate among states and territories in Australia).

The 2003 Survey on Decision-Making was used by the OECD to collect data on decision-making processes in education systems in OECD member and partner nations. Results from 25 countries were published and compared (OECD, 2004). The survey contained 38 questions on information in four domains (OECD, 2004, p52, Annex 3). The domains and types of questions included:

- The organisation of instruction: bodies determining the school attended, decisions affecting school careers, instruction time, choice of textbooks, grouping pupils, assistance of pupils, teaching methods, assessment of pupils’ regular work;
- Personnel management: hiring and dismissal of staff, duties and conditions of service of staff, fixing of salary of staff;
- Planning and structures: creation or closure of a school, creation or abolition of a grade level, designing programmes of study, selection of subjects taught in a particular school, setting of qualifying examinations for a certificate or diploma, credentialing;
- Resource allocation and use: allocation of resources, use of resources.

The survey was completed by a panel of experts for each country, which included members from a central government level, a state, provincial, regional government level or local authorities at a middle level, and at an individual school level. The panel was asked to complete the survey and to reach a consensus on the responses to all questions. The panels were asked to refer to the lower secondary level of education in their country to avoid any possible ambiguities.
**Adaptation of OECD Methodology**

The OECD methodology was adapted for the current project in several ways. The four domains were maintained and these were re-titled and equally weighted, with nine items in each: (1) Teaching and Learning, (2) Staffing and Remuneration, (3) Curriculum and Educational Planning, and (4) Finance and Facilities.

Consistent with the OECD approach, the locus of decision-making referred to the levels at which the decision is made as required by legislation, regulation, policies or procedures, choosing from five levels: (1) Australian Government, (2) State or Territory Governments, (3) Regional or District Authorities, (4) School, or (5) Other.

The mode of decision-making referred to the extent of autonomy that the specified level of authority has in making each kind of decision. Four modes were specified: (1) Full Autonomy (decisions are made with full autonomy at the specified level, without reference to a framework set at a higher level or consultation with others); (2) Framed Autonomy (decisions are made at the level that has been selected but within a framework of legislation, regulations or policies set at a higher level; (3) Consultative Autonomy (decisions at the specified level require consultation with others at the same or lower levels); and (4) Other (other modes of autonomy).

It was recognised that autonomy at a particular level is often accompanied by accountability to a higher level of authority. For some items more than one level of authority may be involved in the decision-making process. In this case, all relevant levels were specified, with the manner in which this occurs explained in the course of discussion. Supporting or explanatory documentation was often provided or requested.

Nine items were included in each domain. While these included several that also appeared in the OECD survey, most were adapted, added or deleted to suit the Australian scene. The following were included:

**Teaching and Learning**

1. Time allocated to teaching and learning
2. Choice of textbooks and other teaching materials
3. Choice of information and communications technologies
4. Grouping of students for teaching and learning
5. Kind of support offered to students with particular educational needs
6. Choice of approaches to teaching and learning
7. Assessment of students' regular work
8. Frequency of reporting student progress to parents
9. Format for reporting student progress to parents

**Staffing and Remuneration**

1. Selection of staff on a permanent /tenured basis, including decisions on the number and professional mix of permanent /tenured staff
2. Selection of staff on a short-term basis and selection of providers for outsourcing
3. Formal hiring / contracting of staff on a permanent /tenured basis
4. Formal hiring / contracting of staff on a short-term basis and providers for outsourcing
5. Dismissal of staff
6. Duties of staff
7. Conditions of service for staff
8. Salary of staff
9. Additional remuneration for staff
Curriculum and Educational Planning

1. Establishment or disestablishment of a school
2. Addition or removal of a grade / year level or campus at the school
3. Addition or removal of a class at a particular grade / year level
4. School at which a student may enrol
5. Curriculum offered by the school
6. Subjects of study within the curriculum to be offered by the school
7. Programmes or pathways of study to be available for choice by students
8. Setting of formal examinations for a certificate or diploma
9. Awarding a certificate or diploma

Finance and Facilities

1. The amount of funds to be allocated to the school from the public purse
2. Fees to be charged to parents for teaching and learning
3. Amounts to be charged by the school for services other than teaching and learning
4. Capacity of school to raise funds other than fees for learning and teaching or for services
5. Deployment of funds at the school including flexibility across budget categories
6. Allocation of funds for capital works at the school
7. Allocation of funds for maintenance of school facilities
8. Design of school facilities
9. Capacity of schools to establish partnerships with business

Utilising the template

A template was constructed to use in meetings with representatives of employing authorities and principals' associations. It contained a cover page providing guidance on completing the instrument. Then followed four pages, one for each domain, each page had nine items listed according to categories as set out above. Table 4.1 contains a sample page of the template. The complete instrument is contained in Appendix 2.

The template was normally sent a day or so in advance of meetings so that participants had a chance to become familiar with the task and the format. Meetings varied as far as the number of participants concerned, with as few as one or two in the case of some employing authorities and as many as fifteen, in the case of some authorities and executives of principals’ associations. One or two members of the consultancy team attended each meeting. A few minutes were spent explaining how the template was to be completed and sometimes the first few items were completed as a group before each participant was invited to complete the document individually. It was to be expected that different people would have a different view about locus and mode and the patterns reported for each state and territory and for Catholic and independent schools in Chapters 5 to 14 describe the modal response but also describe in general terms the range of responses. Several qualitative and quantitative approaches were used to record responses in these discussions as illustrated in the detailed reports of the mapping exercise in Appendix 2.

Case Studies

Chapters 5 to 14 also include brief case studies of 12 schools, including one government school in each state and territory in Australia, two schools in Catholic school systems and two Independent schools. These schools were nominated by the relevant government school system or senior executives of organisations representing independent schools or principals' association in the case of Catholic schools. While these case studies cannot be viewed as representative, they offer an insight into school and principal autonomy in different school sectors and across different types of schools. Included were small and large schools, primary, secondary and P-12 schools, schools in regional and urban areas, and schools that serve higher and lower socio-economic communities. Table 4.2 summarises the characteristics of schools in the various jurisdictions.
Table 4.1: Template for mapping school autonomy

CLASSIFICATION: _________________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decision¹</th>
<th>Level at which decision is made²</th>
<th>Extent of autonomy at specified level³</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
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<td>C/wealth</td>
<td>State / Territory</td>
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<td>9</td>
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</table>

¹ Your response should describe the general pattern for decisions of the kind under consideration. More than one response may be appropriate for some decisions.
² This refers to the level at which the decision is made as required in legislation, regulations, policies or procedures.
³ Autonomy at a particular level is normally accompanied by accountability to a higher level.
⁴ It is acknowledged that there may be different patterns of governance at the school level. It is to be understood in this project that principal autonomy follows from school autonomy.
⁵ Full autonomy means that a decision may be made without reference to a framework set at a higher level and without a requirement to consult others at the same or lower levels.
⁶ Framed autonomy means that a decision at this level must be framed by a set of requirements determined by a higher authority.
⁷ Consultative autonomy means that an authority at this level is required to consult with others at the same or lower levels before a decision is made.
### Table 4.2: Characteristics of schools nominated for case study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Jurisdiction</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Community SES / Fee</th>
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<td>High</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Queensland</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Regional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tasmania</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WA</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>High</td>
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<td></td>
<td>ACT</td>
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<td>Urban</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NT</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Government</td>
<td>Catholic NSW</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>P-12</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Regional</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>P-12</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Issues

Issues in school and principal autonomy were identified in the interviews and focus group discussions involving representatives from primary and secondary principals’ associations and system leaders. A list of twenty sample questions was used to shape these interviews and focus group discussions. Each question was considered in the context of principal autonomy as manifested in each jurisdiction or sector.

The sample questions were:

1. In which matters do principals currently have autonomy?
2. How is this autonomy exercised or constrained (in respect to curriculum, personnel, students, budget, and facilities)?
3. How has principal autonomy been strengthened in recent times?
4. How has principal autonomy been constrained in recent times?
5. In which matters would you wish to see more autonomy for principals?
6. In which matters would you wish to see less autonomy for principals?
7. In what ways does autonomy currently extend to the selection, deployment, assessment and reward of staff, especially in respect to hard-to-staff schools?
8. In what ways should autonomy be extended in matters related to different categories of staff?
9. In what ways should autonomy be constrained in matters related to different categories of staff?
10. What are the major benefits of principal autonomy (for principals, other school leaders, teachers, other staff, students, parents, community, education authorities, others)?
11. In what ways does or can principal autonomy contribute to improved outcomes for students?
12. How does autonomy impact on the workload of principals and other school leaders?
13. How does autonomy impact on the personal well-being of principals and other school leaders?
14. In what ways do current levels of principal autonomy serve to encourage able people to seek the principalship?
15. In what ways do current levels of principal autonomy serve to discourage able people from seeking the principalship?
16. What would be the impact of greater autonomy on the numbers of able people seeking the principalship?

17. What are the respective roles and responsibilities of principals and governing bodies in the exercise of principal autonomy?

18. What are the benefits of principal autonomy in respect to relationships with governing bodies (or advisory or consultative bodies where governing bodies with more formal powers do not exist)?

19. What kinds of support have been provided to enable principals to exercise autonomy?

20. What additional support is required to enable principals to exercise autonomy more effectively?

The groups responding to these questions varied in nature and number as indicated in each of Chapters 5 to 14. Some meetings were of separate executives of primary and secondary principals’ associations. Others were a composition of these two groups. In some instances, executives were augmented by other principals. In two jurisdictions with remote schools (Northern Territory and Queensland), a teleconference was conducted.

An interactive technology was used to facilitate and record responses to these questions when relatively large groups of participants were involved. This called for each participant or small group of participants to use a keyboard to record their responses which were projected for all to see (anonymity is maintained using this approach). This technology was also used in Australian research over the last three years. The consultant has used it on more than 60 occasions during this period. Large numbers of responses can be generated relatively quickly using this technology which is marketed under the brand name of Zing. One of the advantages of the approach is that all responses can be saved to a Word file enabling analysis and classification after the event.
CHAPTER 5  AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

The system of government schooling in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) is somewhat different from other systems in Australia. It does not have regional or district authorities to assist schools. All supervision and support of schools is directly managed by the ACT Department of Education and Training. This difference has been noted in the responses to the mapping template (see Appendix 2).

Schools in the ACT are also considered to be part of the public service. They are therefore required to comply with all public service initiatives, including occupational health and safety policies. Some principals in the focus group indicated that in the ACT, we should differentiate between decisions that affect schools that are made by the Department of Education and Training and those that affect all public offices of the ACT Government. As described in Chapter 2, the ACT system has had a policy of school-based management since the establishment of the ACT Schools Authority in 1976. In 1997, the policy was extended to devolve responsibility for finances and facilities maintenance to the school level. The SBM policy is discussed further in the ACT case study.

Mapping

The representatives from the ACT Department of Education and Training indicated that the level of decentralisation in this system is currently being reduced in some areas. The Department will soon take on some of the responsibilities that had previously been devolved to the school level, such as facilities management and maintenance. Given the recently updated Education Act in the ACT clearly articulates a framework for decision making at the school level, however, a relatively high level of school based management is likely to continue to be a focus of ACT public schools.

1. Teaching and Learning

Analysis of the responses to the mapping exercise relating to the teaching and learning domain indicates agreement between the Department and school leaders that both share many responsibilities for decision-making. There was, however, divergence in views regarding the responsibilities for the choice of information and communication technologies in schools. While the representatives of the Department indicated that authority for this decision was equally shared by schools and the Department, the principals reported that the Department has greater decision-making powers. The majority of representatives from each of these groups agreed that decisions regarding the selection of information and communication technologies are made within a framework.

The principals stated that some initiatives from both the Australian and ACT Governments may have an influence on school practice, such as A-E reporting. The school and system leaders indicated that the choice of approaches to teaching and learning was a school-level decision. The principals noted, however, that programmes that provide funding for professional development, such as the Australian Government Quality Teacher Programme (AGQTP), may have an effect on the selections of methods for teaching and learning that take place within the classroom.

The representatives from the Department reported that there are guidelines for the amount of teaching time that secondary schools should provide each week. These guidelines relate to the hours required for unit delivery, usually over a semester, and are determined by agreement between the Department and Board of Senior Secondary Studies (BSSS). The participants from the Department and the principals’ association, however, indicated that schools have some flexibility within these frameworks.
Like most other systems, the ACT Department of Education and Training has set minimum standards, within the Australian Government framework, for the frequency and format of reporting on student progress to parents. This mapping exercise indicates that these guidelines provide the schools with significant flexibility in their decisions about reporting. The principals, however, indicated that the Australian Government’s recommendations of the A-E system of reporting to parents may filter down to teachers’ classroom practice and have an influence on the format of assessment for students’ regular work.

2. Staffing and Remuneration

There was divergence in the responses from school and system leaders regarding the locus of decisions regarding the number and professional mix of staff and the selection of permanent staff within schools. Although each group agreed that both the Department and the school has input into these decisions, there was a divergence in the balance of these responsibilities. Schools are staffed based on set formulas that allow principals autonomy in staff numbers, compositions and, to some extent, classification levels.

The school and system leaders also agreed that schools had a greater responsibility for the selection of staff on short-term contracts and entering into contracts with outsourcing providers. The principals reported that, although they have some freedom in these decisions, their ability to select short-term staff or outsource school requirements are regulated by the Department framework. These principals indicated that school leaders need to be proactive to find short-term staff. Schools and school staff in the ACT system are classified as part of the public service. All participants in this mapping exercise stated that, as a result of this classification, schools and staff are regulated by some conditions that are not set by the education system itself. For example, OH & S guidelines are determined at a whole of government level as opposed to being set at the Departmental level in other jurisdictions, and may not take into account issues specific to schools.

The representatives of the principals’ association indicated that they do not want complete responsibility for the employment and dismissal of staff. They raised concerns about the additional workload that would result from greater responsibilities for staff recruitment, employment and management and the potential for liability resulting from employment issues. These principals, however, reported that they would like the ability to accept or refuse transfers. There was a high level of agreement from all participants that school principals continue to have significant levels of involvement in the selection of permanent school staff.

3. Curriculum and Educational Planning

The ACT system has chosen to maintain three stages of schooling. These are primary schooling (years K-6), secondary schooling (years 7-10) and the college system (years 11-12). There are some areas in which a fourth stage of Middle Schooling has been included. A recent initiative has amalgamated pre-schooling and early childhood education with primary schools. While primary and secondary schools are required to comply with the ACT curriculum guidelines, curriculum in upper secondary schooling is developed and implemented at the college level.

The Chief Executive is responsible for the curriculum framework for years K-10 in ACT schools. It was reported that schools have significant freedom within the current framework but are accountable to their school boards for their decisions. Representatives from the Department reported that there are current plans for changes to the school curriculum. The new curriculum, which will be implemented in schools in 2008, has been designed in consultation with schools. It was noted that this new framework includes more prescription in the K-10 curriculum.

There was a high level of agreement between representatives from the principals’ association and from the Department regarding the locus of responsibility for decisions in the curriculum and
educational planning domain. Aside from decisions regarding the establishment and disestablishment of schools and the addition or removal of year levels, the majority of these decisions were shared by the Department and the schools. It was noted that many of the decisions regarding curriculum, enrolment and changes to schools are made both within a framework and in consultation with the community.

4. Finance and Facilities

The ‘Enhanced School Based Management’ policy, which was implemented in 1997, devolved responsibilities for school budgets to the school level. Schools currently receive a global budget and are responsible for the management of finance and facilities within their school. Principals expressed a concern that schools which are able to operate with a budget surplus may have their global budgets reduced in a less prosperous economic climate.

Analysis of the responses to the mapping exercise indicated high levels of agreement among participants in this domain. All representatives noted that the charging of compulsory fees for teaching and learning in the ACT government system is prohibited by legislation. Schools are able to request voluntary contributions from parents at levels set by the Department. It was reported that schools in the ACT also have high levels of flexibility in setting fees for services other than teaching and learning, raising funds and deploying funds across budget categories. The principals indicated that, while these decisions are made within a framework, school leaders also often consult with members of the school community on any significant changes in these areas.

Case Study

The school nominated for study in the ACT is a large urban government primary school that has a reputation for solid academic performance and serves a mid-to-high socio-economic community, around 50 percent of which resides outside the designated ‘catchment’ area. This school serves a transient and culturally diverse community. Over 35 different cultural backgrounds are represented among the 418 students. The school receives the equivalent of almost one full-time teacher to support the needs of students who have English as a second language.

The principal reported that, in her view, she has had a significant level of flexibility in decision-making. In the two years since she began at this school, she has been able to make key changes, ranging from implementing pastoral programmes to embedding new whole school curriculum approaches to influencing substantial upgrades to the school’s buildings and facilities. This principal indicated that she has had considerable input and involvement in the physical changes to the school from the planning stages to the final stages of work for the buildings. She described her position within the school as having significant scope to be creative. She stated that she was supported in these capital works projects by the staff and highly capable parent groups within the school community. The involvement of the parent community has included assisting the school with writing applications for grants for these capital works and other school projects.

School-based decision-making has been a feature of the education system in the ACT since the introduction of the ACT Schools Authority in 1976. ‘Enhanced School-Based Management’, which was introduced in 1997, provided government schools in the territory with global budgets and devolved responsibility for finance and facilities maintenance to the school level. This principal reported that in the past decade, there has been varying levels of support to undertake the Enhanced School-Based Management programme. She indicated that smaller primary schools, in particular, have encountered some difficulties as they do not have the benefits of an economy of scale, with principals of small schools often doing a very large amount of work themselves.
In discussing the current system of schooling in the ACT, the principal reported that the system has recently introduced a range of major changes, such as the ‘Curriculum Renewal’ programme. While she stated that many of the new system initiatives have significant value, she expressed concern about the number of new initiatives and level of support, training and resourcing provided to schools to implement change. She indicated that staff and school leaders are often required to learn new information, terminology and skills for new initiatives in schools. Principals and staff, therefore, require clear and comprehensive professional development programmes and support to effectively implement change. She further reported that, as the leader of the school, the principal needs to be able to confidently support staff in their implementation of new policies related to teaching and learning.

This principal indicated that school leaders are ultimately responsible for the range of decisions that are made at the school level. She stated that the high level of responsibility, increasing scope and complexity of the role has a significant impact on the workload, stress and well-being of principals. The large amount of emerging compliance-based work has also directly impacted on principals’ increasing workload. This principal described time management as a significant issue for school leaders, although this is something that can be strengthened through experience. It was reported, however, that even experienced principals often feel that they do not have the time to manage all of their responsibilities at a suitability deep level. The principalship was described as a highly creative and satisfying role if the principal has sufficient time to dedicate to educational leadership as opposed to demands on time by management and compliance issues. This principal described the need for an additional business manager position in schools to address such issues. She indicated that networks, such as the principals’ associations, can provide support to school leaders and enable them to share ideas and experiences.

In discussions about staffing, the principal stated that she has seen a number of experienced teaching staff, who have the potential to become school leaders, leave the education sector. She reported that in her school, she does not have difficulty attracting teaching staff. The school, however, has a mix of recent graduates and highly experienced teachers and has lost some staff with five to ten years experience. She indicated her concern that these staff are leaving to work in private industries or other areas of the public service, where teachers’ skills are prized, and talented professionals can make rapid progress along their career path. She stated that even with global budgets, school leaders are unable to offer staff levels of remuneration similar to those in private industry. Staffing of schools is undertaken centrally and while principals can offer a ‘list’ of staff suitable for a given position, there is no certainty that teachers on the list will be placed in the school. This can be an issue when principals do their best to employ the most suitable teachers for their particular school needs. Principals need more certainty of the outcomes of their staff selection.

**Issues in school and principal autonomy**

Due to the small size of the school system in the ACT, principals reported that the Department is very close to the schools. The representatives from the Department echoed this description, stating that the size of the ACT system has created the need for high levels of transparency from both schools and the Department. They indicated that this relationship can lead some principals to feel that they are being closely supervised. However, it was not considered to result in high levels of support for schools. These principals stated that they need higher levels of support from the Department before they can consider managing additional responsibilities. They described the current levels of support as decreasing due to constraints within the Department, although the number of programmes and initiatives for which schools are responsible were described as increasing. All participants in the mapping exercise noted that the ACT system does not initiate all of these new programmes and policies, which may also arise from other areas of the ACT Government or from the Australian Government. Representatives from the department indicated that they would like to provide principals with more support in managing the compliance issues that accompany new policies and initiatives.
The participants from the Department reported that there are diverse views about increased autonomy among principals in the ACT system. They indicated that principals from larger schools and colleges appear more willing to adopt greater levels of responsibility for decision-making in their schools. The leaders of smaller schools are reported to want flexibility in decision-making but would like support from the Department in some aspects of school management, including facilities maintenance. The representatives from the Department also noted that there is a relationship between the level of experience of principals and the amount of autonomy that they report they would like.

These principals reported that the scope and complexity of the tasks for which they are responsible is often difficult to manage. They stated that they sometimes feel unable to address all areas of their role to the standards to which they aspire. While their staff can capably and effectively manage many delegated tasks, the principals reported that they are often required to address some incidents immediately, which adds to their workload.

The principals in the focus group reported that the Department does not currently offer effective, systematic and comprehensive training programme for aspirants, new principals or principals who would like additional professional development. They recommended a revision of the current training processes, which they stated could be disjointed and often takes them away from the school. The principals’ association has developed a mentoring system to provide support and assistance to new and less experienced principals.

There is a perception in the ACT that many people are either considering leaving or have left teaching roles for positions in other sectors. The principals in the focus group reported that the primary reasons that many people leave the education sector is that the pace of career progression and remuneration is not commensurate with other industries. They stated that one positive aspect about staff in the education sector is that all staff have a commitment to providing effective teaching and learning for students.

**Key themes**

- The ACT is of special interest because it was an early adopter of school-based management in the early 1970s when the ACT Schools Authority was established. It was the first jurisdiction in the country to introduce school councils with significant authority and responsibility.

- There has been no major development of a kind that occurred in the early 1990s in Victoria but the concept of ‘Enhanced School-Based Management’ was introduced in 1997. This included devolution of school budgets to the school level.

- There was general agreement between centrally-employed leaders and school principals on the pattern of autonomy.

- Leaders at the system level perceive differences among principals in the extent to which the latter would wish to have a higher level of autonomy.

- The principal in the case study school felt she had an appropriate level of flexibility in decision-making.

- Principals indicated their concern at the large number of initiatives to be implemented in schools and, while they appreciated that system-level staff were closely connected to schools, they felt that there should be more support for schools and a more systematic approach to the preparation and professional development of principals and other school leaders.
CHAPTER 6  NEW SOUTH WALES

Mapping

Three groups were involved in mapping the extent of school and principal autonomy in New South Wales (NSW): senior officers of the Department of Education and Training (DET), representatives of the NSW Primary Principals Association (NSWPPA) and a special task force of the NSW Secondary Principals Council (NSWSPC) that was examining the issue of autonomy at the time of the current study. Two sets of maps are included in Appendix 2, one that combines all three maps in a manner that shows where noteworthy differences in perception occur, the other from NSWSPC that contains a relatively large number of responses from this group that was itself undertaking a study of school and principal autonomy.

1. Teaching and Learning

Senior officers of DET offered the following comments on school and principal autonomy in this domain as summarised below.

The NSW Board of Studies provides time frames for teaching and learning and the Department generally requires more time than specified in these standards. The Australian Government is also involved through the requirement that all states and territories provide in their curriculum at least two hours of physical activity each school week. The Board provides a prescribed list of textbooks and guidelines for other materials for teaching and learning for the Higher School Certificate (HSC). Schools have high levels of flexibility in the selection of texts, as long as they support curriculum requirements for K-10. The Department also provides materials to support teaching and learning. In primary schools, decisions regarding the use of textbooks and/or other materials are generally made in consultation with the school community.

It was reported that, while the choice of ICT is predominantly a Departmental responsibility, the regional level may be involved in supporting a particular regional focus in this area. For example, some of the ten regional offices in NSW are involved in supporting their schools with ‘smart boards’ or computers that are compatible across the region. School choices within these guidelines are supported. Should schools decide to purchase ICT that does not fall within these guidelines, they would not receive ongoing maintenance support from the Department.

Schools have high levels of flexibility in the grouping of students for teaching and learning. The Department provides guidelines regarding class size and formulae for schools to decide how to group students for teaching and learning. Many decisions on grouping are made in consultation with parents. The Department provides a framework on how schools should deal with students with special needs such as students with learning disabilities or students from Indigenous backgrounds. Regional authorities are involved in allocating support for individual schools. Schools, however, have some discretion about the support they provide to students, within Departmental guidelines and the resources allocated by the region. Individual Education Plans for students with disabilities and Personalised Learning Plans to support Aboriginal students are prepared in consultation with the region, support staff and, wherever possible, the parents. As far as choice of approaches to teaching and learning are concerned, the Department has developed the Quality Teaching in NSW Public Schools approach which is implemented at the regional level with the support of consultants. The Board of Studies has indirect influence through its descriptions of the curriculum (rationale, philosophy and content) and how it should be implemented.

The Department requires all schools to have an assessment policy for students at the upper secondary level. It also specifies minimum standards for the frequency of reporting student
progress which are framed by Australian Government requirements. Schools have discretion in exceeding minimum standards.

2. Staffing and Remuneration

Senior officers of DET provided the following comments on school autonomy in this domain.

Decisions on the number and mix of staff are mostly made by the Department. Decisions for primary schools are made on the basis of enrolments but external funding may be used to employ a specialist teacher to provide assistance with ICT or music. The mix of staff depends on school priorities and student needs. In secondary schools, the professional mix of staff is influenced by enrolments for student electives. If high numbers of students enrol in a particular elective, then additional staff in that area may be required.

Government schools in NSW have permanent, casual and temporary (replacement) staff. The Department has a significant level of involvement in the selection of permanent staff, although schools may choose their level of involvement, including the choice to convene selection panels for the teachers (top five from the employment list or from expressions of interest) put forward by the Department. Staff are provided with codes, which indicate their experience and areas of training. These are matched to the employment requirements provided by schools with vacancies. All schools are allocated transfer points and staff who have taught in regional and remote areas may have transfer points that provide them with higher levels of choice of location. School selection panels are provided with the top five teachers who have been matched by the Department to the school’s requirements. Incentive and priority transfers for staff who have previously taught in regional or remote schools for a number of years and staff who are resuming duty after approved leave must be given priority in the selection of staff. If this process is unsuccessful in filling the vacancy, then schools may select from the ‘targeted graduate programme’, of up to 1,000 graduates per year. Schools have the right to indicate that staff put forward to them by the Department through an expression of interest process do not meet the needs of the school and its context. If none of these arrangements work out, schools can advertise the position. The school education directors are involved in selection panels for selecting principals.

The process for the recruitment and employment of teachers, executives and principals is determined under the current Staffing Agreement (2005-2008). This agreement works to provide a balance between ensuring selection to meet local contexts and needs and providing quality teachers for all students and schools across the state.

A priority transfer program is in place for teachers, employed by the Department, who require placement due to changes in their former school, such as a reduction of student numbers, changed curriculum needs or school reclassifications and closures. Priority transfers are also available for transfers of Indigenous teachers, compassionate transfers or transfers for those who have served in remote or rural schools. Classroom teacher positions not filled through priority transfer, service transfer, the Permanent Employment Program, special fitness appointment or through a mix of resumption of duty from leave, the Graduate Recruitment Program, scholarship holders, teachers completing targeted training programmes or from the employment list, will be externally advertised and filled by merit. Schools participate in the choice of staff by indicating their needs for subject area and aptitudes and through convening panels to select staff through interviews of the ‘top five’ applicants, Permanent Employment Program, special fitness and externally advertised positions.

Executive staff positions, other than the position of principal, not filled by priority transfer, special fitness appointment, executive returning from leave and executive mobility, will be externally advertised and filled by merit. Schools participate in the choice of staff by indicating their needs for teaching level, subject area and aptitudes and through convening panels to select staff through the expression of interest (executive mobility) special fitness and externally advertised positions.
Principal positions not filled by priority transfer, special fitness appointment, principals returning from leave or merit selection from within current principals, will be externally advertised and filled by merit. Schools participate through panels to select the principal through the expression of interest (merit selection from within current principals) special fitness and externally advertised positions. School education directors convene the panels.

The Department provides a support system for relief engagement of casual and temporary staff, including ‘Casual Direct’, which is a system pool for relief teachers. Schools in NSW are not involved in the outsourcing of professional services. Regions select consultants on the basis of merit for priority areas in their jurisdiction. Schools have a significant amount of responsibility for employment of staff for short-term projects.

There is a state-wide framework for hiring staff, which can be managed at the school level with less flexibility in respect to classroom teachers than for executive teachers. There also is a state-wide framework for the dismissal of staff. Principals make the recommendations, and the regional directors have the power to dismiss staff.

The Institute of Teachers Act 2004 requires that all teachers who have not taught in NSW before October 2004 are termed new scheme teachers. After graduating and beginning work in NSW, teachers employed as full time permanent staff have three years to gain accreditation at professional competence as defined under the Professional Teaching Standards. If they do not attain accreditation within the designated time frame principals can recommend their revocation or dismissal. Non-government schools can employ teachers who have not completed all their requirements to teach (transitionally accredited) provided that they are fully accredited within the required timeframe. If permanent full time teachers don’t receive accreditation in the three year period then they are unable to teach in any NSW school.

The NSW Institute of Teachers has a framework of Professional Teaching Standards which contains a number of domains, elements and standards describing the work, competencies and behaviours expected of teachers at the various stages of Graduate Teacher, Professional Competence, Professional Accomplishment and Professional Leadership. Remuneration including salary, incentives, rewards and other benefits are determined by the Department through awards, policies and procedures. The Department provides a range of incentives for teachers who work in regional and remote settings including significant rental subsides, retention benefits and locality allowances.

3. Curriculum and Strategic Planning

Senior officers of DET offered the following comments on school and principal autonomy in this domain as summarised below.

The establishment and disestablishment of schools are a ministerial decision after 12 months of consultation. The structure (number and composition) of classes is determined at the school level for both primary and secondary schools within a state-wide framework. For the addition or removal of a grade/year level or campus at the school, there is a state-wide agreement on how decisions will be made at the senior secondary level. Regional offices are involved in the process. The Department determines enrolment boundaries which ensure that all students have a place at their local school. While local enrolment has priority, schools may enrol students from outside the enrolment boundaries if there are places still available.

The region may be involved in decisions about the curriculum to be offered at a school if there is a special focus proposed by the school or if schools opt to include a selective stream. Subjects of study within the curriculum to be offered by the school or programmes or pathways of study to be available for choice by students were discussed. In the secondary setting, students influence these decisions by the number of enrolments in particular electives. Schools may need to add teachers to cover these electives or collaborate with other schools or organisations.
to provide students with access to particular subjects or pathways. Formal examinations and the awarding of certificates are matters for the Board of Studies, with the school providing advice on the eligibility of students.

4. **Finance and Facilities**

Senior officers of DET offered the following comments on school and principal autonomy in this domain as summarised below.

The Department determines the levels of funds to be allocated to schools from the public purse and the amount for voluntary contributions to support teaching and learning, including materials and consumables. Schools are able to adjust the level of voluntary contributions according to the Consumer Price Index (CPI). The Department sets broad guidelines regarding amounts that can be charged for services other than teaching and learning. Should schools choose to vary the charges, the decision is made in consultation with the community. The Department provides constraints on how ‘tied funds’ shall be spent. There is flexibility at the school level in regard to other funds such as those raised by the school and its community. The region may also set some priorities.

The Australian Government provides funding for some capital projects under the Investing in Our Schools Programme (IOSP). Proposals are prepared by the school and funds are allocated to schools by regional authorities. Schools must be built or renovated according to design codes determined at the state level but may have some input on the details. Maintenance must be done according to State-wide procedures. There are State-wide processes for sponsorships and other partners with the corporate sector as well as with public-private partnerships in the building of schools. Regional authorities may provide support.

**Case Study**

The school nominated for case study is a large urban high school. It employs about 120 staff and enrolls approximately 1,100 students from a predominantly middle-class community. The principal reported that members of this school community generally have a strong commitment to education and high performance by its school. The school is known for high performance in sport, academic and cultural (including visual and performing arts) activities. The school has been operating for about 30 years. The school has two special needs classes for autistic students and the principal also manages an off-site centre for about 20 troubled adolescents. In 2007 the school has given priority to literacy and numeracy. It received three awards in improvement and performance in these areas. The school bases most of its activities on four core values: safety, personal best, respect and responsibility.

The school has an established staff. The principal believes that this ensures significant intellectual capital; however, he believes the school needs some fresh ideas in teaching and learning and student management. Some staff struggle with the pace of changes in technology and the requirements for staff and students to establish and maintain their skills in ICT.

The principal stated that the school’s staffing budget is constrained by the number of enrolments and so flexibility is limited. Decisions regarding the number of staff are not the school's responsibility, but the school has some responsibility for the professional mix of staff. Transfer processes can be used. The principal commented that he found managing underperforming staff could be tiresome and time-consuming.

The school has been able to employ a person for two days per week to assist with literacy and numeracy strategies. Each fortnight this staff member presents different teaching and learning strategies to all school staff. These presentations examine generic skills that can be used across faculties (departments) to support student learning in these areas. The outcome has been improvements in literacy and numeracy for all students, particularly the boys.
The principal believes that principals need to recognise the value of people who work in the school. He stated that he currently can’t and wouldn’t want to provide financial rewards to teachers as it could cause division in the staff, but he believes principals need to recognise and value quality teaching staff. In his opinion, teachers do not work primarily for the financial gains. There are psychological motivations and satisfaction in working in schools but not necessarily financial rewards. He believes that the pattern of Generation Y frequently changing careers is a characteristic of society and is not limited to teaching.

The principal shares key tasks with his deputy principal, although he generally works for around 80 hours a week. He has an ‘open door policy’, which he believes assists him to respond to people and their immediate needs. He does the paperwork and administrative work at home to minimise interruptions and to effectively manage his time. He believes that the level of autonomy has no bearing on workload. The management of workload is more about the principal’s style of leadership.

He believes that the hierarchical role of principal no longer exists. He has established a collegial structure, with his own role being a mix of management, leadership and consultation. His role is to get people to take ownership of their own practice within the school. He stated that principals are leaders and managers of a range of different areas of the school. Principals, therefore, need to prioritise their tasks and be prepared to react to immediate issues. He stated that he can’t plan his day because immediate issues will always take priority. Principals need a deep understanding of what a school is and the depth and complexity of the role. He stated that schools are one of the most interesting and difficult organisations to manage.

In this school, faculties (departments) are run like business units. Head teachers in each faculty are required to make decisions about what is best for the faculty. He gives teachers autonomy within the school framework.

The principal reported that recentralisation is about benchmarking standards. On the one hand, governments talk about individualised learning and on the other there is national testing and benchmarking. He stated that there are elements of state and Australian Government initiatives that take freedom away from principals. He indicated that the National Assessment Program is a perfect example of recentralisation. He believes that national testing is not the best method of measuring school outcomes as there are many factors, including socio-economic status and home environments that may affect student performance. In his opinion, there is certainly a recentralisation in terms of curriculum, although there are elements of that which he considers beneficial. This principal believes that a central curriculum could provide economies of scale and provide comparative data on student performance.

The principal considers he has a significant amount of flexibility in terms of leadership in the local context but little flexibility in management. He believes that school decisions have a broad impact on the community which look to schools for leadership.

The school receives a budget that covers most of its needs. This is determined by enrolments and is subject to auditing. Staff budgets are provided centrally. All funding from the Australian Government involves compliance issues. He reported that tied funding restricts principals. He would like some untied resources and wouldn’t mind where it came from. He agrees with accountability for staff and public funds but the system needs to reconcile responsibilities and accountabilities.

The principal is reasonably happy with the current system of schooling and school leadership in NSW. He would be happy to have less autonomy in decisions regarding maintenance as there is little funding and it is tied through whole-of-government contracts and whole-of-government procurement. Purchases of supplies for the school must be made through whole-of-government contracts. He indicated that, in terms of facilities management, the system has contracts with local government but they provide reactive not proactive maintenance. He gave an example in his school where the plumbing has been damaged by tree roots and regularly overflows in one
set of toilets. He indicated that he can receive maintenance funding to stop the flooding but not to fix the plumbing so that it does not occur again.

This principal stated that he would like freedom in some aspects of student discipline within a flexible framework. He doesn't know if there is evidence to support the relationship between principal autonomy and student outcomes. He reported his belief that student outcomes are related to quality teachers and the principals are required to support teachers to effectively teach students. He believes that being responsive to local needs makes a significant difference in the school.

This principal is actively involved with other schools in the region through a schools-industry partnership programme. He stated that schools have the flexibility to establish partnerships with external contacts and mentoring programmes. The school has created partnerships with feeder primary schools and works with them on literacy and numeracy strategies.

The principal indicated that there is a reasonable quality of applicants at the principal level but expressed concern that there is little incentive for people to move to middle management (head teacher) roles in schools. There are fewer applicants for head teacher positions. There are slightly higher numbers of applicants for deputy principal roles and higher numbers of applicants again for the principalship.

He recalled that there were two important training programmes that assisted him prior to taking on school leadership. He did a home-school liaison programme which gave him insight into different schools. He also did a masters degree in education. He stated, however, that there is no effective one-size-fits-all training programme for aspirants. He believes that it is easier for principals to learn the technical skills for their role than to learn the required interpersonal skills: principals need to establish a positive relationship with teachers, parents and students.

**Issues**

The same three groups that undertook to map the locus and mode of decision-making also responded to key questions on issues in school and principal autonomy (see Chapter 5 for a list of these questions). Reports of these discussions are summarised below in the following order:

*Department of Education and Training, New South Wales Secondary Principals Council (NSWSPC) and New South Wales Primary Principals Association (NSWPPA).*

**Department of Education and Training**

There was acknowledgement of the perception that school education in NSW was highly centralised and that there are different views among principals with some wanting more staff or resource autonomy and some wanting continued support from the Department in these areas. Some principals feel that they have the experience and know how to manage schools differently, whereas others like the safety net that the system provides. Some principals want more autonomy in their school but not full responsibility for school governance such as staffing budgets including on costs.

It was believed that there is little clearly reported and detailed evidence to support the relationship between autonomy and student outcomes. Schools do however need a capacity to respond to local needs and to allocate resources effectively.

The Department has undertaken some projects where greater autonomy in decision making is required. Increased responsibility may create workload issues, but principals can't completely outsource all of their responsibilities, for example, to a bursar. There is a range of flexibility that is available to principals under current arrangements that some principals are not currently using. While increased autonomy can lead to workload challenges principals can reduce the stress inherent in this through refining skills in change and project management to assist them in the process. New principals need effective training in educational leadership and
management as well as system support, some of which can be provided through networks of schools. The principalship is a tough and demanding but very powerful role. Principals can and do make a difference in the education and learning outcomes of students through quality support and management of staff.

Until recently only teachers already employed in NSW government schools could apply for teaching, executive and principal positions in NSW but the regulations were broadened in 2005 (Teaching Service Act). Now the Department employs people from other states and systems as well as teachers who had previously retired. These changes have been beneficial for employment in a range of areas including rural and remote schools.

It was reported that the Department hasn’t noticed down-turns in applications for principal positions. While the numbers of applicants may vary, there has not been any significant problems in filling positions. Disadvantaged areas may tend to have principals and staff with less experience. As part of the Principal Accountability Framework the Department has established the Performance Improvement Program for Principals to support principals who are having difficulty with the role. Regions offer professional development, support and advice for principals.

**NSW Secondary Principals Council (SPC)**

One member of the consultancy team was able to discuss issues related to school and principal autonomy for several hours with a working party of the NSW Secondary Principals’ Council that is examining, among other things, the issue of autonomy. Most of the questions in the interview schedule were explored. The following is a summary of the discussions.

Participants reported that there was an increase in autonomy at the start of the 1990s following the release of the ‘Schools Renewal’ report by Brian Scott, but this has been curtailed since then. The general view was that the Scott initiative targeting devolved school-based decision making had been largely abandoned by the mid to late 1990s after a change in State Government. It was asserted that the Department had viewed decentralisation as having gone too far and as a result, re-centralisation occurred in some particular areas of school operation under the leadership of the then Director-General, Ken Boston.

In these earlier times, the funding of schools had changed from a tightly controlled head office system to schools now receiving a global budget which the principal had the ability to manage far more flexibly. Schools could invest and earn interest and some principals saved as much as $5,000 on electricity costs by having local contracts. More recently individual school contracts have been removed as the DET has tried to find savings through state-wide contracts, often with a single provider. The recent trend seems to have been towards more accountability and less autonomy and flexibility. It was asserted by one principal that schools have to work within a framework of up to 1,250 policies and memoranda.

At the school level in NSW there is some flexibility in curriculum but most things are highly formularised, especially staffing, where there is little flexibility (see later information). About 70 schools in highly disadvantaged settings have recently received grants to foster innovation and creativity. These schools work with an academic partner and this is seen as a very positive programme. In these special programmes for disadvantaged schools there is some flexibility in staffing, for example, the school may employ a social worker from special programme or community funds. In the area of professional learning, all schools receive $700 per teacher that can be spent at the discretion of the school, provided it is in line with a number of key priority areas determined by the state office.

In financial terms, despite the continuation of the global grants system across the state, equity is illusory as there are wide differences in the capacity of schools to raise local funds. Schools in well-to-do areas usually gain a benefit from higher collection rates of voluntary school contributions (school fees). Schools with facilities available for hire do better than schools
without. The global grants system does not take account of, or compensate for these sorts of factors.

In NSW the curriculum is determined by the Board of Studies through its detailed syllabuses with prescribed hours of study. In addition, the Australian and state governments mandate additional prescribed hours of study in certain subjects for public schools. As a result, principals have little discretion in the subjects offered in Years 7-8, but there is more flexibility in Years 9-10 and considerable flexibility in Years 11-12.

There was a general view that principals would like more flexibility in the allocation of time to particular subject areas in order to help schools address the needs of students. This was especially so in Years 9 and 10, as these are the years during which many students disengage. It was also pointed out that with the demise of school inspectors in the early 90s, schools have more flexibility in time allocations and approaches to teaching and learning. Although audits are conducted annually, they focus primarily on finance and compliance with Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) legislation.

There was a view that beginning principals are more cautious when it comes to autonomy. They often do not take up the degrees of freedom available to them.

An interesting example was presented by one principal. He is an experienced principal who has re-organised the different subject areas in Years 7 and 8 into three areas of study. All outcomes specified by the Board of Studies are tracked, addressed and achieved. His school has the advantage of having one of the best curriculum writers in the State. The school works closely with neighbouring primary schools to ensure there is no repetition of primary years’ material. He proceeded with this reorganisation only after getting support from the school education director. This example demonstrates school-based leadership and how a confident principal with the support of talented people can be innovative and still achieve system-wide intentions. He started small with parts of the curriculum and then extended it across Years 7 and 8.

Schools are not able to give any additional period load allowance to head teachers who mentor large numbers of beginning teachers, unless they have special programme funds, community funds or access to the Teacher Mentor Program. There are considerable inequities as some schools get few if any beginning teachers, while others get significant numbers.

There are some matters in which principals would like less direct, hands-on involvement. Principals are becoming managers in OHS and property matters, but the issue here is lack of sufficient administrative support, rather than a desire for less autonomy in an academic leadership sense. Principals believe that their role as ‘educational leaders’ is being swamped by the managerial and administrative aspects of their job. These demands remove the principal’s ability to stay focused on teaching, learning and students. Without exception, participants felt that there is a need for more support in the form of such people as school bursars and facilities managers. At the present time schools are unable to vary the formularised mix of staff to respond to this issue.

The matter of autonomy in staffing was explored. NSW has a highly centralised staffing operation, much of which is conducted beyond the school at regional and state level. In most instances principals must rely on the use of staffing codes to specify what sorts of teaching expertise, special programme expertise and even clerical support they need for their school. It is important to note that principals, in general, are not interested in undertaking local recruitment of staff because of the work involved. However, there are some other principals who would relish this opportunity. In addition, most principals in rural and remote areas and hard to staff metropolitan areas look to the centralised system to help them obtain the staff they need, while principals in more favoured areas have an abundance of applicants from which to choose.

Nearly all principals are keen to have increasing local selection of executive staff and, in many schools, of teachers. Local selection of staff is particularly time consuming as a result of the
requirement that principals must establish selection panels with a specified membership and process involved. There were also different views on the extent to which there should be increased principal autonomy in the appointment and dismissal of staff. Many principals are very committed to supporting the 'rights of staff' in such matters as transfers.

In relation to the achievement of the Australian Government, the Department and school priorities, discussion centred on schools having a capacity to determine the ‘how’ after the Government and Department specified the ‘what’. Principals readily acknowledged and accepted that they are responsible for achieving targets and in other ways being accountable. Reference was made to the current Department view in relation to the achievement of priorities at the school level where there are tight targets, flexible implementation and tight accountability.

The issue of support for schools was also explored. Reference was made to the restructuring of the Department in 2003-04 where regions were re-introduced after having been abandoned in 1995. There are now three levels above schools: state, region and district, with 10 regions led by ‘regional directors’ and 78 school education areas each managed by a ‘school education director’. Previously there had been 40 districts and 40 district superintendents, each one operating out of a district office with its own staff.

The view was expressed that the previous district arrangements provided more support for secondary schools. Principals believe that up to 1,500 positions were lost in the reorganisation. The effect of this was to move responsibility and significant additional workload to schools with no additional staffing or funding support, and with no benefits to students. School education directors are expected to perform two key roles: accountability and support. It was also noted that school education directors and regions have little money to allocate.

One principal referred to the increasing importance of schools and principals working together in networks to provide support. Principals also have to do much more marketing of their schools in the face of the current shift from government to non-government schools. Government schools also have to meet the needs of large numbers of marginalised students (students facing particular social and socio-economic challenges).

In commenting on the impact of autonomy on the number of people seeking the principalship, it was observed that the application rate for the principalship in NSW is still very good and better than in other states and for Catholic schools. It is believed that a significant number of principals are retiring early or considering early retirement because they are worn down by the workload. The continuing tension created by the expectation to deliver externally identified priorities and targets without the corresponding discretion and support to lead and manage their schools is also an issue.

In commenting on the relationship between autonomy and governing bodies of schools, it was noted that there was a ‘flutter’ with school councils in the 1990s, corresponding with the introduction of the Scott recommendations for schools renewal. Considerable pressure was exerted on principals to form school councils during the early-mid 90s, but by the late 90s school councils were off the main agenda. Few schools currently have school councils, while most schools have a Parents & Citizens Association. Depending on the nature of the local area in which the school is located, the P&C may or may not play a significant role in school decision making, but they must be represented on selection panels for school staff.

New South Wales Primary Principals Association (NSWPPA)

Principals reported that they would like to have more flexibility in making decisions, particularly flexibility in choosing which decisions that they would like to make. They reported that autonomy would affect different school leaders in different ways. It depends on the individual’s level of motivation and personality.
Many primary schools do not have staff who want to take on the principal role. Some assistant principals are not always interested in going further. It was acknowledged that the workload of the principal may discourage able people from applying for the position.

Principals have flexibility in the exercise of their responsibilities. However, participants reported that they would need support in managing school finances. They indicated that most principals feel comfortable with teaching and learning and relationships with the community but don’t have the financial experience to manage global budgets. They stated that some principals don’t want to go back to controlling budgets. They indicated that increased responsibility may be a big shock to some people but as people gain experience their skills will increase.

These principals accept that higher levels of autonomy would mean increased accountability. It would depend on the individual whether they would want increased responsibility. They stated, on the other hand, that increased autonomy would provide principals with more flexibility to allocate their time. They further reported that some cynics may say that changes to school governance would assist the system not individuals in schools.

**Key themes**

- It was acknowledged at the system level that NSW is perceived as one of the most centralised systems in Australia. The Department officers understood that research did not show a relationship between autonomy and learning outcomes.

- There were noteworthy differences between participants in their understanding of the pattern of autonomy in the state. An examination of responses in the mapping exercise reveals differences between department and principals but also within groups of principals, for both primary and secondary, especially secondary.

- There was general acknowledgement that there was a range of interests among principals in the extent to which they wished to take on more autonomy. Some principals, for example, do not wish to have responsibility for the selection of staff because of the protocols that must be observed and the associated workload.

- Some expressed the view that there was enough flexibility as far as leadership was concerned and that it was more in the area of management where more local-decision-making was desired, especially in the allocation of funds. Principals generally felt that a higher level of autonomy would require more support at the school level.

- Reference was made to the higher levels of autonomy that were introduced in the late 1980s but there was a retreat to a more centralised approach from the early 1990s.

- The recent reorganisation of the system reduced the number of people available to support schools and increased the number of authorities between the school and the Department. These changes were seen by principals to be a constraint on autonomy.
CHAPTER 7  NORTHERN TERRITORY

The Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) in the Northern Territory administers a system of 150 government schools with many in very remote areas and enrolling high numbers of Indigenous students. Students total about 33,000 with expenditure in 2007-08 estimated at an average of $19,250 per student. Improvement of student outcomes is the highest priority with a reform agenda being strongly pursued.

Principals are employed either on four-year contracts or on a permanent basis. Contracted principals are more favourably remunerated and are required to work a longer school year. Contract principal positions are advertised Australia-wide in an endeavour to attract high quality applicants.

Mapping

A small focus group of principals was interviewed in Darwin, supplemented by input from principals in the remote areas of the Territory by separate telephone conversations. The principal of the case study school also gave invaluable insights into the development of school autonomy. Three senior officers of DEET participated in a range of frank in-depth interviews. Their expertise and experience in other Australian education jurisdictions added greatly to their input. The majority of interviewees participated in the completion of the template as well as in extensive discussion of associated issues.

1. Teaching and Learning

Analysis of responses from the principal focus group and senior officers from DEET indicates a reasonable degree of congruence on the loci of decisions relating to teaching and learning, but a high degree of divergence on the modes of decision-making. Fundamentally, principals envisage a very high prevalence of opportunities to make decisions without reference to frameworks set at higher levels and without a requirement to consult with others at the same or lower levels. There were no issues where principals indicated a necessity to consult prior to decision-making and many where they perceived that the school was in a strong position to decide outcomes with only some reference to frameworks.

Apart from the mode of decision-making, principals and senior officers agreed on the loci of decisions on time allocations, construction of learning groups and choice of approaches to learning and teaching. The allocation of time to teaching and learning was viewed as the prerogative of DEET while construction of learning groups and choice of approaches were perceived as the responsibility of schools.

Not only did principals and senior officers provide very different views in relation to the mode of decision-making about choice of teaching support materials and technologies, support offered to students with special needs, and assessment of students’ regular work, but they also differed on the loci of responsibility. In relation to most of these issues, the senior officers acknowledged some responsibility to be exercised by the Australian Government but this view was not shared by the principals who acknowledged no role for the Australian Government. Similarly, the principals perceived the school as the major decision-maker on all these issues while the senior officers viewed that this decision making was more evenly split between DEET and schools.

Only in relation to the frequency and format of reporting of student progress to parents was there unanimity between the principals and senior officers. There was agreement that DEET and schools had key responsibilities and that the Australian Government also exercised some decision-making in respect to these issues. All indicated that any decision-making was framed, although interestingly the need for consultation with others on these issues was not shared by principals.
The role and responsibilities of regions/districts was not given any great attention by either principals or senior officers. With the Northern Territory only having approximately 150 schools, the focus of decision-making on DEET and schools is not unexpected. However, it does parallel the strong view expressed in other jurisdictions across Australia that the role of regions/districts should be to support schools and not as centres to determine policy. This development is in accordance with the concept of devolution to schools within a centrally-provided framework of standards, policies, expectations and accountabilities.

2. Staffing and Remuneration

The pattern of divergence on degrees of autonomy of schools was continued in relation to issues concerning staffing. Principals were strongly of the view that schools were the key decision-makers on matters relating to the mix, selection, hiring and duties of staff. The senior officers recognised the role of schools on these issues but indicated that they were mostly in support of the key role of DEET. It should be noted that school councils employ non-teaching staff while DEET employs teaching staff.

The mode of decision-making on staffing was also in contention. Principals perceived their decisions to be either with full or framed responsibility while the senior officers saw all decision-making as either framed and/or consultative.

There was agreement between the groups on the dismissal of staff. All acknowledged the primacy of DEET with support from the school. However, where the senior officers saw decision-making on this issue as framed, principals expressed the view that consultation predominated.

Unanimity prevailed on the issues of remuneration, incentives and rewards, with decisions being the prerogative of DEET within a constructed framework.

3. Curriculum and Educational Planning

The degree of divergence between DEET and principals on curriculum and educational planning did not parallel the high degree noted on teaching and learning and staffing and remuneration. This was particularly noticeable in relation to the mode of decision-making, with all groups strongly emphasising that these decisions were mostly framed. Senior officers did place some emphasis on consultation, which was not supported by principals who were inclined instead to some degree of the full mode on some issues. The exceptions were the establishment/disestablishment of schools and the addition/removal of year levels or campuses. On these issues principals perceived a strong role for consultation, where senior officers recognised that they were mostly framed decisions.

There was agreement that the locus of decision making on school establishment/disestablishment, student enrolment, curriculum, setting of formal examinations, and awarding of certificates or diplomas rested with the DEET with supportive roles for schools. Agreement was also evident that decisions on the addition/removal of a class at a particular year level were mainly the prerogative of the school.

Although there was some disagreement on the loci of decision-making in relation to the addition/removal of year levels, subjects of study within the curriculum, and programmes available for choice by students, it mainly related to degree. These groups recognised the role of both DEET and schools in different aspects of these decisions. It is interesting that where the senior officers recognised an Australian Government role in some of these decisions, this was not reflected in the responses of principals.
4. **Finance and facilities**

For the majority of issues relating to finance and facilities there is complete agreement between principals and senior officers on the loci of decision-making. Decisions relating to the amount of funds allocated to schools, allocation of funds for capital works and maintenance, and design of school facilities are the prerogative of DEET. Decisions relating to fees to be charged to parents, amounts to be charged for services other than teaching and learning, capacity of the school to raise funds, and the capacity of the school to establish partnerships are the prerogative of the school. Interestingly, deployment of funds at the school, including flexibility across budget categories, while strongly recognised by principals as school decisions, was not supported by senior officers who recognise an equal role for the DEET to that of the school.

Although there is general agreement on the loci of decisions, the same cannot be said for the mode of decisions. The pattern on mode parallels those in relation to teaching and learning and curriculum and educational planning. Principals perceive a much stronger role with full decision-making being claimed, particularly in relation to charging fees for services other than teaching and learning and the capacity to raise funds. Differences also occurred for decision-making modes in relation to the allocation of funds to schools and the design of school facilities. Both are acknowledged as DEET roles but were perceived by principals as very strongly consultative in mode while viewed as framed by DEET.

**Case Study**

The nominated school was a primary school, located approximately 40 km from Darwin in a relatively new development area. Enrolment is approximately 300. Students generally have a middle to higher socio-economic background. The school enjoys a reputation for caring and has developed expertise in the education of children with autistic spectrum disorder.

The school presents with a bright and cheerful environment with an emphasis on the celebration of the success of children. The key priority is the improvement of student learning outcomes with very few children now unable to achieve or exceed the benchmarks. A key strategy in achieving this success has been the particular attention given to optimising the development of learning competencies in the early years.

Staff turnover is high as prospective staff perceive the school as being too distant from Darwin. Continuity has therefore been a problem. This has been overcome by close attention to the design of learning programmes best suited to meet the needs of students. New staff are expected to implement these programmes.

The principal is experienced in school leadership and management and expressed perceptions of school autonomy in the Northern Territory parallel to those expressed by principals interviewed in the focus group. It was evident that the principal prized professional learning by staff and considered professional learning as a key priority for the principalship. There was also a strong leadership focus on developing the school capacity to make decisions about learning and teaching programmes based on evidence and centred on the performance of the individual child rather than averages of performance.

It was evident that the school was well resourced. The school was able to determine the mix of staff within an allocated quota and to exercise some autonomy in the selection of staff. The school budget amounted to approximately $350,000 per annum or in excess of $1,000 per student. Some of the allocation was specifically targeted on essential services and the like, but with the majority available for flexible allocation to best meet the needs of students, including capacity to increase staffing above the calculated quotas. The dissatisfaction with the low level of provision for staff absences including sickness, personal, special, and professional development leave was strongly expressed by the principal in line with views found elsewhere.
Parent/family support for school programmes was relatively low at $80 per child and with payment being received in relation to approximately 80 percent of students. School fund raising was targeted at $24,000 per annum. School initiated funding amounted to a total of $44,000 per annum or approximately 11 percent of total funds available to the school.

The selection of staff was identified by the principal as the key strategy to optimise learning outcomes for students. Initially the staff was too inexperienced with most being recent graduates. A policy was developed to gain a mix of graduate and experienced staff to provide mentoring and support for graduates and to energise the operation of the school. There is an expectation that all staff will participate in ongoing professional learning programmes. Staff recruitment in now focused on identifying those with a real commitment to teaching at the school and providing the skills and capacities to successfully implement the programmes chosen by the school as meeting the learning needs of students.

Although student outcomes are above Territory standards, the school is strongly focused on achieving outcome standards above the national measures. This priority is being underpinned by the development of a cohesive school culture with all students and staff sharing a common set of values and beliefs. Many students commenced school at other locations with varying experiences of the nature and value of schooling. The school has a strongly-held position that the policies and programmes of the school must be related to the nature and needs of the children to significantly add value to learning. The school is also developing a capacity to closely monitor the learning of every child and to base decisions about programmes and processes on valid evidence.

**Issues**

While the above summary of the mapping focuses mainly on template responses and the context of educational reform in the Northern Territory, discussions with participants were equally important in gaining an appreciation of school autonomy. It is evident that principals perceive a higher level of autonomy for schools on many issues than DEET does, particularly in relation to the mode or degree of freedom in decision-making without reference to frameworks or requirements to consult. In this respect a note of caution is advised as the input from principals was predominantly from those with significant experience. In other jurisdictions, it was noted that degree of autonomy is not always specified as the same for all schools but varies in relation to experience, expertise and school context.

The Territory has a deliberate policy of advertising many principal positions on an Australia-wide basis accompanied by attractive salaries. However, it did not appear that the degree of school autonomy was in anyway a factor in either attracting applicants or otherwise. All interviewees reported that other factors were far more important in determining the likely number of applicants. Foremost was location in relation to the major urban centres, and reputation, with the number of applicants decreasing dramatically with increasing remoteness, social deprivation and prevalence of Indigenous enrolments. In extreme cases, there may be no applications.

An issue that received attention from most principals related to delegated budgets and responsibilities for relief teachers. Dissatisfaction was strongly expressed on the allocations of relief teachers to schools on the basis of 6.5 days per teacher per year to cover illness, unexpected personal leave and school-initiated professional development. The situation of the perceived inadequate allocations was exacerbated by the lack of availability of relief staff and the time spent in each school endeavouring to locate suitable people. There appeared to be no objection if this responsibility was returned to central management.

The recruitment of teaching staff to meet the needs of schools as well as system needs is a particular issue for the Territory due to the significant proportion of remote schools. Staff recruitment to these schools is assisted by possible later transfer to urban and more desirable locations for teachers. However, the outcome is schools recruiting from centralised lists rather
than the open market. There are reports relating to difficulties with teachers not being necessarily successful in all contexts.

The recruitment of staff for very remote schools is far removed from recruitment for more urban schools. ‘Homeland’ schools provide ‘learning centres’ in numbers of surrounding Indigenous communities staffed by local ‘assistant teachers’ and supported by teachers flying/travelling in for short periods. In a few instances some fly-in teachers camp in a swag in community or school facilities. Staffing, curriculum, learning expectations, supervision and continuity of programmes, etc are complicated issues for these schools. Principals report autonomy as being both a hindrance and a help. There is a need for mentoring and support to the principal, but in the context of the uniqueness of the homeland learning centres and communities where English is taught as a foreign language and the culture and values can be so different from mainstream Australia, one size certainly does not fit all. The critical issue is how to give as many opportunities as possible to every Indigenous child.

A view was expressed by principals that autonomy should focus more on leadership for learning to strengthen capacity building in schools rather than management issues. A direct relationship between autonomy and improved learning outcomes for students was not perceived by all principals. Some identified an indirect relationship through autonomy supporting the building of school capacities to provide high quality learning programmes. Others did identify links with improved outcomes through being able to focus decisions more intensely on meeting student needs and being more able to innovate to solve problems.

No strong relation was perceived between autonomy and stress on principals. Stress was perceived as more of an outcome of under-developed capacities to successfully lead and manage low performing staff, not only in relation to learning and teaching but also in relation to support. With increased autonomy there had been a tendency to appoint staff from within the school without the required expertise rather than access staff from elsewhere. The difficulty in recruitment of staff overall does not always help the situation. Support for principals to assist staff to optimise learning for students was viewed as very important. Performance management of principals is a feature of the Territory reform agenda. It is reported that the non-renewal of contracts is more prevalent than in other jurisdictions.

Key themes

- There are special circumstances in the Northern Territory that explain why the pattern of autonomy is different to that in other jurisdictions and these concern the large number of remote schools with high numbers of Indigenous students.

- A relatively large number of principals are on four-year contracts with high levels of remuneration and a longer school year. Non-renewal of principals’ contracts is apparently more prevalent than in other jurisdictions.

- While there were some common responses, there were many differences in perceptions between principals and officers in the department in respect to patterns of autonomy, for both locus and mode, but especially mode. Principals generally perceived that they had a higher level of autonomy than was perceived by those in the Department.

- It appears that schools are well resourced in financial terms but there is limited flexibility. For example, the number of days to cover staff absences was seen by the principal of the case study school to be inadequate.
The recruitment of teaching staff is a central responsibility. Teachers are placed in schools according to needs expressed by principals. There is understandable difficulty in selecting teaching staff for service in remote locations. Principal and teacher positions are advertised nationally.

Principals preferred autonomy in the exercise of leadership, especially in respect to building the capacity of their staff.

No link between the level of principal autonomy and the level of stress was reported. Poor performance of some staff was seen as a cause of stress.
CHAPTER 8  QUEENSLAND

Mapping

Two groups of stakeholders agreed to map the locus and mode of decision-making for schools in Queensland, including senior officers in the Department of Education, Training and the Arts (DETA) and the Queensland Secondary Principals Association (QSPA). Both maps are included in Appendix 2.

The special support of DETA is acknowledged in the preparation of this report. Senior officers met with the consultant on two occasions, the first to obtain a full briefing on the nature and scope of the current project and the second to describe in more detail how autonomy is exercised in Queensland. In addition, a senior officer of DETA arranged for detailed written explanations to be prepared, and these are incorporated directly in the text that follows, and in explanatory comments included with the maps, as illustrated in Appendix 2.

1. Teaching and Learning

Officers of the QSPA explained how decisions were made in respect to support offered to students with particular educational needs. Schools, State and District each have some input into which resources are provided and how resources are spent. The level of resourcing varies between Indigenous students and students with special educational needs. There is variation between the type of student needs (for example, if the child has a recognised disability and/ or requires learning support). They also commented on the frequency and format of reporting student performance to parents. Schools are given the opportunity to select the frequency and format of formal reporting to parents within the guidelines provided by the Australian Government and the State’s minimum standards guidelines. Queensland provided minimum standard guidelines to schools prior to the commencement of the Australian Government reporting guidelines. These State guidelines now include the Australian Government framework. Schools have some freedom in providing more frequent reports to parents or providing additional information.

2. Staffing and Remuneration

Senior officers of DETA prepared detailed written comments about practice in this domain and these are reported verbatim as follows.

Queensland principals already exercise significant autonomy in regard to teacher transfer and appointment:

- principals are consulted throughout the teacher transfer process, particularly in relation to ensuring teachers who are transferred have the teaching capabilities the school requires and there are no performance concerns
- principals and classroom teachers make assessments on the employment suitability of teacher applicants
- principals are able to make recommendations on the appointment of graduate teachers to vacancies that have not been filled through the teacher transfer process
- school community representatives and relevant qualified staff members are directly involved in principal appointments
- principals and relevant qualified staff members select classified teachers (which refers to permanent teaching staff employed by DETA) and temporary and casual teachers
Queensland fills approximately 4,000 permanent vacancies per annum (approximately 11 percent of the total teaching workforce) with an equal proportion of vacancies filled through transfers and through appointment of graduate teachers. This ensures continued opportunities for staff renewal and through this process, principals are continually consulted.

Queensland principals already directly appoint an additional 6,000 relief teachers each school day to undertake temporary and casual teaching duties.

In accordance with the Schools Assistance Act (Schools Assistance (Learning Together – Achievement Through Choice and Opportunity) Act 2004), Queensland has provided more power to school principals over teacher appointments, particularly in relation to graduate and classified teacher appointments. The devolution of staffing processes and labour budgets to schools may increase school autonomy but will increase administrative workloads and complexity in managing schools.

A further extension of principal autonomy in relation to teacher appointments would result in Queensland experiencing significant difficulties in staffing rural and remote schools. These schools are able to be staffed on the understanding that teachers appointed will have the opportunity to transfer to a more favourable location after a minimum service requirement.

The recruitment of teachers directly by schools would place a significant burden on principals requiring them to focus on the administrative process of hiring at the start of the school year shifting the focus from preparing the school to ensure optimal educational service delivery.

Officers of QSPA provided comments on the dismissal and remuneration of staff which are consistent with the comments of DETA. They reported that the school takes staff through the process for dismissal but the Department is ultimately responsible for the decision to dismiss a staff member. The regional offices may also be involved in the process of dismissal. The State provides a framework of award salaries for teaching staff. Schools are able to provide staff with some benefits within the State guidelines.

### 3. Curriculum and Educational Planning

Officers of QSPA provided comments on decisions about the school at which a student may enroll and programmes or pathways of study to be available for choice by students. They reported that parents are ultimately responsible for making the decision about the school in which their child enrolls. Parents’ decisions, however, are often made within the State framework of Enrolment Management Plans for schools. For example, parents who reside outside the defined ‘catchment area’ of a school with an Enrolment Management Plan may not be able to enrol their child in that school, unless there are places available after all students who reside in the ‘catchment area’ have enrolled. Government schools must make places available for students within their local area. Schools, however, can recommend the exclusion of particular students or make recommendations for students with special educational needs to attend schools with better facilities to support those needs.

The Australian Government provides funding for some programmes and pathways of study to be available for choice by students. The State also provides a framework or guidelines for programmes and pathways that can be offered in Queensland. Schools have the freedom to decide which programs and pathways will be available to their students within this framework. Other registered training organisations such as TAFE and private colleges may also offer programmes and pathways for students. These provisions need to be considered by schools when choosing the programmes and pathways they will offer.
4. Finance and Facilities

Senior officers of the DETA prepared detailed written comments about practice in this domain and these are reported verbatim as follows. In relation to the devolution of school budgets:

With respect to the non-labour budget, Queensland schools currently have primary control. They are provided with a range of operational grants and targeted grants to support students who require additional support in addressing their learning needs. Principals in conjunction with their school staff and community determine the school priorities based on their school strategic plan and annual operational plan.

With respect to the labour budget, Queensland schools are currently allocated teaching and non-teaching resources. Schools have the flexibility to convert from one employee type to another depending upon school needs and priorities through a workplace reform process.

Officers of QSPA provided comments on decisions about the amount of funds to be allocated to the school from the public purse, the design of school facilities and establishing partnerships with business. The Australian Government and the State provide funds to schools. The amount of funds received by schools is moderated at the regional level. The State sets the minimum standards for the design of school facilities but schools have the freedom to make decisions as long as they do not contravene the minimum standards. Schools have the capacity to establish partnerships with business within State guidelines. State guidelines provide schools with a framework indicating those businesses that they should not establish partnerships with, for example, companies that promote alcohol or tobacco.

Case study

The Queensland school nominated for the case study is a large P-12 school in a developing urban area. The school, which is in its sixth year, currently enrols about 2,100 students from Preparatory to Year 11. Enrolments are anticipated to rise to 2,600 in the next year and the school will then have a cohort of year 12 students. The College Director, referred to in this report as ‘the principal’, oversees the three ‘principals’ and three deputies who lead the primary, secondary and upper secondary areas of the school. The team of school leaders also includes 12 Heads of Department, a Business Manager and a Registrar.

This school is considered a school of choice for the local community. While there are no other government schools in the area, the school is reported to be competitive with the local independent school. The upper secondary area of the school is located outside the main school campus. Upper secondary students are offered university-style learning in the local business district to prepare students for post-schooling pathways.

The principal reported that he has a high degree of autonomy in the governance of his school. In discussion, he stated that the Queensland system provides school leaders with clearly defined guidelines of what they must do within the system. There is flexibility and room for innovation, however, in how these outcomes are achieved. Within his school, innovation and solution-focussed planning is encouraged, with a strong emphasis on supporting student learning. He indicated that, after consultation with the regional authorities, he has been given significant flexibility in forming partnerships with other organisations.

The principal believes that his autonomy is related to positive relationships with the Executive Director and Regional Executive Director. He stated that the regional officers have a clear role in monitoring school performance and, hence, the performance of principals. The regional offices function as an immediate authority to support and supervise school leaders. The levels of support, supervision and accountability to all levels of the system were described as being necessary to ensure that all school leaders in the state are performing effectively within their school setting. He reported that the levels of support and supervision may differ between
schools. School leaders who are new to the role or who are having difficulty within their schools may be offered guidance from the region. This may take the form of higher levels of supervision or participating in regional and State-wide mentoring and coaching programmes with more experienced school leaders, including the principal of this school. This principal indicated his belief that experienced principals are often able to identify and effectively utilise the autonomy that is provided within the State framework.

In discussions about workload, the principal reported a need for school leaders to prioritise their responsibilities in order to effectively meet the needs of the students and school community. He indicated that principals are responsible for being the leaders of teaching and learning within the school, in addition to managing school staff, finance and facilities. It was reported that all of his leadership decisions as principal are focussed on the needs of students and to support students in their academic performance. Due to the size of this school, the principal has a range of support, including a Finance Manager, which may not be available to leaders of smaller government schools. He stated, however, that he would require greater levels of support within the school if further budgeting responsibilities were devolved to the school level.

The principal indicated that he would also require additional support personnel to manage the recruitment, employment and management of staff if schools were given full responsibility for staffing. This school currently employs over 200 staff. While staffing is managed centrally within Queensland, the principal reported that he currently has strong input into the staffing in his school. He described his support for the central allocation of staff in Queensland by noting that although his school attracts and will continue to attract high level teaching staff, this is not the case for all schools in the state. He reported that any initiative regarding staffing in Queensland would have to recognise the diversity of the schools, ranging from large schools in the south-east corner to small, remote, hard-to-staff schools. He indicated his belief that it is important that Queensland schools are not provided with a one-size-fits-all model.

While the focus group and mapping exercise indicated some issues regarding the number of applicants and training for the principalship, this principal is active in encouraging aspirants. He has been involved in local, regional and State-wide mentoring and coaching programmes for aspiring and new school principals. Within his school, he has established a leadership programme which attracted almost 50 participants from his staff. He indicated that, as the school principal is ultimately responsible for a number of decisions within the school, it can be an isolating role. He highlighted the importance of establishing and maintaining strong relationships with staff, the region and other school principals.

**Issues**

Three groups of stakeholders provided responses to key questions listed for discussion by focus groups. These were members of the Queensland Association of State School Principals (QASSP) (representing primary principal and conducted by teleconference because of wide geographic dispersion of participants), QSPA and DETA. Summaries of these discussions are set out below.

*Queensland Association of State School Principals (QASSP)*

For participants, the issue of principal autonomy is one of seeking a balance of ideals and pragmatism. While autonomy may be an ideal situation for many principals, it may not be pragmatic or realistic in small, rural or remote schools. About half of the schools in Queensland have less than five teaching staff, including a principal with a teaching role. These principals may not be able to effectively manage higher levels of responsibility, particularly as they tend to be less experienced. They stated, however, that principals of small schools often feel that they have considerable freedom already. The focus group indicated that, while increased autonomy may be beneficial for schools in the south-east corner, the system needs to support all Queensland schools. They believe that there is tension between the needs of schools as a system and the needs of individual schools.
When schools are provided with the responsibility for the selection of staff, it is assumed that there will be no problems with staff management. Participants expressed concern about the level of workload associated with autonomy in staffing, particularly with interviewing and industrial relations. They indicated that they would need infrastructure and support to effectively carry out these responsibilities. They would like more senior appointments, like the senior teacher positions in the UK. They indicated that offering middle management-style positions, which provided some teachers with higher levels of responsibility, would indicate the value of some staff members and would benefit both teachers and principals. The focus group reported that they are generally happy with the current system of staffing but there are some downsides. They stated that there would need to be additional support for hard-to-staff schools if staffing responsibilities were devolved to the school level.

Participants were unsure if greater autonomy would result in better school leaders. They believe that currently, principals are able to operate within the guidelines in a way that suits their school. They also indicated that autonomy is related to risk management. They believe that the higher the risk of an initiative or activity, the less autonomy a school should have. The issue is in finding a balance between the systematic management of risks which values consistency and provides schools with the capacity to be innovative.

Participants stated that some principals follow the broad guidelines of state educational policy and ‘massage the rules’, responding to the spirit but not the letter of guidelines. They reported that the principals who follow ‘the letter’ of the educational legislations and policy tend to be the ones who suffer from the pressure. They further noted that there are differences in principals’ ability to take a broad view of the guidelines depending on the region and the Regional Executive Director.

Participants indicated that there are vacant principal positions across jurisdictions. They reported that independent schools are filling the vacant principal positions with less experienced candidates. There are few incentives for staff to take on the principal role. The remuneration for principals is not significantly higher than the remuneration offered for head teachers or leading teachers. There is not, therefore, a great incentive to take on additional responsibilities. Teachers see the complexity and amount of work done by principals and become discouraged from seeking appointment to the principalship. The group was concerned about the role of executive principals, who might look after more than one school. They were worried because the on-site principal will still have to deal directly with the community with another level of authority above them. The heads of schools in purpose-built P-12 schools are adopting a role very similar to the principalship. The group was concerned that they cannot move up as they don’t have (or haven’t had) the experience as leaders of a whole school.

In connection with the relationship between autonomy and student outcomes, participants noted that the issue is problematic as there is currently no use of value-added measures, especially for students in low socio-economic settings. It was noted that schools have a double sense of accountability; one at the DETA level and one in the community and that an individual’s leadership style is an important factor in determining whether autonomy will work. In order for autonomy to be successful, the system and the school must have a level of trust in staff and not endeavour to micro-manage.

All participants reported that they would like more autonomy but need the infrastructure to support it. They described their view of autonomy as the freedom to act on the things that are important for the school. Rather than full autonomy, they would like to have flexibility. The example they gave was staffing. They indicated that they would not want full responsibility for staff recruitment and management but would like the flexibility to interview a short-list of candidates. These representatives indicated that currently, human resources support staff tend to have transient roles and may lack a deep understanding of a school’s needs, which creates difficulties in successfully assisting schools to find the best possible staff. They indicated that staff management is currently difficult due to DETA and union involvement. They reported that
they are responsible for outcomes without having equal flexibility in the input. The group indicated its belief that improved principal performance would result in increased student outcomes but principals need the support and leadership of the system to be most effective. They stated that the system provides mentoring and coaching programmes for principals and that Queensland principals work together well in networks to provide each other with support. They noted that being part of a system is an advantage for teachers and principals.

Participants suggested that some policies need to have time frames. They also indicated that the Australian Government and State can duplicate policies, which can become confusing for schools. They believed that the education system is politicised and that responsibilities for outcomes get ‘pushed down the line’. They shared a view that there is a lack of consistent educational leadership for principals to be innovative risk-takers and no clear definition of the student outcomes that should be achieved by the school. They stated that it is no longer clear what the overall desired outcomes for a school are, given the range of programmes and initiatives to which schools are required to respond. The group also indicated that the system needs to provide different supports for individual schools and that there is currently more scope for gaining funds from the Australian Government rather than State sources.

Participants believed that, in order to increase autonomy, Queensland schools would need to look at a different governance model especially as there are so few functioning school councils. They believe that in order to be autonomous, they would need the assistance that independent schools have. They indicated that schools, especially primary schools, need more administrative support.

It was believed that many principals find facilities maintenance to be difficult as there is not a lot of transparency in quotations for services and they may not have the necessary expertise in this area. They stated that there are inequalities in facilities between schools. When managing new building works and areas in which one lacks expertise, principals can face difficulties, but with flexible funding one can outsource to those who have the expertise. An understanding of how this can be achieved in the current system comes with experience. They stated that they do not want full control of the budget but would like more flexibility to enable them to do these things. Principals want to be educational leaders not chief executive officers. They indicated that there is a tension between the principal’s role as leader of teaching and learning and manager of the school.

Participants believe that State and Australian Governments need to avoid becoming involved in the implementation of curriculum but noted that school development of curriculum could have an impact on teachers’ time.

They indicated concern about one-size-fits-all policy initiatives. One example was a policy for the support of Indigenous students. They believed that this was an important initiative but indicated that at present all school staff needed to undertake the relevant professional development, even when the school and community had no Indigenous students. They believe that the funds could be more effectively used in schools that faced the issue, rather than funding all schools.

Queensland Secondary Principals Association (QSPA)

Participants from the QSPA reported that they would like to have greater flexibility in the allocation of resources within their budgets. They believe that a higher proportion of funding than in previous years is tied to specific purposes and thus gives them less flexibility. They reported that they would like less state involvement in the allocation of resources. They indicated that on some occasions the Department may re-allocate funds to the regional, rather than the school level, to provide funding for regional programmes.

The principals reported that they would like to have greater flexibility in the selection and hiring of support staff. These principals indicated that they currently have some involvement in the
recommendation of staff for the school. They highlighted their support for the transfer system, especially for small regional and remote schools and recommended that the central staffing and transfer system be maintained. They reported, however, that they would like to have more input into the selection of staff for their school. For example, these principals suggested that they would like to be given the right to reject a teacher who has been nominated for transfer into their school. They reported that they have some capacity to reject the nomination of a teacher transfer at the moment but would like this freedom to be enhanced. These principals also indicated that they would like the Department to develop a better process for the dismissal of teaching staff or to provide staff the opportunity to move to other schools.

When discussing areas in which they would like less autonomy, these principals indicated that they would like less responsibility in maintaining large areas of facilities and capital works. They reported that some principals may not have the knowledge and skills to manage these areas. They believe that rehabilitation programmes need to have a certain number of trained personnel. These principals reported that there is the potential for issues within the school system if schools are provided with too much autonomy. They stated that principals have not been provided with the training to assist them with increased levels of autonomy. The principals reported that Department frameworks, policies and guidelines can often provide support and clear boundaries for decision-making, especially for those principals who are new to the role.

Increased levels of school autonomy also have the potential to increase differences and competition between schools. While these increased differences and competition may result in greater opportunities for students, it could also result in increases in the performance gap between schools.

These principals reported that they do not want to be responsible for paying staff salaries. They would not want to have responsibility for negotiating industrial relations agreements with cleaning staff or investigating issues that arise from the implementation of these agreements. On the other hand, these principals would like autonomy over the selection of classified staff. They would also like to be given more autonomy to reward staff in tangible ways, but not always through financial incentives. They stated that staff could be rewarded through higher levels of recognition or increased non-contact time. They reported that they would also like more freedom in managing problems with parents as the current bureaucratic grievance process can take significant periods of time.

These principals believe that the major benefits of autonomy would be that schools could set their own vision for the school and students. They indicated that, if they were given higher levels of autonomy, they could make decisions based on the local context and the needs of the school community. Principals have a better understanding of the school community than can be expected of a centralised system. Local decision-making may also give schools the freedom to quickly and effectively make decisions. These principals also indicated that having greater flexibility in the allocation of resources would mean that they would be better able to focus on areas of importance for their schools. They would like to plan for big projects for their school. They reported that it would be nice to think that increased school autonomy would result in increased innovation at the school level.

These principals noted that the current levels of school accountability would mean that schools will never be entirely autonomous. There will always be some level of accountability to the system or other stakeholders. They would like, however, to have a little more freedom from the constant changes and sometimes conflicting policy directions of the Australian Government and the State Government. The principals reported that, in order to address current accountability requirements, their focus is often taken away from issues of teaching and learning. They stated that schools need staff to manage the accountability requirements and submissions for funding.

The participating principals believe that the accountability requirements and level of management in the principalship discourage able people from aspiring to become principals. They stated that aspirants often see principals dealing with the bureaucracy of running a school.
and being asked to manage difficult problems that could not be solved at lower levels within the
school. Principals are often required to manage the most difficult parents and the most difficult
students. They also reported that the workload and difficulties within the principalship can be
isolating. They believe that the remuneration for principals needs to be increased to better
reflect the levels of responsibilities inherent in the role.

These principals indicated that increased levels of school and principal autonomy would
enhance the value of their professional networks. Principals may need to seek the support of
the knowledge and skills of other school leaders. Additional support, either by other principals,
staff or the region would be required if schools were given higher levels of autonomy. These
principals reported that they want to be able to focus on the teaching and learning in the school
and not have their time constrained by preoccupation with work in other areas. They stated that
there are many constraints on principals’ time already, including managing social welfare
issues, facilities and maintenance and curriculum. They believe that school governance should
be focussed on strategic planning and teaching and learning not management issues. One
principal stated that she would like more leadership and less management in her role.

*Department of Education, Training and the Arts (DETA)*

Senior officers commented on three particular issues in the schedule of questions. In regard
to the major benefits of principal autonomy, they stated that Queensland has shown that principals
and school communities can have a say in who is on a school’s staff without the need for a blunt
instrument approach that simply shifts an administrative burden for the appointment of a large
number of teachers to the principal’s office. Senior officer stated their belief that, unlike some
other states where devolution has occurred, Queensland enjoys a healthy teacher workforce
profile. For example, the average age of Queensland teachers is 41.8 years, compared to about
50 years elsewhere, and graduate teacher attrition in Queensland is about three percent per
annum compared to reports of 20 percent elsewhere. Queensland’s parent representatives
have indicated satisfaction with consultation processes relating to staffing and have raised
concerns regarding the challenges that additional responsibilities for hiring and firing teachers
would place on principals.

In commenting on the links between autonomy and learning, it was noted that Queensland is
cognisant of the fact that school principals need to have the capacity to concentrate on the
educational provision as this is where the difference is made to student outcomes. DETA
officers do no believe that there is definitive research that establishes a positive correlation
between devolving administration and improved student outcomes.

On the workload associated with school autonomy, it was noted that there are significant
administrative complexities associated with appointing and dismissing teaching staff. Of the
1,250 schools in Queensland, over 40 percent have five or fewer teaching staff. The complexity
of running appointment and dismissal processes in schools, especially small schools with
inexperienced principals, has the potential for inconsistent practices and unfair dismissal claims.
Currently, principals consult Human Resources staff regarding teacher dismissal matters in
order to ensure consistency across 1,250 schools and to minimise the administrative burden on
schools. DETA officers stated that it is reasonable to suggest that devolved responsibility will
lead to greater inconsistency and a requirement for additional resources if economies of scale
through centralised processes are removed.

**Key themes**

- There was general agreement among participants on patterns of autonomy in
  Queensland.
- Noteworthy is the well-documented approach to involving principals in the appointment of staff to schools and this is the prevailing approach across the State except for schools in remote locations where the need for centrally-determined placements is understood and accepted. DETA officers believe that the very large number of small schools means that it would be inefficient for staffing to be devolved.

- The principal of the case study school, which is a very large P-12 school in a growing urban community, reported that he has a high level of autonomy. He highlighted the importance of a good working relationship with regional staff. He is well supported administratively but even more support would be required if the school was to successfully take on a higher level of autonomy.

- Workload and the need for additional support emerged as an issue in discussions with principals' associations when higher levels of autonomy were explored.

- There was a general view among principals that there should be more flexibility in the way the school budget is implemented. Management of facilities is problematic because many principals lack knowledge and experience. It may be one function that should be centralised.

- There was general acceptance that a 'one-size-fits all' approach to autonomy is neither desirable nor feasible in Queensland.

- According to some participants, higher levels of autonomy might result in dysfunctional competition and greater inequality among schools.

- While departmental officers were not aware of research on the links between autonomy and learning, principals were able to articulate the benefits of autonomy, albeit constrained, in terms of vision-building and local responsiveness.
CHAPTER 9  SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Mapping

Five senior officers of the Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS) and nine members of an augmented executive of the South Australian Primary Principals Association (SAPPA) undertook the detailed mapping exercise. This was done individually by the former and the following is a summary of the key themes and observations made during meetings with the consultant.

1. Teaching and Learning

Representatives of DECS stated that the Department provides guidelines for the total number of hours per week required for teaching and learning in schools. It may further provide guidelines for the total number of hours per week to be allocated to specific subject areas. Current policies on the choice of information and communication technologies within the South Australian system are being changed with DECS setting guidelines for the types of ICT to be used in government schools. Schools, however, have freedom in deciding how the ICT is used to effectively support teaching and learning.

The level of resources provided to schools to support students with particular educational needs is allocated at the state level. There are systemic guidelines regarding how these funds are used to respond to students’ needs. Schools, however, have some flexibility in deciding the response.

There were no noteworthy differences in the patterns of responses by representatives of DECS and SAPPA. The latter referred to an Australian Government role to a greater extent than the former. Most decisions were seen by DECS to be in the ‘framed autonomy’ only mode whereas SAPPA tended to provide a bi-modal response, for ‘full autonomy’ and ‘consultative’. It is likely that SAPPA were more conscious of the need and practice of principals to consult with their colleagues.

2. Staffing and Remuneration

DECS is primarily responsible for decisions regarding the selection and hiring of staff on a short-term basis and outsourcing, particularly in the area of facilities maintenance. Schools have low levels of autonomy in these decisions. Schools, on the other hand, have total responsibility for the selection and hiring of Temporary Relief Teachers. Decisions about staff remuneration, salary, incentives and other benefits, are generally made at the State level. Schools are able to offer staff some training and development benefits but not financial or other rewards.

Patterns of response for DECS and SAPPA were similar, and where differences occurred they were similar to those described for the teaching and learning domain. In addition, SAPPA referred to the role of districts in two instances (selection of staff on permanent/tenured or short-term basis). In no instance in any of the four domains did DECS respondents refer to the role of districts, apparently seeing this location of personnel as being part of the State level.

3. Curriculum and Educational Planning

The establishment of schools in South Australia is a State responsibility. The decision to disestablish schools, however, is generally achieved in consultation with the local community.

The South Australian Curriculum Standards and Accountability (SACSA) framework for curriculum for students from years P-10 may have an influence on the choice of approaches to teaching and learning and regular assessment of students’ work. The South Australian
Certificate of Education (SACE) curriculum for students in upper secondary school offers more rigid guidelines regarding the approaches and regular assessment of teaching and learning for students in year 11 and 12. While the setting of formal assessments and awarding of certificates is generally a State responsibility, there is a lower level of Australian Government involvement in Vocational Education and Training (VET) certification.

Patterns of response for DECS and SAPPA were similar except in the manner described above for the teaching and learning and staffing and remuneration.

4. Finance and Facilities

The funding for government schools in South Australia is determined by the level of enrolments at the school. DECS sets a recommended level for fees for the support of teaching and learning. Schools are required to consult with the school community if they decide to vary these fees.

DECS has a slightly higher responsibility than schools for the deployment of school funds across budget categories. Participants explained that some of the resources provided by the State were tied to specific activities or programmes. While schools cannot use these tied funds for any other purpose, they have the freedom to deploy other resources across budget categories.

Patterns of responses for DECS and SAPPA were similar in respect to commonalities and differences as described for responses to the other three categories.

Case Study

The nominated school is a large urban secondary school enrolling about 575 students. The school has a high level of transience (around 30 percent) and a highly diverse school community. About 45 percent of students are in the ‘school card’ programme for students from low socio-economic backgrounds, 25 percent of students are from non-English speaking backgrounds, 18 percent of students are Indigenous and 15 percent have a physical and/or intellectual disability. The area in which the school is located has communities from a broad range of socio-economic backgrounds.

The school is located on the extreme edge of three local council districts. There are few accessible services for young people. The principal indicated that the location of the school can make the development of community resources quite difficult as the school is required to work with three councils and service providers from three different areas. The school also enrolls a number of African refugee students. Supporting these students was described as difficult as the school and local area has little experience in working with such students. While the principal indicated that the school has the funding to provide support, the school has difficulty finding support services, including translation services.

The principal reported that she is able to be very flexible within the school structure and within the constraints of financial resources. She indicated that the level of flexibility in the management of a school can often be framed by community perception. She stated that school leaders need to communicate their vision to the community and ensure that all plans respond to community needs and have community support. The principal indicated that the school has a broader definition of student outcomes than the measure provided by tertiary entrance ranks or results on standardised tests. The school defines its desired learning outcomes as enabling young people to leave the school with a sustainable future. This may mean that students go to further training, whether at university, TAFE or through an apprenticeship, or take up ongoing employment. The school attempts to minimise the number of school leavers whose whereabouts and post-school pathways are reported as ‘unknown’.

The principal reported that there are considerable restrictions in some Australian Government programmes, including the use of funding for tutors of Indigenous students. She stated that,
while the resourcing is quite good, there are a limited number of people in the area who have the skills to support this programme. The school has experienced some difficulty in finding and retaining tutor support. She indicated that some Indigenous students need a mentor to support their engagement in school and other areas of life, rather than a tutor to support particular areas of the curriculum. She stated that the funding is specifically for tutors and that this has not been as successful as it could be as students often do not attend tutoring sessions or fail to attend school. She reported that many Australian Government grants have a highly specific focus, which provides schools with little flexibility. She stated that, due to the specific purposes and desired outcomes, her school does not apply for many grants that could be useful but do not fit well with the school’s priorities. The principal reported that she is happy to be accountable but that reporting and compliance for the use of Australian Government funds can be very restrictive. She further indicated that a lot of time goes into applying for Australian Government and State funds.

The principal reported that the funding for the Australian Government Investing in Our Schools Programme was used for maintenance by many schools. She indicated that very few schools were able to do anything really innovative. She also reported concerns that initiatives such as this can make schools compete with one another, which they do not like.

The principal indicated that SACSA curriculum statements are provided as a guide for Reception to Year 10 and these are used for Years 8-10 in her school. The SACE provides guidelines for curriculum in Years 11 and 12. She stated that schools have significant flexibility within these curriculum frameworks. She also reported that the South Australian curriculum is well researched, monitored and reviewed and provides the freedom for schools to make changes and respond to local needs.

The principal has minimal responsibility for staffing. The only positions the school can advertise generally are positions in designated areas of teacher shortage. She stated that they have been involved in the ‘School Choice’ programme for disadvantaged schools classified 4 to 7 on a scale of disadvantage. She reported that this programme enables the school to determine and describe the vacancy that needs to be filled. The school can offer a 100 word description of the position but this description is constrained as schools are not able to describe required skills that all teachers are presumed to have. She stated that employment codes for positions are very traditional and can restrict the description of position vacancies in schools where they are doing things differently.

Within the ‘School Choice’ programme, DECS advertises positions to permanent DECS employees. The school receives all applications for the position and is able to establish a two-person selection panel. This panel, including the principal and a union representative, can interview and check the references of applicants within DECS guidelines. She indicated that most schools don’t interview applicants due to the lack of resources for travel and replacement teachers at the applicant’s site. Schools are required to manage all applications uniformly so they may conduct all telephone interviews or not interview at all. Both schools and applicants can rank their preferences. Applicants can apply for up to three rounds, with the first and second functioning in the method described above and the third just placing teachers with the relevant codes in schools where there are vacancies. The applicant has some right to decline a position, but the school must take an applicant who is placed with them. The principal indicated that this can mean that, even with three rounds, a school may be unable to fill a vacancy. Once teachers are employed in a school, they cannot leave for three years unless they win a leadership position.

The principal indicated that the merit-selection ‘School Choice’ programme only started last year. She said that it is more decentralised than the previous system but is far from perfect. She believes that DECS should persevere with the process, which will improve with time. She also stated that some older staff, particularly those who have never had to apply for teacher based positions, require training to participate in the process as many have never had to write applications for positions.
The principal reported that there is a 10-year tenure for teachers at schools categorised from 4 to 7 on the disadvantage scale, which are the higher levels of disadvantage. Schools must keep the staff during their tenure but after 10 years staff may have to reapply for their position or other positions if they are no longer required in the school. There is no maximum tenure period in hard-to-staff schools, which means that teachers are able to stay and the schools cannot transfer teachers elsewhere as they have a continuing contract with the school. The principal reported that there has been discussion of removing the concept of tenure from all schools, which she thinks would create issues for some schools.

The principal stated that the management of underperformance has improved but is still time consuming and stressful for school leaders and staff. She said that only in extreme cases would this process lead to the dismissal of a teacher.

The principal reported that the actual costs of staffing are covered by DECS. The school is given some flexibility in the number and professional mix of staff but the union and restrictions on class size can limit this freedom.

The principal indicated that she would like more flexibility in how the school uses funds it receives from DECS as the school has insights on the needs of its local community. She stated that currently there is some flexibility in financial management but the restrictions mean that schools are only able to make very small savings. She reported that she sees no benefits to the school or student learning in the school being responsible for monitoring school facilities e.g. power, water and breakdown maintenance. She believes that this could be done more efficiently by DECS.

The principal stated that schools have been given more responsibility for managing the maintenance of school facilities but the resourcing is centrally allocated and does not allow for schools to effectively maintain all required areas. She gave the example that it is a DECS imperative for all schools to have high quality IT support to assist and train teachers. She stated, however, that IT technicians are resourced as school support staff. She indicated that there is no career structure for IT technicians in schools and that considerably better remuneration packages are available for trained technicians in private industry.

She is an avid supporter of the OECD re-schooling scenarios. She stated that, if governments want schools to have a continued influence on student learning and keep up-to-date with research findings, they must have more flexibility to support innovation.

The school has been able to establish a partnership with industry for an innovative Year 10 programme which allows students to work with the community, and gain support from outside organisations in their project-based work. The school also has a partnership with the University of South Australia and invites pre-service teachers from the University to assist in school programmes.

Issues

It was noted in the first section of the chapter that there were few differences in perceptions on the locus and mode of decision-making between those held by senior officers of DECS and the augmented executive of SAPPA [representatives of the South Australian Secondary Principals Association (SASPA) did not undertake the mapping exercise]. There were, however, some important differences and strongly held views in relation to issues in school and principal autonomy. These are summarised below for each of the three groups (DECS, SAPPA and SASPA).
Representatives of the Department of Education and Children’s Services (DECS)

The representatives from DECS described principal autonomy as the default position in the South Australian school system. They indicated that the system tries to devolve as many responsibilities as possible to the school level. There are some issues within the system, however, that mean total school autonomy is not the most efficient or practical method of managing schools.

These issues were reported to include concerns about the repertoire of skills of current principals to manage increased levels of autonomy. Participants stated that well-rounded and effective school principals need to have skills in the areas of educational leadership and in management. The aging population of school staff in South Australia was described as a factor in that there are staff entering the principal role with high levels of educational experience but no experience in managing the finances or the staff of schools. These principals may require comprehensive training and development of their management skills. This would, however, be a difficult and expensive process.

It was acknowledged that there has been some criticism of the local merit selection process, known as ‘School Choice’. The critics have indicated that principals may be selecting staff who have similar skills and experience, which may leave a shortage of some skills in a school.

A concern was raised by the representatives from DECS that the Australian Government may base changes to principal autonomy policy on the model used by independent schools, where the school board or the school council are the principal’s employers. It was noted that principals in government schools are employed by the system, which is significantly different to the school board model.

Economies of scale and the geography of South Australia were also raised as a potential issue for the implementation of increased principal autonomy. The participants indicated that some centralised decisions, such as facilities management and curriculum development, may provide economies of scale. These economies of scale would not be available if the responsibilities for curriculum and finances, including outsourcing and purchasing, were devolved to the school level. Centralised decision-making, therefore, may be the most efficient and cost-effective way of managing some areas of schooling. Currently, the system offers incentives to teachers who choose to teach in hard-to-staff remote or regional areas, whereby these teachers are given priority placement in their choice of schools when they leave. It was reported that the system faces some difficulty in staffing all of the remote and rural schools in the State. If the responsibility for staffing was devolved to the school level, however, schools may face increased difficulties as they would not be able to offer a similar incentive scheme.

Finally, informants from DECS indicated that the system is supportive of providing principals with a significant level of framed autonomy. They reported their belief, however, that a standardised level of autonomy for all schools in South Australia would not be as effective as a variable or structured model. It was indicated that a variable model of principal autonomy may better address the differences between schools and enable higher levels of support where necessary.

South Australian Primary Principals Association (SAPPA)

The consultant met with a representative group of SAPPA to explore issues related to school autonomy. Interactive technology was used on this occasion and a total of 226 responses were generated from the nine participants in response to nine questions selected from the schedule for this aspect of the study.

Participants were invited to list the benefits of autonomy. The most frequently mentioned response referred to the opportunity it provided to respond to local circumstances. Other benefits included greater efficiency and effectiveness, selection of staff, personnel
management, including the nurturing of talent, mentoring and the creation of a team responsivenes
and flexibility, the opportunity to reduce bureaucracy and take control, the development of a vi
for the school, and the design of a favourable learning environment. All are closely related to each o
representing particular manifestations of the opportunity to respond to local circumstances. These re
ponses were similar to those offered to the question about the perceived link between autonomy and improved outcomes for students. The most frequently mentioned referred to the capacity to match programmes to local needs, capacity to set an agenda for learning, the selection of staff to match the programmes of the school and the related personnel factor of a close knowledge of the capacity of staff and the opportunity that autonomy brings to address factors related to their wellbeing.

Participants explored the impact of autonomy on the workload and wellbeing of principals. For
the former, responses were divided on positive and negative impact. Negative impact included
administrative work, responding in particular to the demands of head office and the demands of consultation. Some indicated that not having autonomy was stressful. Other responses suggested that principals accept the workload associated with autonomy if it leads to positive outcomes. More autonomy can lead to greater effectiveness but it leads to greater responsibility to ‘get it right’ at the same time that leadership is distributed throughout the school. Participants were clear in their views about impact on wellbeing but some responses suggested that impact was not a consequence of autonomy so much as the immediacy of new technology and the heavy demands that limit the extent to which educational leadership can be exercised. There was acknowledgement that the hectic pace of the 21st century impacts on the work of the principal. A number of responses concerned aspects of staffing, with reference to the stress of managing poor performance, the challenge of motivating staff who are negative, and the need to consult. Other noteworthy responses referred to the absence of a ‘second tier’ of support for principals of primary schools, the negative climate emanating from the centre of the system and the influence of the Australian Education Union (AEU) which can be a stressor at times.

The smallest number of responses from the nine participants was concerned with the manner in
which current levels of autonomy served to encourage able people to seek the principalship. Similar levels of responses referred to opportunity to shape the vision of the school, work as a member of a leadership team and influence the development of a curriculum. About one-fifth of responses challenged the idea, contending that some see the workload and are not interested. The number of responses doubled when participants were asked about the extent to which current levels of autonomy discouraged applicants. Workload and lack of influence in the selection of staff were the most frequent responses. Other responses were concerned with factors unrelated to autonomy including poor career paths, pressure from the community and system issues, including lack of clarity in financial matters and differences in performance of district directors.

Responses were highly contingent in respect to the extent to which higher levels of autonomy might encourage more people to seek appointment. ‘It depends’ summarises 58 percent of responses, with participants referring to the need for greater support, lower workload, higher remuneration and the acquisition of new skills. Other responses referred to higher levels of autonomy in the selection of staff, capacity to make decisions that influence teaching and learning and need and opportunity for mentoring. One response indicated that there would be no difference for small and remote schools.

There was ready acknowledgement of the extent of support for current levels of autonomy, with 42 percent of responses referring to system support, including the district director, district finance officer, district cluster and some department people. A further 29 percent of responses referred to the support of principal colleagues, including SAPPA and networks, while others referred to school colleagues, especially the leadership team. Mentoring and leadership training were mentioned in 13 percent of responses. There was also ready specification of the kind of additional support that would be needed to exercise autonomy more effectively, some referring to ‘true selection’ of staff, guidelines on performance management, relaxation of ‘antiquated’ union agreements and the ‘buying in’ of expertise. Higher level of system support was
mentioned, with reference to the district director, management and financial support, mentoring and professional development. Streamlining head office operations, reducing red tape and fewer projects emanating from head office were mentioned, as were calls for greater clarity in budget information, curriculum documents and role descriptions.

South Australian Secondary Principals Association (SASPA)

The consultant met with two members of the executive of SASPA with extensive experience in leadership, including service at the system level. They believed that the promised benefits and original concept behind what was proposed under the Partnerships 21 initiative, a South Australian model of local management, have not been fully realised. Of particular concern is the limited ability for principals or schools to have a say in the selection and appointment of staff. Additional teachers in the early years were placed by directive without consultation with principals. One participant felt that autonomy had decreased over the last 30 years since the breakthrough following the Alby Jones (former Director-General of Education) Freedom and Authority Memorandum. The other felt there was marginally more autonomy but there have been cutbacks in recent times.

There is some flexibility in staffing in the use of money that has been ‘saved’ since, if there is a resignation during the year, there can be no re-advertisement and reappointment before the start of the next school year. The participants would like to see more autonomy in staffing. There is currently little as far as selection is concerned. Principal appointments are now advertised nationally. Why not teachers? There are rigidities in staffing in non-teaching areas, for example, there is a State procurement process for cleaning staff.

Particular attention was given in discussion to ‘pedagogical leadership’ where there is a relatively high level of school autonomy. A high level of ‘distributed leadership’ can be achieved.

In discussing how autonomy contributed to student learning outcomes, one observed that ‘I can make decisions that address the needs of students – the more decisions the better it is for students’. This applies, in particular, to assembling the staff to match requirements. Other measures include performance management of staff and opportunities to design relevant professional development. The view was expressed that professional development has been marginalised in South Australia due to limited resources.

Attention was given to how autonomy impacts on the workload and personal well-being of principals and other school leaders and whether current levels of autonomy encourage or discourage people from seeking the principalship. Although greater autonomy would possibly increase the number of people applying for principal positions it would not be a significant improvement. Participants considered that the principalship ‘needs a facelift’ – and serious marketing of the benefits and positives associated with the role was needed.

The participants believe that governing bodies were not ‘real’, or as effective as possible, in South Australia. There is little difference between the role of parent advisory committees and governing bodies. The strategic planning can be done well by the principal and other teachers. Both felt the need for more personnel support, including a personal assistant with research skills. It was acknowledged that it is expensive to employ top-class management support.

Key themes

- There were few noteworthy differences among those participating in the mapping exercise.
- Participants were consistent in their views that ‘framed autonomy’ is appropriate. System-level leaders believed that autonomy is the ‘default’ position and that there were differences in the capacities of principals to take up a higher level of autonomy.
There were differences between the three groups of participants in their preferences about what levels of autonomy are desirable. The principal of the case study school would like to have more flexibility in the allocation of the budget and described the constraints on the selection of staff, even under the ‘School Choices’ initiative for staffing of schools in disadvantaged settings.

Schools are reluctant to fully utilise selection processes because of the demands of interviewing and seeking references.

Primary principals could readily articulate the benefits of autonomy but were mindful of workload issues, not all of which were connected to autonomy.

The secondary principals, who contributed to the project, while small in number, were experienced and knowledgeable about the issues. They described early progress on autonomy in the 1970s, a long period without further advance, the potential for higher levels of autonomy under the Partnerships 21 initiative, and a more regulatory approach in recent times.
CHAPTER 10 TASMANIA

Tasmania is interesting to study in relation to school autonomy as it is currently part way through an organisational restructure based on the premise that 'The best way to support and improve schools is through the organic, devolved structures found in a networked organisation, rather than a traditional bureaucracy' (Department of Education, 2006). This involves not only decentralisation of decision-making to schools but also to the four regions charged with developing a culture of regional support to schools to ensure alignment with curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practice. Each region, also referred to as regional learning services, now has a School Improvement Board chaired by a community representative and with school principal members in the majority. As well as providing service to their schools, each of the four regions has a state-wide responsibility for an over-arching activity, for example, curriculum development, student services, or personalised learning.

It is emphasised that the new structures and related philosophies are still being developed in Tasmania and this is reflected in the template responses. Principals had to differentiate between the past and the emerging future in responding to questions about the locus and mode of decision-making in schools. Interestingly, responses did not identify the new regions as having key decision-making roles. The key decision-making levels remain the state and the school. The intention of the new vision for Tasmanian education is for the regional authorities to support learning in schools rather than to direct the operation of schools. This intention is reflected in the appointment of general managers rather than directors to head the regions.

Mapping

The mapping of autonomy in Tasmania was undertaken in three sessions involving key stakeholders. Meetings were held with representative groups of principals in Launceston and Hobart by arrangement with the Tasmanian Principals Association (TPA). In each meeting participants were able to complete the autonomy template as well as discuss a majority of the key questions. A meeting was also held with a senior officer of the Department of Education in Tasmania. In this meeting the template was completed and a wide range of issues relating to school autonomy were discussed. Responses are summarised below.

1. Teaching and Learning

Analysis of the responses indicates agreement between principals and the system that schools are responsible for the majority of decisions relating to teaching and learning. The schools’ decisions are rarely made with full autonomy and are usually made within a framework and/or with consultation within the school. There is a divergence of views among principals regarding the extent of their powers in decision-making and through discussion it was evident that the degree of autonomy is related to experience, expertise and the leadership style of past regional leaders.

Although the school is the locus of the majority of decisions in the teaching and learning area, there was overall agreement that the State was the key locus in relation to the frequency and format of reporting student progress with some influence from the Australian Government. Interestingly, there was a marked difference among principals on whether the State or the school was the locus for decision-making on the time allocated to teaching and learning. The system view was that this was a State decision. There could have been some differences in the interpretation of the question.

There were differing views between the Department and principals only in relation to the kind of support offered to students with particular educational needs and the assessment of students' regular work. In both instances the system view and principals believed these decisions to be
their prerogative and it is interesting that the principals gave divergent views on the extent of autonomy ranging from full to consultative.

2. Staffing and Remuneration

The most remarkable outcome of the mapping and associated discussion was the high degree of difference between principals not only on the locus of decisions but also on the mode of decision making on each item in the area of staffing and remuneration. This applied to the number and professional mix of staff, selection of staff on a permanent basis, formal hiring of staff on a permanent basis and the duties of staff. From the discussions it was evident that there were wide variations of existing practice, not all of which could be associated with practices developed in past regional arrangements. Some principals were more confident in taking the lead role in decision-making and perceived the system role as supporting their actions. The range of responses to the mode of decision making could also be reflections of the different leadership styles portrayed by principals.

Responses were consistent in acknowledging the autonomy of schools to select short-term staff although again there was divergence on whether this autonomy was full, framed or consultative. Consistency was also evident on conditions of service and remuneration with there being general recognition of the key role of the system with very limited opportunity for variation between schools.

The formal hiring/contracting of staff on a short-term basis and providers for outsourcing was contentious with the system seeing this as a State responsibility but principals perceiving it as a school responsibility, even to the extent of full autonomy by some principals. It could be that this difference was more related to interpretation of practice and legal responsibility.

Responsibility for dismissal of staff is also of interest. Principals were united in perceiving that the State, regions and schools had equal responsibilities on this issue and that all parties had to work together to achieve an outcome. The system response indicated a pre-eminence of the school role within a framework. This may be an outcome of the recognition of the school responsibility to initiate the action and to ensure the fairness of the process. One principal reported a recent dismissal where the school had certainly taken a lead role with the support of the State and the region.

This domain of staffing and remuneration differed to the others in that principals perceived the regions as having key roles particularly in relation to the selection and formal hiring of permanent staff.

3. Curriculum and Educational Planning

The establishment or disestablishment of a school is perceived by principals and the Department as a framed and/or consultative process with communities. However, principals view the state as the key decision maker with some input from the Australian Government, regions and schools. The apparent dichotomy is one of focus, with schools emphasising establishment and the system emphasising disestablishment.

All participants were in agreement that the addition or removal of grades or classes and the provision of choice for students through available pathways were decisions for schools in consultation with parents.

Differing views were expressed in relation to choice of school, curriculum and subjects. The majority of principals perceived these decisions to be the prerogative of schools, where a minority of principals plus the system leader perceived these decisions to be the responsibility of the State. However, there was agreement that the decision making was framed and consultative.
Participants were in agreement that matters relating to the setting of formal examinations for a certificate or diploma and the awarding of these to students were the prerogative of the State with some input from the Australian Government and in accordance with a specified framework.

4. Finance and Facilities

There was agreement by all participants that the allocation of funds to schools in general as well as to capital works is a key responsibility of the State with some input from the Australian Government. Some perceived that the State had full autonomy in these allocations while others indicated that it occurred in a framed environment and even with some consultation, particularly in relation to capital works.

The system view was that the allocation of funds for maintenance and the design of facilities were decisions for the State. Approximately half of the principals agreed with this position while the other half strongly expressed the view that these were school decisions even to the extent of full autonomy in decision-making. The dichotomy is possibly one of scale with the system focusing on large scale projects and the schools on smaller scale developments. Principals also indicated that schools were able to increase allocations for maintenance, if necessary from within school funds.

There was unanimity that the issues of fees charged to parents, capacity of the schools to raise funds, flexibility in deployment of funds, and capacity to establish partnerships were all decisions for the schools. However, there were differences in view as to whether these decisions were made in full autonomy, framed or consultative, with principals being evenly disposed across the spectrum. It was apparent that this distribution was a reflection of leadership style.

Case Study

The case study was conducted in a government district high school (K-12) serving about 600 students in a coastal community. It is relatively isolated from its regional centre and Hobart.

The community is a seaside holiday centre with small industries associated with fishing, farming and forestry. The population increases dramatically over holiday periods. School families differ markedly from the holiday influx and resident retired people. Many students come from low socio-economic backgrounds and face social challenges.

Literacy programmes are a high priority for the school together with health and wellbeing and the raising of student aspirations. Learning programmes in secondary classes are influenced by the early childhood/primary model. Year 7 outcome data is good in comparison with 7-10 high schools.

The principal has served at the school for six years, with prior experience at this level in similar kinds of schools. He agreed to complete the mapping template prior to the discussion of issues relating to the school. His perceptions of autonomy were at the upper end of the range for Tasmanian principals as revealed by analysis of the responses of the Hobart and Launceston principal focus groups. His perception of level of autonomy was in alignment with the factors identified by the focus groups relating to leadership expertise and experience and the nature of past practices in the Region. The relative isolation of the school is also a factor.

The principal perceived that autonomy has been constrained over the past five years by the centre taking back some aspects of financial management. On the other hand the educational leadership aspect of autonomy has increased significantly with the encouragement of school-based curriculum construction.

The workload of the principal is rated as high (approximately 60 hours per week) mainly generated by endeavours to optimise the effectiveness of all staff. For example, a review of
school values and beliefs revealed that members of the leadership team were not all heading in
the same direction, requiring an intense 12 month period of building up trust and relationships
within the team. This was a time of discomfort and vulnerability but necessary for the future
wellbeing of students and staff.

Support for principals was not identified as a critical issue apart from a stated preference for
principals to be given short (four to six weeks) ‘sabbatical’ periods every four years to enable
reflection and planning for solution of key school problems. Often the intensity of the school day
is at odds with finding the time and energy for ‘future’ thinking.

It was reported that, if and when the principalship of the school is again advertised, there would
be at least six ‘good applicants’. This estimation was in keeping with the mainly favourable
position on applications for principal positions described by the principal focus groups.

The school appears to be taking every advantage of available levels of autonomy and benefiting
from the very evident knowledge and expertise of an experienced principal focusing on the
leadership of learning.

Issues

Discussions based on the key questions were important in gaining an appreciation of emerging
school autonomy in Tasmania, especially as it is part-way through a structural reform centred on
students and their learning. The restructure involves reducing the size of the centre and
focusing on strategic matters, developing regional support and encouraging schools to work
flexibly and collectively in the best interests of students.

These developments are very much work in progress, particularly in relation to the
establishment of the regions to support schools. Part of the challenge in increasing school
flexibility is changing the symbiotic relations between staff, unions and human resource
management in the system.

Given the developing situation in Tasmania, principals were supportive of the strengthening role
of the principal on learning, and the emerging power of collectives of schools. They perceived
these developments as strengthening the autonomy of schools. The view was also strongly
expressed that the level of school autonomy was not set in place for all schools and that the
level for any particular school is set by the determination of the school to increase autonomy,
the expertise and experience of the leadership team, school size, and the position taken on
autonomy by individual regional leaders.

Principals did see constraints in the development of school autonomy particularly in relation to
support for principals. Mentoring was prized but it was acknowledged that successful mentoring
of new principals was dependent on these principals initiating the processes. Principals were
also tentative about the current reforms in Tasmania as to whether the reality would match the
rhetoric. There were also concerns about accountability requirements, particularly those in
relation to minor operational matters. There was less concern with accountability related to
student learning outcomes.

Increased autonomy to employ and dismiss staff was identified by principals as a requirement to
go forward. It is interesting to note that principals already have framed autonomy in the selection
of staff and perceived framed autonomy in hiring staff, but have a view that dismissal was a
shared decision between the State, region and school. This contrasted with the system view
that principals are the key decision-makers in dismissals within a given framework. It may be a
matter of developing principal expertise and confidence on this issue. One principal described a
recent successful dismissal with an outcome of benefit to all parties including the staff member.

Discussion on increased school autonomy on selecting and hiring staff also raised the concern
that this could further advantage the preferred schools at the expense of hard-to-staff schools.
The possibility was raised of addressing this issue by funding schools on the basis of the number, nature and needs of students and charging the actual cost of staff from the school budget. This would allow the hard-to-staff schools greater flexibility in staffing and place some constraints on the preferred schools. The principals did not reach any consensus on this possibility.

The issue of principal stress was also discussed. It is noteworthy that from the discussion emerged the idea that stress and levels of autonomy are not necessarily linked. Stress was perceived as mainly the outcome of a lack of support and the occurrence of critical incidents. It was stated that critical incidents occurred irrespective of autonomy and were part of the school/community environment of today.

The issue of the prevalence of applicants for principal positions was also discussed. Again the principals did not relate this issue to levels of autonomy. Situations were quoted where there had been up to 22 applicants for a country position. The principals agreed that the factors determining the number of applicants were location (distance from a major centre), perceived difficulties in relation to the socio-economic status of communities, and school reputation. It was also stated that applicants were rarely attracted from outside the region of the school. A lesson learned could be that preparation for the principalship needs to be a regional activity rather than state-wide.

The developments in relation to autonomy in Tasmania should be of continuing interest to some of the other states and territories as it breaks new ground in down-sizing the centre, focusing the regions on the support of learning, and encouraging schools to work flexibly and collectively to raise the learning outcomes of all students. These developments will need to address resource allocations to schools to gain alignment with the nature and needs of students and to parallel the intense focus on the concept of ‘student at the centre’.

**Key themes**

- Tasmania is of particular interest because of plans in the Department of Education to create a system that was shifting from a traditional bureaucratic organisation to a network of schools. It will be worthwhile to monitor developments in Tasmania given the shift to a networked system.

- There were many commonalities between the judgement of a system leader and principals who participated in the mapping exercise. There were some interesting differences, especially among principals in respect to staffing and remuneration, and among principals and between a minority of principals and the system leader in regard to authority in curriculum and educational planning (most principals saw a higher level of autonomy in this domain).

- The principal of the case study school operated with a relatively high level of autonomy and perceived that this autonomy had been constrained in recent years through re-centralisation in financial matters. On the other hand, schools have more autonomy in matters related to curriculum.

- Principals generally preferred a higher level of autonomy in the selection of staff and were mindful that there was variation among schools and principals in respect to the exercise of autonomy.

- The number of applicants for the principalship and levels of stress were not seen as necessarily related to the level of autonomy.
CHAPTER 11 VICTORIA

Mapping

Mapping for Victoria was completed by three groups of school and system leaders, including representatives from the Department of Education, the Victorian Association of Secondary School Principals (VASSP) and the Victorian Principals Association (VPA) (which represents primary principals). The representatives from each of these stakeholder groups completed the mapping exercise and discussed their responses in meetings with the researchers. The mapping matrix in Appendix 2 presents the most frequent responses provided by participants.

1. Teaching and Learning

Analysis of the responses indicates high levels of agreement in the responses provided by representatives from the Department, VASSP and the VPA. There were only two areas in the teaching and learning domain in which the responses from these stakeholders differed. When asked to describe the locus of responsibility for the choice of approaches to teaching and learning, the representatives from the Department indicated that decisions regarding pedagogy were made at the school level. Participating school leaders, on the other hand, indicated that Australian Government initiatives may have some influence on the choice of approaches to teaching and learning. Furthermore, the representatives from the principals’ associations reported that the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) framework also has an influence on decisions about teaching and learning practices in the classrooms.

There were also some differences between the Department and principals’ associations’ responses in respect to the locus of responsibility for decisions regarding the type of support that are offered to students with particular educational needs. All stakeholders indicated that the responsibility for making these decisions was shared across state, regional and school authorities. The representatives from the Department stated that the Australian Government is responsible for some funding for special educational assistance. State authorities were reported to be involved in the assessment of disabilities and some of the funding decisions for special needs education. The regions provide some further support to schools, including the provision of allied health professionals, such as physiotherapists and speech therapists. These stakeholders agreed that schools had some flexibility in deciding how these resources were used to effectively support the particular educational needs of students.

The analysis of the responses in the teaching and learning domain indicates that schools have significant flexibility in making these decisions within a framework. For example, schools have high levels of freedom in choosing how to group students for teaching and learning within State guidelines for maximum numbers of students in the class. Schools also have high levels of flexibility in the regular assessment of student work. Guidelines are provided, however, for the assessment of student work while they are undertaking work for the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE). The high level of school freedom in these areas is indicated by the selection of both the ‘full’ and ‘framed’ modes of decision-making.

The Department provides schools with guidelines for the minimum total time allocated for teaching and learning for each school day and week. There is a legislative framework of total time for each subject. All participants reported that schools have some flexibility within these guidelines. Similarly, the Department provides a general framework for the selection of materials for teaching and learning, enabling schools to decide on the materials that will be most effective for their students. There are limitations, however, regarding the choice of materials for teaching and learning for students undertaking the VCE.
2. **Staffing and Remuneration**

It is interesting to note the divergence of responses in the staffing and remuneration domain. All stakeholders reported that schools were responsible for decisions regarding the selection, number and professional mix of staff. The representatives from the principals associations indicated that school leaders had full autonomy in making these decisions. Participants from the Department, however, stated that school decisions about the selection and mix of staff were made within a state framework. While there may have been some differences in the interpretation of these questions, the responses suggest that principals perceive that they have significant autonomy over staffing choices in their school.

The selection of staff occurs within the limitations of the budget. Schools have full autonomy over selection of short-term staff. The representatives from the Department indicated that the Department is responsible for the dismissal of staff on the advice of principals. Conversely, the representatives from the principals’ associations indicated that the regional director is ultimately responsible for the dismissal of a staff member in their jurisdiction. All stakeholders stated that, if a school has decided that a staff member should be dismissed, the principal makes a recommendation for dismissal and completes the required paperwork. All dismissals are accomplished within the framework that is set by the Department. Principals also indicated that the Victorian Institute of Teaching provides an additional framework for the dismissal of staff. Staff may be dismissed from the Victorian system but if they are not deregistered by the Institute, they are still eligible to work in non-government schools.

**Case Study**

The school nominated for study was a government primary school in regional Victoria, which enrols about 500 students. Although the current principal has only been at this school for two years, she has worked to establish a collaborative, research-based culture of teaching and learning. She feels she has a high level of autonomy which has enabled her to create and build on her vision for the school.

The Department of Education has established a review process for schools in its jurisdiction. High performing schools are able to undertake a negotiated review and additional support is available to schools as required. The consistently high levels of student outcomes and data on community engagement enabled this school to undertake a negotiated review. The principal reported that the review provided her with the freedom to nominate a reviewer and to have greater involvement in the review process. She indicated that the review provided the school with purposeful feedback that could be used to develop the staff research focus and assist in creating a school vision.

The principal indicated that she has significant levels of autonomy in the selection of staff and setting of the staff profile for her school within a broad framework. Although this school is classified as regional, the area in which the school is located is very popular with teachers. The principal reported that she has not encountered any difficulties in finding applicants to fill teaching positions. While the majority of staff decisions have been devolved to the school level, the Department provides teachers with the opportunity to apply for transfers on compassionate grounds, including transfers for teachers who have been employed at schools that are downsizing staff levels due to decreasing enrolment numbers. Schools with staff vacancies are required to give priority to these transfer requests. The principal stated that, due to the popularity of the school and the area, she generally receives transfer requests when advertising for staff. Despite the principal having the right to select staff, it was reported that the priority given to transfers may limit flexibility.

In Victoria, schools are allocated funding for staff at an average teaching salary level, according to the number of student enrolments. While schools with over 400 enrolments are able to select four graduate teachers directly through the graduate placement programme, they may employ new teachers for other positions that have been openly advertised. The school has established
a strong relationship with the Education Faculty at a local university. The school regularly provides placements for student teachers and, therefore, provides them with insights into the practices of new graduates who may be suited to teaching in this context. About half of classroom teachers are in their first four years of teaching. The principal reported that, as the salaries of graduates and less experienced teachers are below the average staffing costs, this school has a surplus from its staffing budget which can be deployed in other budget categories. This surplus is accessed through the global budget and provides the school with greater resource flexibility.

This school has used the surplus in its budget for teaching staff to employ leading teachers in the role of curriculum coaches who do not have teaching responsibilities, although they are available to assist the school if other teaching staff are absent. The principal stated that the coaching initiative provides practical and personalised professional development for all staff and has been particularly useful in developing the skills of less experienced teachers. Curriculum coaches support teaching staff with their own professional learning and their availability to teach permits other teachers to attend professional development activities away from the school. The principal stated that the coaching initiative has enabled staff to identify their areas of need and has resulted in a more focussed approach than taking up external professional development opportunities.

This principal reported that the allocation of a global budget has also provided funds to make physical changes to facilities to reflect the educational vision of the school. She felt fortunate that, in the period that she has been a school leader, she had always managed a global school budget. It was suggested that school leaders without prior experience may encounter some difficulties in changing their role to manage a global budget. The principal stated that some of these principals may need some professional development support to enhance their financial management skills.

The principal has been able to participate in several leadership opportunities through the International Networking for Educational Transformations (iNet) project and through her own professional development activities. She has visited and observed practices in a number of different international school systems with high levels of decentralisation. She noted that the level of autonomy provided to schools has a relationship with the level of school accountability. It was stated that school leaders often perceive accountability measures to be unwelcome or threatening. This principal reported, however, that accountability processes could be used to support schools in the identification of areas of school need.

The workload of principals was described as being difficult to manage as a result of the broad range of responsibilities that fall to the school leader in a decentralised system. The principal indicated that the devolution of responsibilities for school staffing and financial management have increased the workload for principals. Despite the increased workload, this principal referred to the increase in school responsibilities as a positive outcome. She reported that the flexibility in school governance enabled her to focus every aspect of her school on the needs of the local community and the school vision.

Issues

Four sets of discussions were held to explore issues in school and principal autonomy in Victoria. These were conducted in the same groups as assisted in the mapping described above (Department of Education, VPA, VASSP, and a small focus group at the Annual conference of VASSP). The main themes in these discussions are summarised below.

Department of Education

Schools in Victoria are given responsibility and authority to make decisions within their school. Responsibilities in all areas of school governance have been devolved to the school level but are framed within state guidelines. The rationale for providing schools with significant levels of
autonomy is that people at the school level are better placed to make the most effective
decisions for the local community.

The Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) sets requirements for the VCE,
Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning and P-10 curriculum standards (Victorian Essential
Learning Standards) within schools. While schools have flexibility in teaching and learning for
grades P-10 there are mandatory requirements for reporting student performance to parents.

Although school councils have significant input into school decisions, school leaders are
ultimately responsible for outcomes in the current decentralised system. The representatives
from the Department stated that the devolution of responsibility to school level, therefore, has
the potential to result in greater levels of variation between schools and the possibility that some
schools have greater capacity than others to respond to performance expectations. It was
reported that, whilst the decentralisation of decision-making has resulted in some market forces
between schools, there is an increasing emphasis and evidence of collaboration across schools
within the system.

The representatives from the Department indicated that in 2005 a streamlined accountability
and improvement framework that provided tools for planning, reviewing and communicating
school performance was developed and implemented. This also included data sets to make
judgements about the quality and effectiveness of school performance.

The Victorian system has a differential school review process that is designed to provide an
expert, independent analysis of current school performance and practice, and to advise on the
goals for student outcomes and appropriate key improvement strategies. For example the
negotiated review is flexible, whereby the school uses a critical friend to examine a specific area
for improvement identified from the school self-evaluation. This type of review is usually used for
schools with student outcomes and other key indicators above expected levels, although the
school's capacity to manage such a review is also considered. For schools with some student
outcomes and other key indicators below expected levels, or where the circumstances of the
school are complex, such as a multi-campus school, a P-12 school, a school with a large
number of students with disabilities, diagnostic reviews are undertaken. The regional directors
have flexibility in how they manage the schools in their jurisdiction, given the different contexts
the nine metropolitan and country regions the system operate within.

The Victorian system provides all new principals with an experienced mentor and regional
induction training as well as access to professional development to support them in their role.
The human resources area of the Department also manages a call centre to support principals.
Similar supports for principals are offered by the regional authorities. The system has also
developed a School Compliance Checklist, to assist principals in managing over 90 compliance
issues through the use of templates and provision of contact personnel.

It was reported that the Australian Government has increased the level of compliance and
administrative burden on individual schools. The representatives from the Department stated
that they believe Victoria has strong levels of planning and accountability and that the Australian
Government is duplicating the reporting responsibilities for schools in some of these areas. The
system is currently examining the ways of reducing the administrative burden and supporting
principals.

Within the confines of the Student Resource Package (global budgets), schools have the ability
to hire business managers and support staff in the areas of human resources, finance and
administration. The Student Resource Package was described as providing the highest level of
funding possible at the school level, where it can be most effectively used to support student
needs at the local level. Principals of larger schools often have greater discretionary funds to
employ support staff. It was reported that smaller schools may have more difficulty in accessing
this type of support. The representatives from the Department indicated that there had been
some discussion of returning to more centralised decision-making in some areas to support
these smaller schools. They stated that although there are some issues with the devolution of responsibility to school level, the majority of principals do not want to return to the previous centralised system.

The study prepared for the Victorian Department, entitled ‘The Privilege and the Price’, was described as a document outlining problems with school leadership in Victoria. The representatives from the Department questioned the paper’s finding that there are problems in Victoria with the number of applications for principal positions. They reported that there are ample applications for the principalship in Victoria but there may be some concerns with the level of preparation of the applicants. It was reported that there is currently a 4.2 per cent attrition rate for staff in Victorian schools. The attrition rate for principals is slightly higher than the average rate for school staff due to age. Participation rates in Department leadership programmes over the last four years suggest that a new generation of school leaders are being developed.

Applicants for positions in primary schools sometimes have limited formal leadership experience. The system has responded to this challenge by expanding the range of professional learning opportunities on offer to aspirant leaders. The representatives from the Department indicated that minimum standards or accreditation for people who aspire to become school principals is an area that needs further investigation. They reported, however, that there would be associated costs with implementing such standards.

**Victorian Principals Association (Primary)**

Participants believe that there is little evidence in Australia of a relationship between increased levels of principal autonomy and improvements in students’ academic achievement. One example is that students in Victoria, the most decentralised system in Australia, do not achieve higher levels in literacy and numeracy testing than students in other Australian school systems. The Victorian system was described as being under-resourced. It was noted that, without adequate resourcing, increased principal autonomy is not likely to make a significant impact on students’ academic outcomes. School principals in Victoria, however, do not want to return to a more centralised system.

Principals were supportive of the idea of devolving decision-making to the school level as extended in the Schools of the Future initiative in the early 1990s. This provided principals with greater flexibility to develop plans for their schools. The increases in school leader autonomy also resulted in increased workload and accountabilities. These increases, however, were not accompanied by additional resource support.

As part of the Schools of the Future initiative, schools were enabled to employ business managers to assist with the management of a global budget. It was reported that many schools did not employ additional staff but extended the role of their clerical assistants, some of whom were not skilled in managing large budgets. Prior to the devolution of responsibility, schools had been provided with funding for a part-time (about 0.5 of full-time role) clerical assistant. The introduction of self-managing schools increased the funding for a full-time business manager on a higher salary than a clerical assistant. It was reported that this full-time assistance was required prior to Schools of the Future. This increase, therefore, only increased the support for schools to the level that was required prior to the introduction of additional school responsibilities.

Participants stated that the Schools of the Future initiative was driven by ideas about local management and the economic imperative for the State to decrease the level of bureaucracy in the education system. Over time, it has become clear to school leaders that they needed additional resources to effectively manage their schools. Responsibility for 94 per cent of the State education budget has been devolved to the school level. Schools are required, however, to resource all of the new policy initiatives and requirements from their global budget, which is now called the Student Resource Package.
Schools in Victoria are provided an annual base level of funding of about $40,000 for primary schools and $400,000 for secondary schools. There is thus a ‘massive’ difference between the base funding for primary and secondary schools. All other resourcing for Victorian schools is provided on a per capita basis. It was reported that economies of scale can support schools of over 450 students. A number of schools in Victoria, however, have enrolments of less than 450 and do not receive these benefits. Victoria also has a number of secondary schools that enrol fewer than 200 students.

Funding for school staff is determined using a system-wide formula with the average teacher’s salary adopted as the unit for the staffing component. Schools, however, have responsibilities for determining the number and professional mix of staff. This funding mechanism may create difficulties for schools with staff profiles of highly experienced or senior teachers and declining school enrolments. Conversely, there can be a financial benefit for schools that employ significant numbers of graduate teachers who earn below this average salary. Schools with young teaching staff and high enrolment numbers may achieve a substantial budget surplus. It was reported that there is an expectation of schools to manage their budgets over time and for schools to prepare for decreases in enrolments and, therefore, funding.

The local selection of staff has been highly beneficial for schools in Victoria. A time commitment is required from school staff to manage the recruitment and employment of staff. Schools are able to select staff in a manner that reflects local needs and school priorities. One issue with the local selection of staff is the deployment of surplus staff within the system. Although staff are employed at individual schools, they are still part of the system of State education. Some schools may need to downsize their staff as a result of decreased enrolments and/or funding issues. The referral process gives priority to teachers within the system who are leaving a school in these circumstances. One problem with the referral process, however, is that schools may choose to use the referral process for teachers who do not perform to the expected standard. It was reported that there are decreasing numbers of applications for positions within schools, particularly in hard-to-staff schools. The decreasing number of applications for school leader and other staff positions may create difficulties in rural and some regional areas.

In discussions about curriculum, it was noted that there are few centrally-located curriculum resources for schools. Schools, however, have greater licence to innovate and develop curriculum that is based on local needs through the efforts of professional learning teams. It was reported that the best curriculum resources come from project-based professional learning teams in schools that are supported by school leaders and external experts. External expertise may be sought from universities or other organisations, including other schools and school systems. These innovative and locally-based curriculum resources and ideas were reported to be likely to have a positive effect on student outcomes.

Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals (VASSP)

When discussing constraints in the relatively decentralised Victorian school system, one school leader noted that they had become used to a particular style. He believed that regardless of the governance style of the system that they are in, principals will always identify blocks and hurdles that must be overcome in their relationship with the system and that there will always be principals who want more freedom and/or more support from the system.

One principal reported that he would like to be free to select staff on merit, regardless of current rules on hiring graduates. Currently, the rules state that any school with a budget of over $2 million can hire up to four new graduate teachers directly from universities, without advertising the positions. Large schools, however, are still tied to this limit of four graduate teachers. If they have other positions available, they must advertise and, after the selection process if there are still unfilled positions, they are able to hire graduates.
An issue was raised with promotion positions within the system. If a teacher or other staff member is offered a promotion to another school but during the school year, the principal must release the teacher from their duties before the promotion can be accepted. Without this release, the principal is effectively able to ‘stop’ their staff member from accepting the position. Many schools are required to advertise positions and hire staff each year, but are continuously looking for staff who suit the needs of the school.

Principal indicated they would be happy for some decisions to be made at a central level if they could believe and trust that the Department would make the right decisions for their school community. In an ‘ideal world’ the centre or region should be supporting schools, especially with staff such as speech therapists and psychologists. Principals would like these support staff to be placed where they are currently most needed and not where there has been a historical need for that type of support.

The Australian Government has particular forms of accountability associated with funding it provides directly to schools. Principals expressed concern about the compliance requirements associated with the use of these funds. The workload is excessive in relation to the amount of funds. They gave the ‘flagpole’ scheme as an example, where they said there were multiple issues of compliance, including getting politicians to ‘launch’ the flagpole, yet this provided schools with just $1500 or similar amount (the ‘flagpole’ scheme was also cited as an example of over-compliance by principals in other jurisdictions).

The principals (and principal class members) were clear in that they do not seek total autonomy in the operation of their schools. They stated that, without the support of the Department, they would not have the resources to build better schools or to maintain the schools that they are currently leading.

One principal noted the ‘local money for local schools’ model that is used in the United States and stated that this would be beneficial for schools, provided that the parents and the local community valued education.

Principals agreed that it was difficult to lead their school in run-down facilities. They reported that the educational needs of student have changed and they require facilities for the 21st century. One principal stated that ‘it is very hard to deliver a 21st century education in 1950s facilities’. Each concurred that there is a link between school facilities and student outcomes. They believe that even principals with a high degree of autonomy may be hindered by a lack of high quality educational facilities.

Participants also stated that students need consistency from the system and the school in critical periods of their lives. They highlighted the importance of the students’ roles in these discussions, indicating that they often feel that the concerns of students can become lost or overwhelmed by systemic and personal considerations.

**Focus groups of secondary principals**

The consultant held discussions with two small focus groups at the annual conference of VASSP. These were scheduled as an option in the programme for the conference. With two groups it was possible to address most of the questions that shaped discussions of this kind, as listed in Chapter 4. The following is a summary of responses.

Participants described how autonomy had been strengthened in recent years, especially in being able to determine where and how funds were spent, with a significant role for school councils. They noted improvements in the Student Resource Package that allowed greater flexibility. However, they also acknowledged that autonomy had been constrained, especially in respect to being able to select staff on merit, requirements of the Department that schools must adopt particular programmes and strategies, the amount of administrative work associated with the employment of staff, under-funding and delays in school maintenance, the capping of the
number of graduates schools can employ, lack of support for innovations and professional development, and constraints in the use of funds in some areas. They would like to see more autonomy in their capacity to engage in strategic planning, employ staff, decide on how maintenance funds should be allocated, and matters related to the transportation of students to and from schools, particularly in outer-urban and rural areas. Staffing was the most frequently mentioned area where more autonomy was preferred. They would like to see less autonomy in the employment of school support officers and associated human resource issues.

Participants readily identified the benefits of autonomy as being the capacity to determine the directions of the school and developing a coherent plan. They referred to being responsive to the needs of the community, freedom to some extent from system constraints and ‘external distractions’, freedom to take risks, the opportunity to create a unique school culture and build high levels of trust, and creating more opportunities for communities to be involved in decision-making. They acknowledged and accepted that accountability comes with autonomy.

Responses on the links between autonomy and students outcomes were consistent with the research literature, with reference to matching resources including staff to students and programmes, tailoring responses to meet family and community needs, acknowledging that each student is a unique individual, and acting on school-level data to make plans to address needs and set priorities. Reference was also made to more effective use of funds for building maintenance.

Participants acknowledged that more autonomy can lead to increased workload if administrative support is inadequate. It was acknowledged that autonomy provides principals with an opportunity to set priorities and it may take some principal’s time to develop a capacity to do this effectively and not create work overload. Delegation of responsibilities is important. More autonomy may lead to a decrease in workload if it meant that schools could shed some staff and students – ‘the burden might be easier to bear’. There was acknowledgement that not all decisions should be decentralised. The focus on decentralisation should be on matters that can lead to adding ‘value’ not ‘administrivia’. The Department expectations on accountability need to be ‘carefully constructed’. On the matter of the link between autonomy and well-being of principals, participants noted that there were two sides to this: autonomy can bring a great sense of achievement but also a great sense of responsibility (there can be stress and distress). A particular ‘stressor’ is the responsibilities of principals in the area of human resources. Concern was expressed about offloading tasks to schools to the extent that important things are pushed into the background: ‘schools are not autonomous enough in areas that are important’.

There were ‘two sides of the coin’ on the matter of whether autonomy attracts or repels people from seeking the principalship. On the positive side, autonomy can attract people because of the opportunity for leadership in creating a unique culture, with appointees able to ‘influence up’ and ‘enable down’. Autonomy can be ‘incredibly energising’ although many principals were highly energised in ‘pre-autonomy days’. Some potential appointees are, however, put off the principalship because of the workload and a perceived incapacity of principals to shed ‘difficult staff’. They see stress and distress, the loneliness of the role, and the way some principals ‘struggle with data’. It is almost as though potential applicants were undertaking a personal ‘cost-benefit analysis’ in deciding whether to seek appointment at this level.

Participants were very clear on the kinds of support that are needed to enable principals to exercise autonomy more effectively. There is a need for finance and facilities managers: ‘why can’t we be like business and have the support we need?’ It was noted that the best managers would earn more than principals. The importance of keeping centralised those things that are more efficiently and effectively handled at that level was emphasised. Facilities are important, as in the case of principals being expected to take on more responsibility for supporting students with special needs but not having the necessary facilities to do it.

In a final comment, some participants raised questions as to whether autonomy should be withdrawn in under-performing schools, how to respond to the challenge of providing a 21st
century education in a 1950s environment (and a related issue of being dependent on receiving funds to improve the infrastructure of the school) and how to most effectively use autonomy to the benefit of each individual student.

**Key themes**

- Victoria is of particular interest because the level of autonomy is higher than in any other state or territory, representing the high point to date since the creation of systems of public education in the late 19th century. While there had been a steady increase over the preceding two decades, the most significant development came in the form of the Schools of the Future project of the Kennett Coalition Government, extended under the Bracks Labor Government.

- About 94 percent of the State’s recurrent budget for schools is subject to local decision-making. Selection of staff is a local responsibility within a framework of centrally-determined guidelines. Needs-based funding of schools is continually reviewed following a model that has been widely recognised internationally.

- There were few noteworthy differences among participants in the mapping exercise.

- The principal of the case study school noted the workload associated with school autonomy and this was reinforced in discussions with principals’ associations and in focus groups. It was felt that the Schools of the Future project was not accompanied by the building of adequate management support to the principal. All participants were mindful of workload, paperwork and compliance requirements and the need to simplify these.

- There were different views about several issues. One concerned the number of applicants for the principalship, with system leaders believing that these were adequate while representatives of principals provided evidence to the contrary.

- Primary principals believed there was little evidence of a relationship between autonomy and learning outcomes but they believed the local selection of staff was highly beneficial.

- Secondary principals would be content to have some decisions re-centralised if there was a level of trust that the system could make decisions in the interests of the school and its community and provide greater support to schools. They were concerned about compliance requirements, especially for relatively small amounts of money connected, in particular, to some Australian Government grants. They believed that poor or obsolete facilities limited autonomy in the introduction of approaches to curriculum and pedagogy that were best suited to the early 21st century.
CHAPTER 12 WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Mapping

Three groups of school and system leaders completed the mapping matrix, including representatives from the Department of Education and Training (DET), members of the Western Australian Primary Principals’ Association (WAPPA) and members of the Western Australian Secondary School Executives’ Association (WASSEA). During these sessions, each group offered literature and entered into discussions that provided the researchers with vital contextual information about the current state of school and principal autonomy in Western Australia. The mapping matrix in Appendix 2 represents the most frequent responses provided by school and system leaders.

1. Teaching and Learning

School and system leaders agreed that there were various elements to many of the decision-making processes referred to within the teaching and learning category of the mapping matrix. For example, there were reports that the decision-making processes regarding the time allocated to teaching and learning occurred at three levels. The total time for teaching and learning each week is allocated by the Department. The State Government legislates that all students enrolled in primary or secondary schooling are to be provided with at least 25 hours and 50 minutes of instruction in each week the school is open for instruction and a minimum of 4 hours and 10 minutes for each day of schooling. All schools with primary aged students are required to provide literacy and numeracy instruction for a minimum of 50 percent of instructional time. Furthermore, a policy implemented by the Australian Government from 2005 requires that all compulsory school-aged students are required to undertake at least two hours of physical education each week. Within these frameworks, schools have flexibility in the time that is allocated to teaching and learning.

Reporting student progress to parents was another area that includes a number of levels of authority in the decision-making process. The Australian Government requires that all schools report student progress to parents at least twice a year in plain English on a five-band A-E scale (or equivalent). The State Government provides schools with guidelines that state the minimum standards for reporting student performance to parents, which incorporate the Australian Government requirements. The frequency and format of reporting student performance to parents must adhere to these Australian and Western Australian guidelines. Schools, however, have the flexibility to choose to provide parents with further information or more frequent reports of student progress than required by these minimum standards.

The participants in this mapping exercise reported that schools had a significant level of autonomy in the choice of textbooks and learning materials and the regular assessment of students’ work, particularly in the compulsory years of schooling (years K – 10). The Curriculum Council determines the curriculum and assessment framework and offers recommendations on textbooks and materials to be used in post-compulsory education (years 11 and 12), including the Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE). Schools, however, do have some freedom to choose learning materials and determine approaches to classroom assessment of students’ work within the Curriculum Council’s post-compulsory education framework.

Although consultation is not required by regulations, a majority of school leaders report that they routinely consult with their teachers, heads of department and the school community in a range of decisions. These decisions include the selection of textbooks and other learning materials, the grouping of students and choice of approaches for teaching and learning, the regular assessment of students’ work, and the frequency of reporting student progress to parents.
2. Staffing and Remuneration

Discussions with school and system leaders indicated significant issues and changes with regard to decision-making in the areas of staffing and remuneration in government schools. Western Australia had implemented a system of local selection, which devolved many of the responsibilities for the recruitment and selection of staff to the local school level. At meetings with school and system leaders, DET had announced the cessation of local selection due to acute staff shortages across the state. Although a number of school leaders in Perth supported the local selection of staff, schools in hard-to-staff and particularly rural and remote areas faced significant issues in staff recruitment and it was decided that this could be managed more effectively at a central level.

The local merit-based selection of school staff raised a number of issues. It was observed that schools in attractive urban areas in and around Perth attracted and were able to select from a pool of highly-qualified and experienced teaching staff. Schools in regional or remote areas, however, have found the recruitment of staff extremely difficult, even with the support of the system. This is especially difficult in level 3 schools, schools in which the principals also have a teaching role. The majority of graduate teachers are based in and around Perth and are often reluctant to relocate to rural and remote areas. Furthermore, there is a high staff turnover rate for graduates who accept positions in these regional and remote areas. The issue of school staffing is intensified by the finding that about 30 percent of the teaching workforce will have left the profession within three to five years.

At the time of discussions with school and system leaders, responsibilities for the selection and employment of school staff were divided between the state authority and schools. This locus of decision-making will change following the cessation of the system of local selection in November 2007.

Levels of staff remuneration and conditions of service are set by the state through Enterprise Bargaining Agreements (EBA) with the teachers' union. There is a state award rate for each level of teaching staff. While it is reported that schools have significant levels of freedom with their budgets, the salary level received by staff is set by the EBA. School leaders reported that they would like greater freedom in rewarding staff as they are currently unable to offer staff financial benefits above their salary level. Some schools may offer duties other than teaching time for staff who undertake other responsibilities within the school.

Teaching staff are employed in the public sector and their working conditions are covered by public sector agreements. School and system leaders reported that the procedure to dismiss staff is difficult to negotiate, unless the staff member has committed a major infraction which places the safety of other staff or students at risk. While school leaders are able to make recommendations to dismiss teachers on the basis of their performance, many school leaders reported their hesitation in initiating the dismissal process.

3. Curriculum and Educational Planning

The responses of school and system leaders reflected a high level of consensus on the locus and modes of decision-making in the curriculum and educational planning domain.

The Western Australian curriculum provides schools with some flexibility in the selection of subjects to be offered and programmes to be available for choice by students in years Kindergarten to 10. School leaders reported that, although it was not required by policy, decisions regarding the subjects and programmes offered by the school were often made in consultation with the school community. It was noted that schools had reduced flexibility in the subjects and programmes to be offered to upper secondary students (years 11 and 12).
4. Funding and Facilities

The responses regarding the locus and mode of decisions in the funding and facilities domain indicates that schools have some freedom in raising and allocating funds across budget categories. In completing this category of the mapping matrix, however, school and system leaders reported that autonomy was limited in some areas of funding and facilities management.

Western Australia, like other states, provides a framework for schools regarding the costs that can be charged to parents for teaching and learning. There is also a framework in place to cap the charges that schools may charge for services other than teaching and learning, including school excursions and co-curricular activities. The charges for services other than teaching and learning can vary by over 150 per cent, ranging from $230 for students in years 8 to 10 to up to $700 for upper secondary students. All school charges in government schools are voluntary.

Schools in Western Australia are not legal entities and were therefore unable to independently access the funding they received for capital works from the Australian Government Investing in Our Schools Programme (IOSP). The money from this programme was given to the Public Works office, which is then responsible for authorising the capital works for schools. School and system leaders reported that this system may result in delays.

Participants indicated that there are high levels of accountability related to the receipt and use of public funds. It was reported that this accountability is not initiated by or limited to the Department. While there was general acknowledgment that accountability for the use of public funds is necessary, the current system was reported to be restrictive for leaders of schools and those within the school system.

Case Study

The school selected for study in Western Australia was an urban primary school that serves 796 students from a middle to lower socio-economic community. Forty-six students at this school are Indigenous. The school has 72 full-time and part-time staff, including 22 education assistants. The education assistants (also known as teachers’ assistants) are provided with high levels of professional development. Their role in the school is to assist students and support the behaviour management programmes within the school.

In discussions, the principal reported that he felt that he has significant freedom to make decisions within his school. He stated that he believes the school system would benefit from school leaders having greater flexibility in decision-making within a framework set by the system rather than providing principals with full autonomy. He indicated that this style of flexibility would enable principals to make decisions that suit the needs of the school community, while providing them with guidelines and a framework which supports them in their decision-making process. He indicated that while principals and all members of schools are required to and should act within the regulatory framework, there is flexibility within these guidelines that, when implemented, may give school leaders significant freedom to make the best decisions for their local contexts. He reported that the franchise movement in Australia has clearly shown that in business, structures can be used to improve quality assurance and to support the individual site while owner commitment and local drive can energise and develop the structures as a whole.

This school chose not to participate in the local merit-based system of staff recruitment. The principal reported that he would like the ability to recommend the selection of around 10 to 15 percent of his permanent staff and has some flexibility within the selection of temporary staff. He stated that he supported a central staffing system as long as the school’s needs are recognised and the formula and allocation of staffing is equitable. The school has some options in the management of staff. Members of staff who are not happy or not fulfilling their potential within the school environment are supported by further training or discussion of other options to resolve these issues. Improvement in processes for dealing with and supporting poor performance is required.
The principal reported that within the urban area of Western Australia in which this school is located there are issues with the performance management of principals. There are around 130 schools that are under the administration of three district directors. He said that it is difficult for district directors to manage the performance of all school principals in their jurisdiction due to the size of the districts, staffing changes and the rate of policy changes. He reported his belief that some changes need to be made in terms of the district’s relationships with the state and schools but these changes should focus on the provision of high quality education and closer relationships with school leaders.

The principal noted that the big assets of a public system include its size, breadth of resources including its intellectual capital, and the diversity of skills of those in the system. He reported that primary schools, such as this school, are provided with services by the district, including some assistance for schools in managing students with special educational needs or behavioural issues. Graduate teachers are also provided support by the district, which supplements the training and assistance that schools are able to provide. He stated that the district support is particularly beneficial in schools with small numbers of graduate teachers or students with special needs. The district is able to assist schools and lobby for support of groups of schools with similar needs. He indicated that, as members of the system, schools have access to an accumulation of skills and economies of scale that provide them with access to services that they would not be able to independently access.

He reported his belief, however, that the economies of scale and intellectual capital are not fully utilised within the system, particularly in the training of aspiring and current principals. He stated that, unlike many other public sectors, professional development to support aspiring and current principals is fragmented and inconsistent. Western Australia does not currently fully implement a cohesive system of high-quality training to support the needs of school leaders and aspirants. The principal stated that aspirants and school leaders need to be provided with initial and ongoing systematic training on finance, risk management, education policies and curriculum leadership. The system needs to provide principals and aspiring school leaders with all of the tools and the knowledge base to effectively lead schools, through easily accessed and well-developed training programmes. He believes that a national training and development plan would not be the most effective as a one-size-fits-all model would not address the concerns of all systems. Each system needs to identify and respond to the needs of their schools and communities. He stated that, if systems worked with the principals, the development and regular revisions of aims, directions and approaches for training school leaders would be as important as having the development programme. This consultation would offer an acknowledgement of the knowledge, skills and experience of the principals currently within the system.

**Issues**

Issues in autonomy in Western Australia are reported from two sources. The first summarises responses from participants in focus groups. The second refers to a strategy released recently by the Director General that takes up a number of concerns and outlines a course of action to address them.

**Issues identified by principals**

The participants in focus groups reported that the cessation of the system of local merit-based staff selection was a major issue faced by schools in Western Australia. Over one-third of responses indicated that school leaders would like to have greater input into the selection of permanent teaching staff in their schools. Principals indicated that, with the cessation of the system of local selection, they would have less ability to select teaching staff for their schools. The system of local merit-based selection was supported by leaders of urban schools in Western Australia, who were able to recruit high quality staff. However, participants acknowledged that hard-to-staff schools faced difficulties in both the recruitment and retention of teaching staff. They suggested that a return to five-year tenure for teaching positions may assist...
schools in recruiting and retaining staff and to dismiss staff who are not meeting performance standards.

The groups of primary and secondary school principals who participated in this study reported that they currently have autonomy in the management of staff, setting the priorities and planning for school development and the organisation of classes, including class structures and timetables. The most frequent response to this question, however, indicated that principals in Western Australia have autonomy in the setting of their school budget and allocation of resources within their school. While around one-fifth of responses referred to school budgets as a matter in which school leaders have autonomy, the participating principals noted that there are high levels of restriction about the use of public funding in Western Australia. It is also interesting to note that around one-quarter of responses to the question on the areas in which principals would like more autonomy related to the funding of schools. Principals reported concerns about the number of grants that tie resources to particular areas of the school.

These participants reported that they would like greater freedom in allocating resources, particularly in the area of rewarding staff. They indicated that they have little ability to provide staff with financial rewards for taking on additional responsibility or duties. School leaders reported, however, that they could provide time-in-lieu as one of the few rewards for staff. The highest number of responses to the question about the major benefits of principal autonomy described the potential rewards for school staff. Principals indicated that these benefits for school staff may include rewards for high quality teaching staff, the ability to dismiss staff for poor performance, and higher levels of job satisfaction for all staff.

About one-third of responses to the question regarding the major benefits of principal autonomy indicated the potential for schools and school leaders to respond to the needs of the local school community. They reported that, by efficiently and effectively responding to the needs of local communities, schools would be able to improve student outcomes. However, they also reported that they would require support to effectively utilise greater levels of autonomy.

Twenty-nine percent of responses indicated that participants believed that principal autonomy would result in increased workloads for school leaders. In order to manage this workload, participants indicated that they would require greater administrative and management support. When asked what additional support principals would require to effectively exercise autonomy, a number of principals indicated that they would need increased administrative support. These principals also indicated that they would require professional development, particularly in the area of financial and public sector management, and changes to current centralised reporting requirements in order to effectively and autonomously manage their school.

The Classroom First Strategy

Director General Sharyn O’Neill recently released the Classroom First Strategy that addressed several issues raised in the current project (O’Neill, 2007). The starting point and first element in the strategy was that there should be a focus on student achievement: ‘success for all’. It was noted that ‘teachers’ attention will be focused on the standards of achievement expected of students and on monitoring the progress of students towards those standards’. The second element proposed a ‘classroom orientation’:

The first thing to do is to reduce the squeeze on teachers – the squeeze between the immediate learning and behavioural needs of their students and the myriad other demands of the system. Over time these other demands have created clutter and noise for teachers and distracted them from their core business of teaching students.

They take the form of administrative requirements, compliance paperwork and implementing a wide range of initiatives from central office. (O’Neill, 2007)
While the focus in the foregoing is on the work of classroom teachers, a consequence ought to be a reduction on ‘compliance paperwork’ for school principals. The third strategy is explicitly connected to the current project in its call for abandoning a one-size-fits-all approach, with flexibility in the way schools use their resources:

Rather than thinking of the public school system as a whole, this strategy takes one school at a time. We aim to get rid of uniformity and the one size fits all approach … We will provide sufficient flexibility to enable each school to develop their own unique ethos … In the future we will allow schools to have greater flexibility in how they use the resources the Department allocates to them as part of an agreement to achieve specified outcomes and to operate within Department policy. (O’Neill, 2007)

The proposed strategy suggests a higher level of ‘framed autonomy’ is in the offing. As far as patterns of governance are concerned, it is an amalgam of three models described by Glatter, as reported in Chapter 1 and summarised in Table 1.1: School Empowerment, Quality Control, and Learning System. The strategy is one of the first in Australia to explicitly acknowledge the need to reduce ‘compliance paperwork’.

Key themes

- There were few noteworthy differences among those participating in the mapping exercise about the pattern of autonomy.

- Local selection of staff has been introduced as an option but will be abandoned from November 2007 due to the shortage of teaching staff, particularly in rural and remote settings.

- Principals in Perth generally support the local selection of staff but acknowledge that the process is not suited to schools in rural, remote and other hard-to-staff schools.

- The principal of the case study school felt that he has significant freedom to make decisions but would welcome more autonomy within a system-wide framework rather than full autonomy. The school did not participate in local selection when it was an option, being content with a central approach providing the needs of the school were met.

- Principals acknowledged the support they received at the district level but would like more autonomy especially as it relates to flexibility in the allocation of funds, including the rewarding of staff. They would require more support, including professional development, if there was to be an increase in autonomy.

- Principals believed that autonomy enabled schools to be more responsive to the needs of the local community and thereby make a contribution to improved outcomes for students.
CHAPTER 13 CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

No school in a Catholic system has full autonomy, which was defined in Chapter 1 as complete freedom to make all decisions. Many decisions, as in other school sectors, are framed by state and territory guidelines and legislation. Catholic schools are also overseen by the state or territory Catholic Education Commission (CEC) and, more directly, by the education authority in their diocese. Diocesan authorities are responsible for determining the protocols, including religious practices and values, for schools in their jurisdiction. It was reported that policies and practices may differ among the 32 dioceses in Australia. The level of school autonomy may, therefore, depend on the CEC or diocesan authority. At a local level, Catholic schools are also accountable to the church, the canonical or congregational authority, and the local community.

There are three main types of Catholic schools, including parish schools, regional schools that provide secondary education for several parishes, and congregational schools. Congregational schools are managed by a particular Catholic order, which may have several schools in a diocese. Schools that are managed by the same congregational order may function as small systems within the overarching framework of the Catholic school system. Levels of autonomy can be quite different between congregational schools, as they are accountable to the order by which they are operated in addition to government and diocesan authorities. Regional schools are funded by collaborations of local parishes and are not associated with a particular congregational order. Parish schools are normally primary schools associated with a particular parish church.

Most schools have management or advisory boards, which are responsible for the management of the school. These boards often include a representative of the canonical authority, which is made up of priests or representatives from the local parish and/or the relevant congregational order. The canonical authority is not responsible for the appointment of principals to the school or the deployment of school budgets, although they do have some input through their involvement in the school board. While the powers of boards may vary between schools, principals are generally guided by board decisions. School principals may also hold a position as an executive officer on the school board and are therefore involved in the decision-making processes at the board level. There are also incorporated schools in the Catholic system. Like schools in the independent system, incorporated schools have the legal status of a company. Incorporated schools normally have a director, who is often more involved in the day-to-day management of the school than school board members.

Mapping

The mapping exercise for Catholic schools was undertaken by a representative of the Association of Principals of Catholic Secondary Schools of Australia. The principals of the schools included in the case studies also provided insight to the decision-making patterns in the Catholic school system. The responses to the mapping exercise are included in the template in Appendix 2.

1. Teaching and Learning

Catholic schools function according to the ‘principle of subsidiarity’, which indicates that decisions should be made at the closest possible level of authority to the people who will be affected (see Chapter 1 for a more detailed explanation). The responses in the teaching and learning domain of the mapping exercise indicate that the majority of decisions are made at the school level but within a framework. The school's decisions about the grouping of students or teaching materials, for example, are made within the curriculum guidelines provided by the relevant state or territory authority. Decisions regarding the time allocated to teaching and learning may be framed by state or territory legislation but may also be influenced by practical issues, such as the availability of transport to some schools. It was reported that, while it is not
required by policy or legislation, many of the decisions about teaching and learning in Catholic schools are made in consultation with the school community to effectively address their local needs.

It was reported that Catholic schools normally have high levels of flexibility in choices of approaches and materials for teaching and learning. One area in which they do not have significant freedoms is religious education, the content and materials for which are decided by the school’s canonical authority, within the guidelines set by the Catholic Education Commission (CEC) or diocesan authority. The Bishop is ultimately responsible for the religious identity of Catholic schools.

Responsibilities for the support of students with special educational needs were reported to be distributed between the Australian Government, regional or diocesan authorities and the school level. Funding for students with particular educational needs is often provided to the Catholic regional authorities by the Australian Government. These regional authorities are then able to distribute the funds according to the needs of schools, which are set out in the Individual Education Programmes for these students. While the diocesan authorities are responsible for funding programmes for students with special needs, schools have a significant role in deciding on how this funding will be used to effectively support their students. This process was described as a contractual agreement, rather than a loss of autonomy for schools and school leaders.

This mapping exercise indicated that there was only one area in the Teaching and Learning domain where the school did not have primary decision-making responsibility. It was reported that decisions regarding the regular assessment of students’ work are generally made by teachers or at the faculty level. Their approaches to student assessment are derived from a combination of curriculum, student needs and professional standards of teachers. These decisions are generally made by teachers.

2. Staffing and Remuneration

Responses in the Staffing and Remuneration domain indicated that there can be significant variation between diocesan authorities in the selection of staff. It was reported that schools in more decentralised dioceses may have significant levels of freedom in selecting staff. Some schools may have high levels of autonomy in making decisions regarding the number and professional mix of their staff within the confines of their budgets. Other dioceses may be more actively involved in the decision-making processes regarding the number and selection of staff.

It was noted that all decisions regarding staffing in Catholic schools are made within a framework of policy or legislation. Some dioceses may be centrally involved in staff selection and remuneration processes or may provide schools with prescriptive guidelines for these decisions. Schools in highly decentralised regions, on the other hand, may devolve all responsibility for the selection, dismissal and remuneration of staff to the school level. Decisions regarding staff selection and remuneration in schools in these decentralised dioceses, however, are still framed by industrial relations requirements.

The principal’s authority to make decisions regarding school staffing issues may also vary according to the level of schooling. In general, diocesan authorities are more likely to be involved in decisions about staffing in primary schools. Principals in primary schools, particularly small parish primary schools, often do not have the same amount of flexibility to make decisions regarding staff as principals of secondary schools.

Although principals of many Catholic secondary schools have significant levels of autonomy in the selection of staff, they do not have the authority to hire and fire certain members of staff. Deputy principals and religious education co-ordinators are selected by the school board. As a member of the school board, the principal may decide to be involved in the selection panel for
recruitment of staff in these positions. The principal, however, does not have the freedom to convene the selection panel or veto the decisions.

3. Curriculum and Educational Planning

Analysis of the responses in this area indicated some differences between the Catholic school system and government school systems. Decision-making for the establishment of schools is one area of difference. The decision to establish a new Catholic school is subject to Canon Law, which indicates that a school should not be established or expanded if it has a negative impact on other local Catholic schools. The establishment and disestablishment of Catholic schools, therefore, are subject to approval by the appropriate diocesan authorities in addition to the state or territory policies. Schools may also require approval from some dioceses to increase enrolments or add a new class at a particular grade level.

It was reported that responsibility for decisions about the curriculum and subjects offered by the school are shared between the Australian Government and the state or territory, the diocesan authorities, the school and the local needs of the community, as expressed by parents and local industry. The areas in which staff have expertise may also influence the type of subjects offered at a school. Catholic schools, like most other schools, make decisions about their curriculum within state or territory guidelines. The representative of the Catholic system noted that they are also required to follow curriculum policies that have been developed at the Australian Government level. Schools, however, are provided with some flexibility in their implementation of the curriculum framework. Diocesan authorities are only involved in one area of the curriculum, namely, religious education. The dioceses require all Catholic schools to offer religious education to students and may have some involvement in the content of the courses.

Decisions about the schools at which a student may enrol can also be influenced by the diocesan authorities. It was reported that parents have significant levels of freedom in choosing to enrol a student at a particular school. In terms of the Catholic school system, however, parents' freedom to enrol their child at a school is framed by the policies and level of enrolments at individual schools. Catholic schools are established to predominantly offer education to students from Catholic backgrounds. While dioceses offer schools guidelines on the percentage of enrolments of students who do not have a Catholic background, non-Catholic students are welcomed when there are places available. Students from Catholic backgrounds, however, have priority in the enrolment processes for Catholic schools.

It was reported that there is a significant level of freedom for school principals. Principals, however, may need to use their imagination to address local educational needs within the flexibility that is offered. Higher levels of experience may enable some principals to exercise a higher degree of autonomy, within the available guidelines. Experienced principals may have a greater ability to make decisions based on how they can efficiently and effectively address the needs of their school. It is important to have high levels of trust between the board, the canonical authorities and the principal. Principals may be provided with greater levels of autonomy when there are good relationships between the various levels of authority.

4. Finance and Facilities

The responsibility for the allocation of funding for schools in the Catholic system in Australia is shared by State or Territory governments, the Australian Government and the Catholic system authorities. The Catholic system redistributes government funding to its schools according to a needs-based formula. All Australian Government and state or territory funds allocated to Catholic schools are paid to the regional CEC. These funds are then distributed to schools according to the Catholic system’s needs-based formula.

While the locus of responsibility for decisions about the amount may vary between dioceses, Catholic schools are able to set fees for teaching and learning. There is a policy in the Catholic system regarding fees, which indicates that schools should set fees that are manageable for the
parents in their local community. Decisions regarding fees for teaching and learning and other services are, therefore, framed by the moral accountability of the school and the capacity of parents to pay.

It was reported that decisions regarding the design of Catholic schools are made collaboratively between five levels of authority. All designs of school buildings must comply with government building regulations and guidelines. Catholic schools also consult with the Diocesan and/or congregational authorities that own the land on which school buildings are being built or refurbished. Although this mapping exercise indicates that Catholic schools are primarily responsible for the design of their school buildings, the school will also generally consult with members of the congregation and local school community.

Catholic schools have the freedom to establish partnerships with outside organisations, including local TAFEs and government schools. Decisions regarding partnerships are made within diocesan guidelines regarding appropriate business contributions. Congregational schools may also be supported by other schools within a network of schools.

**Case Studies**

Two Catholic schools were nominated for study, one a primary school in New South Wales (Archdiocese of Sydney) and the other a regional secondary school in Victoria (Archdiocese of Melbourne). These two states were selected because of contrasting approaches in the governance of Catholic education.

**Case study 1**

The school nominated for study is a small parish primary school in an urban setting in Sydney enrolling about 200 students from highly diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. The school community includes members who receive social welfare payments and those from middle-class backgrounds. More than 10 percent of students do not identify as members of the Catholic faith. While faithful to the enrolment guidelines set by the CEC, the principal welcomes students of all faiths when there are vacant enrolment places. The principal indicated that Catholic schools are at the cross-roads and many have begun to look outwards to support a multi-faith community.

The principal feels valued by the system to the extent that she has the freedom to apply her own leadership style in determining strategies for the school. She believes that the potential for an increase of principal autonomy depends on the individual’s personality, character and style of leadership. She has travelled to learn from international models of schooling and to bring ideas back to the school. She believes that learning from international settings is increasingly important in a globalised environment. She tries to instil the notion that, as privileged global citizens, Australian students and educational leaders should try to identify areas in which they can support education in other parts of the world.

This principal believes that her primary responsibility as a school leader is to assist students’ learning. Her staff are highly motivated and supportive of her leadership. They have had success with new initiatives but she indicated that the most successful initiatives have come from the school itself, rather than initiatives that have been developed externally.

The governance structure of the school includes a Parents’ Advisory Council, of which the parish priest is a member. The principal indicated that the Parents’ Advisory Council provides her with significant flexibility in determining the directions of the school and a high degree of autonomy in day-to-day management. The school also has a Finance Committee, the membership of which is decided by the principal. The Finance Committee currently includes the principal, administrative staff, the assistant principal, a parent representative and the parish priest. All Finance Committee reports are presented to the Parents’ Advisory Council.
The principal is provided with some autonomy by the Catholic Education Office (CEO) and feels able to suggest new directions for both her school and other schools in the diocesan jurisdiction. The CEO provides guidelines, including the strategic plan to be achieved by 2010. She stated that schools are required to advise the CEO of their own strategic goals that contribute to the achievement of this plan. These local goals are included in the school’s own plan for development. She works with staff to set the school’s own goals and has flexibility in prioritising how these goals will be achieved. She indicated that the CEO has high expectations of school performance, which are echoed by her own personal expectations for the school.

In discussing the state and diocesan frameworks for schools, the principal indicated that there are core concepts and common understandings of the guidelines but there is not a common expression of how these guidelines are implemented in each school. She stated that the expression and implementation of policies within these guidelines must be different in each school to effectively address the needs of the local community.

This is a parish school but does not have a resident priest. The priest who represents the parish is shared with two secondary schools. As the school does not have its own priest, staff are able to be involved in religious activities and in shaping the religious vision for the school. She believes that this provides an opportunity for staff to be articulate leaders of church within the school.

The principal stated that she has significant freedom to appoint staff but routinely consults on staffing decisions with the assistant principal, deputy principal and/or a parent representative. The school currently employs 11 teaching staff, not all of whom have a full-time teaching load. Staff provide assistance in the management of the school. There is a strong learning support team, including a special needs teacher and the deputy principal, who work at developing and consistently reviewing classroom practice. The learning support team plans programmes for different students with particular educational needs.

The principal indicated that there is constant evaluation of school policy, so that they may extend initiatives that have been successful and abandon those that are less successful. The school undertakes a complete review of school policies every two years. School policies provide guidelines for teachers and significant flexibility in how they are implemented in individual classrooms.

The principal has been able to employ a person to assist with applications for government grants. She is often not able to request additional financial support from parents and so the school often seeks additional support from government. A recent school initiative that has been funded by government grants is the installation of interactive white boards in all classrooms and providing professional development for all staff to learn how to use them. The school has also received Australian Government Quality Teaching Programme (AGQTP) grants for science for gifted students and boys’ education. The principal reported that there is a significant amount of support available to schools if they are adept at making applications.

The principal stated that her ‘secret’ for managing the school is trying to keep all programmes simple and in line with the school vision. She is happy to be flexible in her view and interpretation of Catholic, State and Australian Government guidelines and to report back to the relevant authorities when she feels that an initiative does not work. She reported that she is fully supportive of accountability requirements and happy to be accountable for the activities in her school. While she is supportive of compliance issues, she indicated that the number of initiatives that require school compliance is getting too large. She stated that, individually, all of these programmes have strengths, but when viewed together, they create a significant workload for the school.

The principal believes that schools are regarded by governments as the panacea for all issues, with some departments not aware of actions already taken or implemented by other departments. She gave an example of a recent initiative that was sent to her by the Department
of Defence for supporting the needs of children of defence personnel. She said that, while it is a positive initiative, many of the issues have been addressed through other measures and compliance with each of these increases workload at the school level. She believes that the school must assess how the guidelines for all initiatives can be developed to fit the school programmes and curriculum. She reported her concern that, when the initiatives do not match school priorities or approaches to teaching and learning, they may receive only superficial attention. She believes that schools and teachers are often not valued highly enough.

The principal believes that the role of the school leader is to act as a gate-keeper for teaching staff. She said that, if the principal does not respond appropriately and sensitively to new initiatives and manage compliance issues, staff can become run-down and stressed. She reported that the role of the principal can be difficult but that it is all about balance. There are so many areas that need to be addressed, often calling for rapid change, that it is difficult to achieve that balance. Once balance is lost there is no fun, joy or trust among staff. She believes that, as a school leader, one must ensure this balance is achieved and to also have a sense of humour while implementing it.

Case Study 2

The school nominated for this study is a large high-fee regional Catholic college located in an urban setting in Melbourne. The school enrols just under 1600 students and employs about 180 staff, including a full-time psychologist, a part-time psychologist, a family therapist and a social worker. The classification of this school as ‘regional’ is not related to the geographical location of the school. Rather, the term ‘regional’ is used by the CEC to indicate the difference between schools that are run by a particular Catholic order of Religion, known as congregational schools, and schools that are operated by the CEC due to the needs in the area. Such schools are located in a particular parish but serve several parishes.

The principal indicated that there wasn’t really any area within his role in which he would like to change his level of responsibility. In his view, principal autonomy does not refer to principals having full freedom to do as they wish but rather refers to having flexibility to make decisions at the closest level to where the decisions are enacted. He reported that this idea was common in Catholic education and is described as ‘subsidiarity’ (see Chapter 1 for an explanation of this term as it used in Catholic affairs).

Historically the governance of Catholic schools was vested in parish priests and congregational orders. Due to the decrease in people entering orders in the last century, Catholic schools were unable to be sustained without employing lay teachers. In the 1980s, there was a rise in the influence of the teachers’ union in Catholic schools, particularly non-order schools like the one being described here. As a response the governance of schools was given a greater focus. Each Catholic regional college saw the creation of its own association of canonical administrators established as a legal body in civil and canon law to oversee the governance of a particular school. This authority has the responsibility for appointing the principal and to approve major school expenditures.

The governance structure of the school involves a school board and Canonical Authority. The formal employer of the schools staff is the Canonical Authority but governance is vested in the School Board. The school board includes formal representation from each of the five local parishes, including the president of the Canonical Authority, a representative staff member, a student representative, a parent and the school principal. At least one of these members has been appointed to the board because of their financial expertise. The board elects a chairperson who cannot be the principal. The Canonical Authority of this school meets infrequently and leaves operational decision-making to the school board. The president of the Canonical Authority is also represented on the finance committee and on the school board executive, which meets twice a year. The principal indicated that, while this is the pattern within his school, the involvement of the Canonical Authority may vary between schools. Each member of the
Canonical Authority is also involved in the management of a local parish primary school. It was reported that secondary schools are given greater freedom, including responsibility for staffing.

The Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (CECV) is the state authority for Catholic schools in Victoria. The CECV sets the policies that guide all schools in the Victorian Catholic system. These policies address areas such as occupational health and safety, anti-discrimination, general enrolment policies, general employer policies and the industrial award, including the salary, leave conditions and processes for staff involvement in decision-making. The principal indicated that the conditions and policies set by the CECV can offer tighter restrictions than seen in the government system.

The regional diocesan body for this school is the Catholic Education Office (CEO) Melbourne. The CEO functions as a service body to assist schools and supervise the implementation of the ‘big picture’ CECV policy. The principal reported that he is also responsible for the implementation of State and Australian Government initiatives and that the Catholic framework provides another level of authority. He indicated, however, that many of these policies are very broad and he has significant freedom within these guidelines. Using the example of staffing, he stated that there are guidelines regarding class sizes and the preferred staff: student ratio within a school. The principal has full flexibility in determining the professional mix of these staff providing that he does not provide lower staffing numbers than these minimum standards.

The CEO also provides the school with a global budget drawn from both state and Australian Government sources, the total of which is distributed among Catholic schools. The principal has full responsibility for managing these funds, although his budget is audited twice a year by the Canonical Authority which is accountable to the CEO. He understands the need for these checks and balances but reported that, in the many years he has been at the school, he has never been contacted about a problem by the financial division of the CEO. He stated that his flexibility with the global budget enables him to resource priority areas for the school. Over the last decade, for example, the school has managed over $16 million worth of capital works that have been borrowed and repaid (or are being repaid) through the global budget. Both the state and Australian Governments provide some support for capital work loans and assisting with repayments.

The principal stated that the distribution of funds by the CEO and the provision of a global budget are benefits of being a member of the Catholic system. The system provides them with freedom to voice their opinions on how funding is dispersed and supports schools that require higher levels of financial resources. There is also an internal Catholic education system that assists with interest subsidies on loans for capital development.

This principal stated that, as he is provided with a global budget, including State and Australian Government funds as well as fees derived from parents, he rarely feels the need to seek financial support. He stated that this is one difference between government and Catholic schools, and possibly a shortcoming in the experience of Catholic principals. He observed that leaders of effective government schools can be highly entrepreneurial and are able to establish strong links with local organisations and the local community. The principal stated that the distribution of funds by the CEO is generally seen as fair. His school receives from the public purse about fifty-six percent of the resource base of a government school. The level of school fees means the College operates at about ninety percent of the resource base of a government school.

The school has four dedicated finance staff to manage the school resources. The principal indicated that he would not be able to effectively manage the school’s global budget without these staff.

In terms of curriculum and pedagogy, there is an understanding that this school, like all Catholic schools, will reflect local needs. The principal reported that there is great flexibility in the VELS and that many schools, like his own, take these and local priorities into account.
One of the four deputy principals has been given high levels of responsibility for staffing. The principal stated that, by devolving many staffing decisions to this level, he is able to focus on leading teaching and learning, rather than staffing. He reported, however, that like all other schools, his school would benefit from employing a dedicated human resource manager.

This principal believes that schools would require more assistance from the centre if school leaders were provided with increased autonomy. He stated that, if this support was not provided by the system (whichever system in which the school is involved), there would be a need to outsource support at a greater cost. With higher levels of autonomy, schools may also be at risk of losing the ability to pool resources. The principal believes that increased autonomy with appropriate accountability is his preferred model. He stated that greater bureaucratic involvement with schools could detract from the focus on student outcomes or lead to simplistic models of student outcomes.

The principal believes that the hardest job in the school is teaching in the classroom. He suspects, however, that leaders of Catholic schools have got used to having support staff, particularly in financial management, and don’t realise some of the difficulties that may be associated with increased responsibility. He reported that, being the principal of a large school, he needs to delegate responsibilities to his staff. He reported that he would be unable to and shouldn’t be required to manage every issue that arises in the school. He has devolved high levels of responsibility to middle management, such as year level coordinators. The principal reported that very few issues related to parents’ grievances come to him as they are generally resolved by teaching staff or year level co-ordinators. He stated that he has chosen to devolve many of these responsibilities so that he can lead teaching and learning in the school. He noted, however, that as a result of devolving some responsibilities, he is aware of the need to devolve rewards to his staff. He indicated that one major issue for principals in managing their workloads is that they must prioritise and establish a good work/life balance.

The principal believes there would be no shortage of applications for his job, were he to leave the school. He noted, however, that another Catholic school had recently had to re-advertise a vacant principal position, which he found surprising. He reported that there are several aspiring principals within his current staff who he believes will lead other schools. He expressed a concern that succession planning for schools may not be as successful in a devolved system and that the current levels of remuneration do not provide incentives for them to seek the principalship.

Key themes

- There are 22 systems of Catholic Education in Australia. Schools operate within relatively complex frameworks and hence do not have full autonomy. These frameworks are set by diocesan authorities through a Catholic Education Office and a state or territory Catholic Education Commission as well as State and Australian Government legislation.

- Schools that are owned by congregational orders constitute another kind of system that operates within the framework described above. Local or regional schools that are operated by a diocesan authority are normally expected to be responsive to expectations of the local parish (primary schools) or several parishes (regional secondary schools).

- Within these frameworks schools have a relatively high level of autonomy compared to their counterparts in government schools. The tightest aspect of the central framework lies in the area of religious education and commitment to Catholic beliefs, ethos and values. Funds are normally allocated to schools by diocesan authorities according to a needs-based formula and, in this respect, are similar to Victorian government schools.
As illustrated in the two case studies, Catholic schools have school councils or school boards that have reasonably strong advisory or decision-making powers. In each instance the principal reported a relatively high degree of autonomy. More administrative support would be required if a higher level of autonomy was to be implemented. Both schools have a high degree of autonomy in the selection of staff. In each instance principals are comfortable with current levels of accountability.
CHAPTER 14 INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

Independent schools often have a legal status as a company or incorporated association and thus have a council or board, with powers of a board of directors, of which the principal is often an ex-officio member. These governing bodies are responsible for setting strategic directions and are legally responsible for the school. There are variations in legal structures among schools and further variation with regard to the decisions that are made at the school board level and those that are made by the principal. Generally, however, the Carver Model of governance, a model for the operations of board leadership with high levels of accountability, has a broad influence as school boards set high-level school policy while the principal is responsible for making decisions to implement these policies. Chapter 14 should be understood in this context.

The representative from the Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia (AHISA), who participated in the mapping exercise, indicated that principal autonomy in independent schools is framed by guidelines, resources, the culture of the school and the school leaders’ awareness of their own abilities and strengths. Principals with confidence in their abilities are more likely to fully utilise the autonomy that they have within the frameworks.

The decision-making of principals in independent schools may also be framed by the culture and tradition of the school. The culture of the school may influence the principal to consult with the school board or community on some school decisions, even when consultation is not required by regulation. The level of consultation may vary between schools, depending on the leadership style of the principal and on the level of consultation that has been a feature of the school. Many principals in independent schools will undertake wide formal and informal consultation with members of the school board, staff and community to gain a greater understanding of the potential outcomes of any major changes within the school.

Mapping

1. Teaching and Learning

Responsibility for decisions about the amount of time allocated to teaching and learning in independent schools in Australia may vary according to the state or territory in which the school is located. Independent schools generally have the autonomy to allocate their own times for teaching and learning but this is framed by the policies and regulations surrounding the curriculum and Key Learning Areas in the relevant state or territory. Some states may set regulations regarding the minimum standard time to be allocated to individual areas of the school curriculum. The curriculum for years 11 and 12 in some states may also provide an indicative time to be spent on each subject area within the relevant programme of study.

Independent schools are generally responsible for the choices of materials for teaching and learning, including information and communication technologies.

Some independent schools maintain a relationship with other schools and thus function like a school system. These ‘systems’ may comprise a number of independent schools that have established a network of shared religious affiliations and/or educational philosophies. They may collaborate in their selection of some information and communication technologies or other areas to maintain a consistency between the schools to, for example, improve the ability of schools to share data. Although schools have significant flexibility regarding the choice of approaches to teaching and learning, these systems or networks of schools may have some influence in the decisions that are made in this area, particularly in some subject areas such as religious education. The choice of approaches to teaching and learning generally varies according to the culture and general philosophies of the school and the school community. An independent school’s involvement in a network or system of schools may influence the culture
or philosophies of a school and, thus, may have an influence on the approaches to teaching and learning used within the school. This may be particularly evident in networks of schools that share particular educational philosophies such as Waldorf Steiner or Montessori schools.

In terms of the kind of support offered to students with particular educational needs, independent schools are usually reliant upon their own resources. They receive some funding for students with disabilities or recognised special educational needs from the Australian Government and/or State or Territory Governments. These funds are allocated after application, with the relevant Association of Independent Schools (AIS) office acting as an agent for government. The AIS divides the funding according to the relative needs of students in each of the independent schools in that state or territory. Demand on the funds is high and each student usually receives significantly less than would be the case in the government sector. Each school is responsible for deciding on the kind of support that it offers for students with particular educational needs. The school’s decision-making is assisted and framed in the allocation of funds from government through the local AIS.

2. Staffing and Remuneration

Independent schools tend to have high levels of autonomy in the areas of staffing and possibly in the area of remuneration. Although almost all of the decisions in this area are the primary responsibility of the school board and principal, the majority of these decisions are framed by legislation and industrial relations agreements. Within these frameworks, independent schools are free to select, formally hire and dismiss their staff. The right of the school principal to select school staff is one of the rules of school membership in AHISA.

Many of the decisions made in independent schools are framed by regulations, policy and legislation. Although the principal may have significant flexibility in some areas of decision-making, the principal’s decision may be framed by the school council (board).

It was reported that leaders of independent schools in Australia have autonomy over the number and professional mix of staff that are employed within the school. In making these decisions, however, the school principal must consider the school budget, class sizes and the needs of the curriculum that is offered.

Although school decisions regarding conditions of service and minimum standards for remuneration are framed by legislation and enterprise agreements, the responsibility for decisions in this area lies at the school level.

The representative for independent schools advised that many schools use groups of senior staff as part of the interview process to advise on staff selection. By involving groups of staff, principals are able to gain other perspectives on, and share opinions of, prospective staff. By involving other school leaders in providing staff selection advice, principals are able to distribute some of their workload within the school and provide aspirants with insight into the staff selection process. It was reported that senior staff in independent schools are involved in budget processes, staff management and leadership as well as management of other issues. The representative of independent schools acknowledged the use of, and support for, a mentoring model of in-house development of aspiring school leaders as one means to assist in the development of the next generation of principals.

3. Curriculum and Educational Planning

The establishment of an independent school has several steps. Those proposing the new school first examine the community need for a new independent school in the area. Following this assessment, school bodies must seek approval to open and seek school registration from the relevant state or territory body. The decision to establish an independent school or to add a grade level or new campus is, therefore, an initial decision-making process taking account of the needs of the community, and then a regulatory process by the State authority for the registration
of non-government schools. School authorities, however, are responsible for decisions regarding the timing of, and preparing applications for, the establishment and/or changes to the structure of their school.

School boards, and in the case of school systems, the system authorities, are responsible for the decision to disestablish or close an independent school. This process, however, generally takes place in consultation with the school community.

The responses in the mapping exercise indicate that independent schools have high levels of autonomy in the areas of curriculum and educational planning. While independent schools function within the state and territory curriculum framework, schools have autonomy over the subjects of study and the elective programmes and pathways that they offer students. The school’s decisions regarding the subject, programmes and pathways available to students, however, are generally made in consultation with the community. It was reported that principals need to understand and be responsive to the educational needs and wishes of their community.

Independent school principals are described as acting like ‘mayors of a virtual village’. This description refers to the community role that is held by leaders of independent schools, who are responsible for public decisions either made by them or by their school board. As previously described, the culture of this role generally involves continual contact with the school community and a continuous process of review of the effect of these decisions.

Unlike government schooling, independent schools are not obliged to enrol students within their local area. One of the major differences between government and non-government schools indicated in the ‘curriculum and educational planning’ area of the mapping exercise is that the choice of school is the primary responsibility of the parent. Independent schools accept or reject prospective students based on places available and their published criteria for enrolment.

4. Finance and Facilities

It was reported that independent schools have significant autonomy and responsibility for decisions regarding the management of school facilities and finances. The two areas of finances in which the school does not have full autonomy are the allocation of funds from the public purse for recurrent or capital purposes. The allocation of funding in each of these areas is determined through needs-based formula funding methods employed at the Australian Government and State or Territory levels. While the majority of public funds are allocated to schools on a recurrent basis, schools may apply to the relevant Block Grant Authority, the authorities that distribute funds for non-government schools, for funding for capital works. Interest subsidies may also be offered in some states and territories for loans that have been taken by independent schools to finance capital works, though this practice has seen a significant decline recently, with three states and territories removing this support.

Overall responsibility for the school’s finances rests with the school board as the legal entity. The school board (of which the principal is usually an ex officio member) sets the overall school budget and approves major capital expenditure on facilities. The school leader is responsible for the day-to-day decisions of the use of the school budget and has significant influence in the design of school facilities (often drawing upon staff experience), the project management during construction and the effective use of facilities thereafter.

One major difference between government and non-government schools, identified in this section of the mapping template, is the freedom of non-government schools to set and charge fees for teaching and learning. Boards of independent schools have autonomy in determining the levels of fees charged to parents for teaching and learning and all other services. It was reported, however, that boards and leaders of independent schools tend to evaluate advice from members of the local and school communities to determine an appropriate fee level.
It was indicated that the levels of tied funding and compliance has significantly increased in recent years. The increases in compliance levels were reported to be adding to the workload for school leaders. Some schools in the independent sector are employing senior compliance officers to manage compliance and accountability issues. The workload of school leaders and their senior leadership teams relating to compliance has grown significantly in recent years and relates to many levels of compliance across all levels of government.

Case Studies

Two independent schools were nominated for case study. One was a relatively small, low fee pre-school to year 12 school in a regional area of New South Wales administered by the Anglican Schools Corporation (ASC). The other was a K-12 school in Melbourne, being one of several such schools serving the Jewish community.

Case Study 1

The school nominated for this case study is a small, low fee, regional Anglican school that currently enrols about 450 students from pre-school to year 12. It has a below average SES profile but 70 percent of students achieve over 70 in their HSC results.

The school is a member of the ASC, which is a legal entity that operates as a company with oversight of its member schools. Although the school itself was established in 1991, it has only been a member of the ASC since 1997. The Corporation has a board to manage the overall budget and policies for members, including the establishment, financial maintenance and disestablishment of schools. The board is also responsible for the appointment and dismissal of school principals. The right of veto for principals’ appointment is held by local school councils. The chair of each local school council is appointed by the board. As an incorporated body, the ASC can borrow funds for member schools, thus providing them with a working capital fund. There is a federated arrangement that all fees and grants that are raised by the school go to the ASC and these are used to offset interest on loans. Schools cannot undertake major capital works that cost in excess of $30,000 without board approval.

The principal has been at the school for approximately 3 years and in this time has endeavoured to connect the school with its community.

The principal reported that he must manage two levels of authority above him, which is made up of the school council and ASC board. He said that, although the school is required to function within state and Australian Government guidelines, and is therefore accountable to these levels of authority, he has no ability to influence their decisions. His focus, therefore, is on the policies of the ASC and the school council over which he has some influence to ensure that local needs are addressed. He indicated that the type of relationships that principals have with their immediate school authorities has a significant impact on the level of autonomy provided to principals. When school leaders are trusted by the board of the ASC and school council, they are more likely to have higher levels of freedom in making decisions. If there is concern about the ability or practices of a principal, the board and school council are more likely to supervise more directly and limit the parameters for the principal’s decision-making. He further noted that this relationship is built on confidence in the principal and the principal’s confidence in his or her own abilities. He stated that it would be counter-productive to devolve responsibilities within a system or a school without high levels of trust.

The ASC provides schools with some support for administration and finance. This provides benefits to small schools as they do not need to use resources to manage these issues at a school level. Each school has responsibility for the preparation and delivery of its budget and this is generally the responsibility of its school council. The principal reports to the school council but does not have voting rights. The school council monitors the management of the budget and is accountable to the ASC board for the monthly budget report. The school council does not, however, have any involvement in the educational management of the school.
The principal believes that, generally, there is now a stronger focus on marketing and brand management of schools. He believes that it is easier to teach educators business skills than it is to teach business people educational skills. He stated that he had the opportunity to learn both as he worked in business prior to entering the field of education. He noted that a high degree of autonomy can be exercised in schools that are high performing, have large enrolments and receive considerable funding. In some of these schools, principals have substantial flexibility in the way they achieve the goals of the school as they have the sufficient resources to commit to new projects. However, it is more difficult to achieve such flexibility and freedom when funding is limited. He also indicated that, while it is more difficult, smaller schools with less money require creativity in decision-making and can be exciting places to lead.

The school received funds for capital works from the Australian Government's Investing in Our Schools programme to carry out some small projects. He said these small projects resulted in significant community support for the school as they responded to local needs. He indicated that projects that required higher levels of funds may not have had the same effect on the community perception of the school if they were not required by the local community. It was noted that some projects may not seem important to systems or school authorities that are removed from the site but may be extremely important to the school and its community. He believes that the ability to provide timely and effective responses to local needs was one of the most important aspects of school autonomy.

The principal believes that one of the most important aspects of autonomy was not about finances but about the capacity to build a culture. He indicated that it was not easy to create and sustain a culture in a school which is difficult to quantify in financial terms. He reported that he has significant freedom in creating a culture in his school and is currently working to establish a culture of high expectations for students. He observed that not everyone wants or appreciates just any school culture. He has had to make it clear that in developing a strong school culture, some people may feel that this is not the school for them. While the development of culture must come from 'the top', he operates with a distributed leadership model and has created a 'cabinet' of leaders to work in various areas of decision-making. He indicated, however, that as principal he has retained the right to veto particular ideas put forth by members of the school community, if he does not believe that they will be effective. He noted that it was important to evaluate the idea but not the person. As the school leader, he is able to determine which ideas are the most important for the school. He has also conducted extensive surveys of students and included some students on leadership panels.

He noted that it was important to examine and define the different roles and responsibilities associated with governance and management. In the case of this school, the council has responsibility for governance and oversight of management, while the principal provides educational leadership. The importance of all having a clear understanding of these roles and responsibilities was highlighted. He observed that a lack of clarity can create confusion and tension. He indicated that, while the school council and the ASC board formulate policies and determine the division of responsibilities, both should be clear and consistent and not change practice on an ad hoc basis. He believes that, regardless of which level of authority sets a goal, all goals should be clear, attainable and must be resourced appropriately. If planning towards a goal satisfies each of these criteria, but the goal is not achieved, then that is a failure of leadership. If these criteria are not addressed in the planning stages, then it is a failure of governance. The principal acknowledged that governance should not be a one-size-fits-all model.

The principal believes that one cannot be a good leader and a poor manager. School leaders need to know the boundaries and the freedoms that they have within established frameworks. He also indicated that school leaders should focus on the freedoms that they have and not the areas that they cannot control.
Overall, the principal feels he has a reasonable amount of autonomy. The school council has no involvement in curriculum or prioritising needs within recurrent budgets. The school council sets budget parameters but the principal has flexibility within these. It also sets policies but the principal and those with whom he works set procedures.

The principal indicated that levels of compliance are increasing and that the ASC does not provide sufficient support, which can be especially difficult for small schools, given that compliance obligations are similar for small and large schools. Large schools, however, may have staff and funds to assist them in compliance.

He believes that, with high levels of autonomy, a principal can select staff with strengths that complement his or her own strengths. He was able to select a deputy principal who had complementary strengths to his own and whose experience could assist in developing a structure that supports the school vision. The ability to appoint staff is a very important aspect of building a school culture. He reported that the school has never had difficulty in attracting or appointing staff members, even though the school was located in a regional rather than urban area. He stressed the importance of creating a culture that attracts able staff. The high levels of salary offered by some schools may limit the pool of talent for other schools that are not able to offer the same. Since May 2007, two of the 14 principals in schools administered by the ASC have left their posts, one having retired and the other moving from being principal of a K-6 school to deputy principal of a K-12 school. Principals tend to have a six month notice clause in their contracts as it often takes this period to find a replacement.

Case Study 2

The nominated school for this study is a K-12 single campus college an inner suburb of Melbourne. It has about 1050 students with three classes at every year level. It was established in another suburb more than 60 years ago, initially as a Sunday school and kindergarten at a time when there were no Jewish day schools in the city. The school achieves outstanding results in examinations for the VCE and is invariably in the top rank of schools on this indicator. It is a Zionist school in that it encourages active support for the State of Israel. The values of the school are explicit in its aim to develop in students an awareness of their Jewish identity and respect for the foundations of Judaism. It does not however prescribe a particular standard of religious behaviour. It promotes academic excellence through a balanced curriculum with a special priority on pastoral care.

The school council meets monthly, with an executive that meets every two weeks. The latter consists of the president, two vice-presidents, secretary, treasurer, finance manager and principal. All members of council are parents of current or former students. One indicator of the status of a school is where the ownership of the building and facilities lies. In this instance, should it cease operations, its assets would be assumed by a like educational institution in Australia as recommended by the school council. The school council exercises the powers of a board of directors.

The principal has served in this role for about 20 years. In discussing the extent of autonomy the principal noted how there has been change over the years, with the amount of autonomy increasing with experience in the position. The principal believes that the key to this is trust. There is likely to be a range of practices across Jewish schools depending on where they sit on an orthodox-liberal continuum and on the level of trust by school councils in the principal and other leaders in the school. This school is toward the liberal end of the continuum and, with an experienced and successful principal, a relatively high level of principal autonomy is evident.

Principal autonomy at the school in relation to the role of the school council may also be understood in relation to the general pattern of governance that has been established. Principles of governance are carefully considered. Confirmation of the school council’s approach was received from a consultant on governance from the United States, who counsels against direct school council involvement in educational and personnel matters, for to do so
would undermine the role of the principal. Nevertheless, because educational developments invariably call for financial support, the school council must give its approval to major changes. As we shall see, there have been three significant innovations in recent times and these called for educational leadership on the part of the principal and endorsement by the school council.

The school council has established a broad framework within which important aspects of education are addressed. For example, there is a long-standing commitment to maintaining the most favourable student-staff ratio possible. This is considered even more important than embarking on new building programmes. It is currently in the range 1:8 - 1:8.5. The principal considers this to be a key factor in explaining the success of the school. Also, contrary to what might be a popular misconception about this and similar schools, substantial support is provided for students with a high level of special education need as well as for gifted students. The school currently employs about 20 integration aides. Also, one in five families is given financial assistance to enable children to attend, with the value of this assistance being about $1.5 million. The principal has a high level of discretion on enrolments, as illustrated by the intake of children of refugees from the former Soviet Union in the late 1980s and of students who transfer from government schools. The principal knows every student and every family. The commitment to a close relationship between the school and its students is also illustrated in its physical design, with a considerable amount of space where teachers and students can meet comfortably on a one to one basis. There is a mentor programme in which every Year 12 student mentors one student or a group of students at a lower level in one area for one period per week. A mentor programme has been in place since the establishment of the senior high school and is identified by the principal as an important factor in the achievement of high academic outcomes and in creating a warm and cooperative atmosphere with the school. The school does not conduct an ‘open day’ because parents are encouraged to visit at any time.

Three examples illustrate how the school acts autonomously under the leadership of a long-serving principal, but within a framework of core values and the policies set by the school council, as described earlier. The school has had an early learning centre since the late 1980s, replacing the kindergarten, but in the early 1990s it explored the possibility of introducing the Reggio Emilia approach, named for the city in Italy where it was established. A small team of staff visited the city on a study tour, including the head of primary, head of the early learning centre and the school architect. The principal went to Reggio Emilia in 1998 and a delegation of staff travel to the city each year on a study tour. The decision to adopt the approach was significant as additional staff and new facilities were required. There must be two teachers in every classroom so the budget for staff at this level was effectively doubled. The purpose-designed facility is a ‘learning tool’ in its own right. Leadership came from within the staff but the principal learned with colleagues along the way and took the case to the school council.

Another innovation is a partnership with a leading graduate school of education in the United States. It is a response to the challenge of how one makes a high performing school even better. Can there be ‘deeper thinking’ and can learning be to a large extent ‘research-based’? The principal visited this leading university in the United States in 2000. Momentum built a few years later after the International Conference on Thinking held in Melbourne and attended by leaders in a range of areas, including Business, Health/Wellbeing, Science and Technology, Arts/Humanities, Education, Sustainability/Environment and Peace. There is a high cost of partnership given that a team visits two or three times per year. The school council therefore had to give approval to the initiative and it commenced in 2005 after due diligence and under private patronage. It is evident that the approach took several years to ‘incubate’, with the principal learning along with staff.

A noteworthy feature of the school that followed the adoption of the international partnership project is the formation of focus groups, each comprising eight teachers. These are cross discipline and cross age-of-schooling groups that are research oriented in their approach to professional leaning. There is a timetable allocation to enable meetings to occur, with the number of groups increasing from an initial two to the present eight. The principal, who participates in meetings of focus groups, considers the approach to have broken down some of
the barriers between early learning, primary and secondary and believes that the school council values the approach for the manner in which it contributes to the ‘regeneration’ of teachers.

A third initiative that reflects the autonomy of the school under the leadership of a long-serving principal is the creation of a bilingual programme in Year 3 in which one of three classes learns entirely in Hebrew, except for studies in literacy. The initiative required the approval of the school council, with an additional 1.5 teachers required, and it was a struggle to secure 20 enrolments in the first year, with each student having English as their mother tongue. There is now a waiting list for entry to the programme. Results in the State-wide Achievement Improvement Monitor (AIM) tests are higher for students in the programme.

It is evident that the principal is able to lead in a relatively autonomous fashion within the framework of the mission and values of the school and the policies of council. The principal believes that her ability to manage a dynamic and rapidly growing school has grown since her initial appointment 20 years ago, with enrolments increasing from about 350 to about 1050. The school has a relatively flat structure with widely distributed leadership across levels of schooling and departments. The principal identifies as a culture builder and enabler and, to some extent, a risk taker. Apart from the high level of trust of the school council that has been built over time, the principal believes that an important factor has been the way personal learning has occurred alongside staff, as illustrated in the three innovations described above.

This principal believes that school autonomy has been constrained to some extent in recent times because the Australian and state governments require compliance on some matters as a condition for receiving grants. Examples include participation in the AIM tests (state) and the use of the A-E approach to reporting student progress to parents (Australian Government). She states that there is a substantial increase in paperwork associated with compliance.

The principal and other school leaders are supported by a team of administrative staff. The business manager has two assistants. There is a development manager and the principal and vice-principal each have personal secretaries as do leaders in the early childhood centre and Hebrew and Jewish Studies. There is also a site manager, daily administrator and three receptionists. It is evident that the school has deep support from the Jewish community, with substantial philanthropy illustrated by the number of named buildings and programmes.

Key themes

- There are several notable themes in the study of autonomy in independent schools that are pertinent to proposals for principals of government schools to have the same level of autonomy as their counterparts.

- The autonomy of principals of independent schools is constrained or framed by Australian Government and state requirements to a greater extent than has been the case in the past.

- Principals of independent schools have a different relationship to their school councils or school boards than principals in government schools, even in Victoria where the powers of school councils are much stronger than in other states and territories. Their governing bodies invariably have the powers of boards of directors under company law.

- It is not widely understood in the broader educational community that many independent schools operate in a system of schools not unlike systemic Catholic schools. This was illustrated in Case Study 1 in which the school was one of 14 administered by the Anglican Schools Corporation in New South Wales. This represents another level of authority that
frames the autonomy of the independent school and its principal, and it demonstrates the benefits of efficiency in forming a system to act on behalf of member schools.

- The level of administrative support for the principal of an independent school is generally significantly greater than for counterparts in government schools and systemic Catholic schools. This is illustrated in Case Study 2.

- The level of autonomy of principals of independent schools is, especially, significantly greater than for counterparts in government schools in the important area of staff selection, and this is a condition of membership of AHISA.

- Governance in independent schools is further developed than in government schools, and to some extent systemic Catholic schools. Approaches to governance generally conform to international benchmark standards, often shaped by guidelines developed by well-regarded experts in the field, as illustrated in Case Study 2.
CHAPTER 15 DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of Chapter 15 is to summarise the key findings from the nation-wide study reported in Chapters 5 to 14 and examine these in the light of general trends in recent decades, international developments, and research on the links between autonomy and student outcomes. Implications are drawn as a guide to developing effective models of autonomy in the years ahead.


The project called for a comprehensive report that outlines the extent and success of current models of principal autonomy, including current practices relating to the autonomy provisions in the Act. The relevant provisions were set out in Chapter 1.

Discussion

As indicated in Chapter 1, several elements of the provisions in the Act are noteworthy. First, they refer only to ‘strengthened autonomy’, which implies a higher level of autonomy than is currently the case in relation to ‘education programmes, staffing, budget and other aspects of the school operations’. Second, there is explicit recognition that the autonomy described in the legislation is not autonomy in its literal sense, for there is recognition in each instance that change will occur ‘within a supportive framework of broad systemic policies’. As far as the mapping undertaken in different jurisdictions across Australia is concerned, there is acknowledgement that it is ‘framed autonomy’. Third, it is also noteworthy that particular circumstances are recognised for Catholic schools and their relationship with individuals and organisations in the Catholic sector, that is, there is a particular aspect of framed autonomy that applies to Catholic schools. Fourth, there is no expectation in the Act that the school itself, or its principal, in government schools should be directly involved in the selection of staff, only that the appointment is to be made ‘with the approval of the principal’.

Two observations can be made in comparing the requirements of the Act with international practice and with what has been found in the gathering of information around Australia. With respect to the former, what is required falls considerably short of some of the more innovative approaches to autonomy that are found in England in academies and the proposed trust schools, and in Canada and especially the United States, where several thousand charter schools have been established over the last decade. Academies, trust and charter schools have a degree of independence from state or local authorities that is not contemplated in the current Act.

With respect to existing practice in Australia, it is evident that the government system in Victoria already provides most if not all of the autonomy proposed in the Act. Further, as shall be summarised in other sections of this chapter, at least some but not all schools in every state and territory involve principals in the selection of staff to the point where it is fair to say that such appointments have been made ‘with the approval of the principal’. The same can be said for the selection of staff in systems of Catholic education. In the case of independent schools, principals or their governing bodies have full autonomy in the selection of staff, this being a condition of their membership in AHISA.

The most recent development for government schools is in New South Wales where, from May 2005, principals are consulted for their views on a short list of candidates for teaching positions provided by the School Staffing Unit of the Department of Education and Training. Until this time, according to Buckingham: ‘NSW public school principals had no say whatsoever in the staffing of their schools’ with the new arrangements ‘not at the behest of the NSW government but as a result of pressure from the federal government, which tied funding grants to the
condition that school principals be given a greater role in teacher appointments’ (Buckingham, 2007, p. 6).

**Implication**

The provisions of the current Act appear to provide an appropriate framework for strengthening the autonomy of government and Catholic schools in Australia and no change to their spirit is recommended on the basis of findings in this project. It currently supports framed autonomy with scope for differences across jurisdictions and in respect to the appointment of staff.

**The ‘default position’ on centralisation and decentralisation**

There has been significant progress in the granting of autonomy to schools and principals over the last half-century since the criticisms of the high degree of centralisation by visiting scholars such as Professor Freeman Butts of Teachers College, Columbia University (New York). Education in Australia is a constitutional responsibility of the states and, through enabling Australian Government legislation, of the Territories. Each of the states and territories has granted a degree of autonomy to principals in the ensuing years, with a major trigger being the report of the Interim Committee of the Australian Schools Commission established by the Whitlam Government (the Karmel Report). These developments occurred against an historical background of centralisation for government schools that had been in place since the creation of systems of public education in the late 19th century. Appendix 1 provides a relatively detailed historical perspective on these matters.

**Discussion**

It is apparent that a high degree of centralisation at the state (and later territory) level has been the basic pattern of governance in government/state/public education since the late 19th century. While there have been significant developments over the years, Australia is still viewed overall as having a highly centralised system of education. This was the way it was classified in a major report of the OECD (2004), even though closer scrutiny at the time would have revealed some important differences across the country, as confirmed in the current project. Shifts in the balance of centralisation and decentralisation have been in fits and starts. These shifts have often been a result of criticism by visiting experts like Freeman Butts, or major committees of inquiry such as that chaired by Peter Karmel. State or territory-based policies may also result in shifts, such as the significant extension of self-managing schools by the Kennett Government in Victoria, building on noteworthy but still significant decentralisation under previous Liberal and Labor administrations. In some instances, where decentralisation has occurred or been proposed, elements have been reversed, as reported for New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and in some respects Victoria.

The general impression is that the pattern reported for Australia in 2004 by the OECD (‘centralised’) amounts to a ‘default position’ in the governance of public education, and that shifts to a more decentralised arrangement have been hard-fought and mostly contentious, with pressures of one kind or another always being applied to re-centralise at least some of the operations. Principals of independent and systemic Catholic schools reported increasing centralisation at the level of government in recent years.

There is general agreement among all stakeholders for all kinds of schools that, whatever the balance of centralisation and decentralisation, there needs to be a centrally-determined framework of curriculum, standards and accountabilities if schools are to receive funding from the public purse. The issue of which levels of government should be involved is addressed in the next section. It seems clear that the ‘default position’ in respect to such a framework is centralisation. However, instead of centralisation being the ‘default position’ on every aspect of school operations, with decentralisation being the exceptional arrangement, there is the option of a reversal of more than a century of policy and practice so that the ‘default position’ for school operations is decentralisation to allow for autonomy. It is an option that is implicit in the
discussion of findings throughout the chapter, especially under current conditions that seek success for all students in all settings through a balanced but flexible curriculum, responding to individual and societal needs and personalising learning through state-of-the-art pedagogies. Autonomy within a centralised framework would appear to be the correct ‘default position’ in the early 21st century, in contrast to the uniform, standardised, one-size-fits-all approaches that called for the ‘default position’ of centralisation adopted in the late 19th century and continues to this day. Exceptions to the ‘default position’ of decentralisation can be made under particular circumstances, and some states and territories are moving in this direction.

**Implication**

After more than a century of operations in which the ‘default position’ has been centralisation, a new ‘default position’ of decentralisation should be adopted, with exceptions to be based on local and regional circumstances. The ‘default position’ should remain at centralisation in establishing frameworks of curriculum, standards and accountabilities.

**Complexity in locus of decision-making**

It was immediately evident in the current project that schools and their principals are operating in a complex environment in respect to the frameworks within which they must operate. This applies to non-government schools as well as government schools. Considering government schools first, with one exception, the mapping for every state and territory, whether it was completed by senior officers of departments of education or principals, revealed entries for four levels: Australian Government, State or Territory, Region or District, School and occasionally ‘Other’ (‘Other’ will not be considered in the following discussion). The exception is the ACT that has no regions or districts. For non-government schools, those who helped prepare maps of locus and mode invariably referred to greater complexity than in the past, with more extensive involvement of the Australian Government but also of the states that were putting in place more demanding regimes of accountability than in the past.

There was consistency in the views across the nation among principals in government and non-government schools that the compliance requirements of the two levels of government were adversely affecting their capacities to serve as educational leaders. Requirements associated with the acquisition of flagpoles and the display of a values poster, both initiatives of the Australian Government, were frequently cited as indicative examples. While participants appreciated their significance, both political and symbolic, the level and manner of compliance illustrated the tendency of governments to intervene in specifying solutions rather than specifying issues to be addressed if public funds were to be deployed. There seems to be an additional layer of concern, with risk management added to accountability over the last decade. While the need for both is appreciated and deeper research would be required to illuminate the issue, it is likely that dysfunctional preoccupation with administration and compliance may be one factor in the fall in numbers of applicants for the principalship in some parts of Australia.

**Discussion**

There are likely to be few counterparts to this complexity in comparable countries. In England, for example, there are two levels rather than three beyond the school: the national government through its Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) (formerly Department for Education and Skills – DfES), and the local authority. There are statutory bodies at the national level, such as the soon to be re-structured and more independent Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and these have counterparts in Australia but at the state or territory level. Increasingly, in England, the local authority is becoming an agency of support for the administration of a national framework. Some secondary schools have little contact with their local authority, seeking support from other providers, including other schools or federations and networks. In the APEC consortium, only three of 21 economies do not have education as a national responsibility administered through a municipal or district authority. These three are Australia, Canada and the United States. Only the United States is comparable, as explained
later, since the federal (national) government in Canada has no power either constitutional or through any funding mechanism to determine what occurs in schools, except schools for children of armed forces personnel or schools for indigenous students.

It is worthwhile to examine the situation in Canada more closely, and the Edmonton Public School District in Edmonton, Alberta is an interesting case for comparison. It was a pioneer in school autonomy, with nearly three decades of experience in which most of the system’s budget is decentralised to the school level for local decision-making. It has an impressive system of needs-based funding and choice among secondary schools. There is a trend to specialist rather than standard comprehensive schools at the secondary level.

Two senior officers of the Edmonton Public School District undertook to map the locus of decision-making for the system using the same template adopted in the current study. They reached agreement on locus and mode and the resultant map is contained in Section 4 of Appendix 2. In a comparison with Victoria, where there is a higher level of school autonomy than in any other state or territory, the federal (national) level in Canada had no entries and therefore no role in decision-making whereas in Victoria there were six entries for the Australian Government role. As far as school-level decision-making in Edmonton is concerned, the school was listed as the point of decision in 21 of 34 kinds of decisions, with 8 of these shared with the local district and 4 shared with the local district and the province. In Victoria the school was listed as the point of decision in 32 of 36 kinds of decisions, with 19 of these shared with the state. Just 2 of the 36 were judged to be decisions by the state alone (needs-based funding mechanism and allocation of funds for capital works). It seems that there is a higher level of school autonomy in Victoria, with much of this autonomy being ‘framed’ or ‘shared’, and with a Australian Government role adding complexity that has no counterpart in Canada.

While there is no role for the national government in Canada, the role of the provincial government has increased in recent decades, especially in respect to funding (reflecting a concern for equity) and curriculum and standards (reflecting a concern for quality). The outcome in Alberta has been impressive. In fact, the second ranked system in PISA is not a nation but a province within a nation, namely, Alberta, which is the best performing province in Canada, coming second to Hong Kong in Mathematics, second to Finland in Reading, and fourth after Finland, Japan and Hong Kong in Science. Several of the factors explaining this success are the same as those advocated in Australia:

Many educators acknowledge that over the past 30 years Alberta has quietly built the finest public education system in Canada. The curriculum has been revised, stressing core subjects (English, science, mathematics), school facilities and the training of teachers have been improved, clear achievement goals have been set and a rigorous province-wide testing program for grades 3 (aged 7-8), six (10-11), nine (13-14) and twelve (16-17) has been established to ensure they are met. (The Economist, 2006)

A large majority of parents in Alberta are satisfied with public schools whereas, in Canada as a whole, the proportion of students in private schools has risen by 20 per cent over the last decade. There are few private schools in Edmonton and some have been absorbed into the public system.

In the United States (which along with Australia and Canada are the only countries in the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) group where constitutional powers in relation to education do not lie with the national (federal) government) the situation is very much like Australia. Fewer than one percent of the approximately 15,000 school districts have the level of autonomy for schools that may be found in England or Victoria, but mapping of the kind undertaken in the current project in Australia would likely yield the same complexity, since the federal government has a strong role through its financial powers to make grants to the states and hence to school districts. This role has become even more powerful in recent years with the passing of the No Child Left Behind legislation.
It is apparent that schools and their principals are operating in a more complex environment for decision-making than their counterparts in England (where the national government has a powerful role) or in Edmonton (where the national government has no role). Without expressing a preference for one or the other, it is apparent that the environment for school autonomy in Australia would be more favourable or at least considerably simpler if fewer levels of government were involved.

**Implication**

The locus of decision-making should be simplified by reducing the number of levels of government that contribute to frameworks of curriculum, standards and accountabilities. Options may involve changes in constitutional arrangements or new agreements between the Australian Government, states and territories. One option is for a national framework and autonomy for schools, with states and territories becoming agencies of support for schools.

**Unanimous support for not adopting a one-size-fits-all approach to autonomy**

While principals expressed a preference for more autonomy in some matters, as explained elsewhere in the chapter, there was no call, either from principals or officers in education departments for the same approach to be adopted for all schools in every setting.

**Discussion**

All interviewees recognised that a high level of autonomy is simply not feasible for schools in remote locations. This was most evident in responses from Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory where it is exceedingly difficult to find teachers and in some instances principals who are prepared to work in isolated and/or highly disadvantaged settings. It is therefore understandable that regional or central staff in an education department should have the task of locating such people, either from within the state or territory or by national advertisement. Principals of schools in these settings do not expect to play any role other than to make known the kinds of staff that are needed and generally trust those at the regional or central level to secure the best people who may be willing to accept an appointment. In the case of homeland learning centres serving Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory, learning occurs in very remote settings, with Indigenous teaching assistants working with fly-in or drive-in teachers. These teachers are present for only part of each week or fortnight. Groups of homeland learning centres, up to ten, are supervised by a principal. The learning centres are also often remote from each other and dispersed over a large area. Distances between centres often exceed 200 km.

There are other circumstances where principals do not seek more autonomy in matters such as staffing, and these circumstances include what are normally considered highly favourable settings. In South Australia, for example, where principals make known their staffing requirements to those at the district level, some interviewees are content to leave the decision with the district director, and in this respect the requirements of the current Act are satisfied. To paraphrase one interviewee, why should we go to the trouble of setting up selection panels to recommend appointments after receiving a list of applicants if we are confident that the task can be done efficiently and effectively at the district level? However, to paraphrase another, it depends on the capacity of the district to carry out the task to the satisfaction of the principal. It seems that in this state and elsewhere there is unevenness across the system, both centrally and at the level of the region or district. In the case study of a large urban secondary school in South Australia, the principal expressed interest in being involved in staffing decisions through the ‘school choice’ merit-based selection programme available to disadvantaged schools.

The consultant formed the view that principals in successful well-established schools, who had built strong and positive working relationships with system personnel, are normally able to secure their preferred staffing profile as their relationships with system personnel give them high levels of flexibility.
Despite the level of trust that is evident in most states and territories, the fact remains that more authority is sought in relation to staff. This was more frequently mentioned than any other area of decision-making, whether it is opportunity for involvement or at least approval of staff who meet the educational needs and priorities of the school, or opportunity to release staff who are unable to meet expectations (accepting the need for due process).

There is a related issue that to a large extent goes beyond the terms of reference for the current project and this is concerned with the quality of the teaching force. Any objective reading of the statements made by many participants is that the quality is very uneven. This is a serious matter given that quality of teaching is generally accepted as the most important factor in determining levels of achievement of students (see review of research and references to intellectual capital in Chapter 2). Two international comparisons are noteworthy. One relates to improvements in student outcomes in Alberta, Canada, cited in the preceding section. Improvement in the training of teachers is a significant factor. The other relates to Finland. As cited in Chapter 2 (based on Harris, 2006), one of several factors accounting for the success of that country in PISA is the quality of its teachers.

Finnish teachers are highly valued and well-paid professionals who are expected to have high levels of pedagogical expertise and flexibility within a national curriculum framework in order to achieve success with students who learn in heterogeneous groups. Applications to tertiary education studies are so high that just 10-12 percent of applicants are accepted in teacher education programmes. Teacher education is one of the top three preferences for those seeking entry to universities. More autonomy for schools in respect to selection of staff may not be needed if the quality of teaching as manifested in the performance of beginning teachers and sustained through continuing professional development is as uniformly high as it appears to be in Finland, and if central, regional and district services operated effectively to ensure that the needs and priorities of schools in regard to teachers and other professional staff were addressed to the satisfaction of principals. There are implications for Australia in regard to the esteem in which the profession is held, the quality of teacher education and the effectiveness of service provided by staff in systems of education, either government or non-government.

**Implication**

The ‘default position’ should allow for local, district, and regional differences in respect to level of autonomy, recognising that there are particular circumstances where decentralisation and autonomy are not feasible or are inefficient. It is acknowledged that some states and territories have adopted such a position.

**Stress, autonomy and the support of principals**

There is little or no evidence in the current project to suggest that higher levels of autonomy for schools and their principals have led or are likely to lead directly to higher levels of stress. The issue was addressed directly in meetings of executives of principals’ associations and in focus groups and there is near unanimity that the dysfunctional aspects of the principal’s role are directly related to the complexity of schooling, higher expectations for what should be accomplished by schools, and inadequate support.

**Discussion**

Schooling in Australia is a far more complex endeavour than in the past and expectations for what should be accomplished are higher than ever. If levels of support for teachers and their leaders are lower than they ought to be, these factors would constitute a ‘triple whammy’ that must be addressed if a high quality of schooling is to be secured and sustained. Higher levels of autonomy may assist in some respects but the resolution lies to a large extent outside the issue of autonomy.
Like many other countries, schooling is more complex for a range of reasons, including greater heterogeneity in the population that is served by schools; the increase in the number of single parent families or families where both parents are working; the rise in alcohol and drug abuse and dependency; the breakdown in traditional agencies of support such as the church; the revolution in information and communication technology; the demands of globalisation and associated rapid and continuous re-structuring of the economy; a breakdown in trust and respect for public institutions, including schools; and more. A comparison with conditions that prevailed until the last quarter of the 20th century will make it abundantly clear just how difficult the task of leading a school is. At the same time, and probably as a result of the aforementioned, expectations for what schools should achieve have risen, not only in the number of areas of learning to be addressed but also in terms of what each student should be able to accomplish. While it has to some extent been a cliché for decades, the school is expected to provide the first response in the remedy of many of the ills of society. Two aspects are unavoidable. One is the more-or-less continuous change in curriculum and pedagogy, largely deriving from the first set of factors identified above. The other is the focus on the student to the point that the concept of ‘personalising learning’ is expected and themes such as ‘Students at the Centre’ (Tasmania) are evident in most settings. Some principals felt there was inconsistency between a focus on personalising learning and standardised approaches to testing at Years 3, 5, 7 and 9.

Reports and surveys sponsored by principals’ associations (WASSEA, 2007) or, in the case of Victoria, jointly sponsored by the principals’ association and the former Department of Education and Training, confirm the general pattern described above (The Privilege and the Price, Department of Education and Training, 2004). A report of WASSEA drew attention to members’ concerns:

The pressures on schools from governments, the Department, unions, media, the community and sociological and technological change have had the consequence of great work intensification in relation to our responsibilities and accountability. The outcomes of this work intensification have been negative and harmful for the profession and well-being of school leaders (WASSEA, 2007, p. 1).

These concerns are consistent with the observation by Fullan in What’s Worth Fighting for in the Principalship cited in Chapter 3: ‘the principalship is being shackled at the very time the principal is expected to be the lead change agent’ (Fullan, 2007).

The declining number of applications for the principalship is a phenomenon in most parts of Australia and comparable countries, including England and the United States. It was identified as an issue in Chapter 3. Of particular concern in the current project was the extent to which this may be associated with higher levels of autonomy for schools and their principals. No participant in the discussions summarised in Chapters 5 to 14 referred to such an association. A further review of literature on the matter confirmed the finding. Robyn Collins (2006) summarised a range of studies, including a survey of participants in the Principals’ Leadership Summit held in Washington DC in 2000 who were asked ‘What are the major challenges that discourage a person from pursuing the principalship as a career goal?’ The responses were consistent with the factors set out in the preceding paragraph: the changing demands of the job (increased accountability, responsibility for raising students to high standards with inadequate support, legal and special education issues) salary, time, lack of parent and community support, negativity of the media and the public towards schools, and lack of respect (Collins, R. 2006, p. 17).

The issues discussed above constitute two parts of the ‘triple whammy’, which includes increasing complexity in and higher expectations for schools, together with low levels of support for school leaders. They affect government and non-government schools. The third part is the perceived inadequate support for teachers and their leaders as they attempt to deal with greater complexity and higher expectations. What follows is not intended to denigrate the efforts of those at the central, regional and district levels, where there was ample evidence in the current
project that untiring effort has been devoted to the cause, although there are exceptions such as
the uneven support that some interviewees reported in the matter of securing staff that match
school needs and priorities.

The level of autonomy in the case study of an independent Anglican school reported in Chapter
14 is indicative of the level that would accrue to government school counterparts in most states
and territories if levels of autonomy were to be increased. Such autonomy accepts that there is
merit in a network of schools operating as a system. Greater efficiencies can be achieved and
there is coherence in the values to be honoured in each school.

The consultant formed the view in the course of the project that principals of independent or
other non-government schools have a high level of sympathy for their counterparts in
government schools in two important respects. The first is the lack of autonomy on staffing
matters. They are constrained in a critical aspect of school operations yet are held accountable
for educational outcomes at their schools. The second is the lack of administrative or
management support for principals in government schools compared to their counterparts in
many if not most medium to larger schools in the non-government sector.

In general, it is apparent that leaders in government and to some extent systemic Catholic
schools lack the internal support that is evident in large independent schools. This refers to
personnel, financial, facilities, and marketing support and the overall levels of income from fees,
grants, donations and other support that are available to independent schools. This observation
is not presented as an argument that these levels of support should not be available to leaders
of large independent schools. To the contrary, this support seems appropriate. The chief
implication is that resources and their distribution in state and territory systems of government
schools and in systemic Catholic schools should be of the same order. These systems
endeavour to provide such support but the evidence in the current project is that it is uneven
and generally insufficient.

Greater support was proposed in response to the issues identified by WASSEA cited above.
The solution, according to the WASSEA report, is enactment of a clause in the Enterprise
Bargaining Agreement in relation to workload duties (‘no school administrator shall be required
to perform an unreasonable or excessive workload during the school year’), a focus on health
and well-being, appointment of an executive team, personal assistant, a purchasing officer in
every school, access to support and coaching independent of line management, rationalisation
of demands for compliance, and a process for accessing system support when required

Fullan makes recommendations along the lines suggested here in What’s Worth Fighting for in
the Principalship. He recommends that ‘more resources be allocated so that most principals
have “business managers”, but they will have to know how to use them which some of them
don’t’ (Fullan, 2007).

Some school systems are making good progress in creating networks or clusters of schools
wherein knowledge can be shared, problems of common concern can be addressed and
resources can be shared. However, there is as yet no significant change in organisational or
leadership arrangements in Australia such as the creation of federations of schools or the
outsourcing of support of the kind that is gathering momentum in England. Similarly, new
concepts of ‘system leadership’, as described in Chapter 3, have not been developed to any
noteworthy extent in Australia. Federations can create economies of scale that enable the same
kinds of expertise as currently available in large independent schools to be made available to
networks or clusters of state schools (see Caldwell and Spinks, 2008, pp. 65-69 for an
illustration of how this has been accomplished in a federation of two state schools in London).

Also relevant is the extent to which government schools, in particular, are drawing on the widest
range of possible support from their communities. Many may still be handicapped by the view
that government or state schools should be exclusively funded, built, owned, operated and
supported from the public purse or a public agency. The issue is the strength of the social capital of schools, as canvassed in Chapter 2 (based on research reported in Caldwell, 2006 and Caldwell and Spinks, 2008). Social capital in a general sense is very strong in high performing countries such as Finland. The support of a wide range of community organisations, including cash and in-kind support from the corporate sector, has been dramatically increased in England in recent years, especially for secondary schools. Philanthropic support on the scale offered to public schools in several countries, especially the United States, by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundations, has attracted considerable attention. The recently-announced Clinton Global Initiative (CGI) led by former President Bill Clinton, is likely to give this kind of support greater acceptance across the political spectrum. Nothing on this scale has emerged in Australia but there are promising developments in philanthropy and school-business partnerships. For example, the Australian Business and Community Network (ABCN) was formed in 2004 by senior business leaders, usually at the CEO level, who personally participate in the programmes and partnerships. The ABCN decided to initially work in the area of education to improve opportunities for disadvantaged students and schools, through mentoring, partnering and support programmes. By late 2006, 19 companies were working with 26 schools from disadvantaged areas in South West Sydney, involving over 5000 students and 50 teachers and over 400 company volunteers. The programme has been expanded to Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia (this information provided to the project consultant by ABCN).

Implication 1

Funding arrangements for government and systemic Catholic schools should ensure that principals have the same levels of leadership and management support as currently provided for principals in independent schools.

Implication 2

Compliance and other administrative work expected of schools and their principals should be dramatically reduced.

Autonomy and governance

The previous discussion on the links between schools and the wider community in the broader context of the social capital of schools is one element in findings related to the governance of schools. While government schools in the states and territories have a connection with and draw on the support of bodies such as parents and friends associations and the like, there are few instances where there are governing bodies such as school councils or school boards, with significant authority and responsibility of the kind exercised by counterparts in independent schools and to a lesser degree, systemic Catholic schools. Most independent schools have adopted models of governance that assign the powers of a board of directors to such bodies. School boards and school councils with significant powers are defined in legislation in the ACT and Victoria, respectively. While the traditional parents and friends association exists for most government schools across the country, these are largely advisory and usually assist in raising funds for the school. They are, of course, an important aspect of the social capital of the school. Some states have experimented with more powerful school councils in recent years and have given schools a choice of having such a body in addition to the parents and friends association, but there is little evidence that these have proved especially beneficial and, in some instances, the impression was given that they may be a burden – just one other area of activity for the principal to deal with in a context where there is little interest in the community. Queensland is an interesting example of a system where legislation allowed schools the choice in the matter of school councils, but only a minority took up the option, and legislation has been enacted to allow such organisations to be disestablished.
Discussion

Experience in Australia contrasts with that in England where every government or state school now has a governing body with significant powers to make policy and approve priorities, plans and budgets for the school. Such bodies are part and parcel of school autonomy in that country. Before the passing of the 1988 Education Reform Act that triggered autonomy on its current scale, these bodies were relatively powerless, having been part of the scene for decades or even centuries. The powers of such bodies have increased even more significantly in the case of academies and trust schools, although these still constitute a small minority of secondary schools in the country. Boards of trustees with significant authority and responsibility were established in New Zealand when self-management was introduced in the late 1980s.

Of central concern is the extent to which too much is demanded of principals and other school leaders in the current context of school education and whether there would be significant benefits in a renewed effort to create new models of governance for state or public schools throughout the country. As with the concept of autonomy itself, this would not mean a one-size-fits-all approach, since there are circumstances where establishing a governing body for each and every school is difficult if not impossible, as is the case for small or remote schools or some schools in highly disadvantaged settings. However, there is much to learn from experience in other settings. In England, for example, good progress has been made with the creation of federations of schools wherein each school remains a discrete entity with its own principal but a governing body and a Chief Executive Officer, who is normally a highly experienced and successful principal (an example of the new concept of ‘system leadership’ described in Chapter 3), provides direction and support for all schools in the federation. There has been good progress in recent years in creating networks of schools in systems of government schools in Australia but there have been few instances of serious attempts to create federations of the kind that are making their appearance in significant numbers in England. A promising development is the recent increase in the engagement of the corporate and philanthropic sector in public education, as illustrated in the preceding section by the work of the Australian Business and Community Network (ABCN). In England, nearly 90 percent of the country’s 3,100 secondary schools now have a partnership of one kind or another with a business, broadly defined, in either public or private sectors. In both instances, especially in England, there has been a remarkable change in culture in recent years. One might be more optimistic than in the past that there might be greater involvement of the profit and non-profit sectors in the governance of schools in the years ahead.

An important and fundamental issue is how governance is conceived. For many observers, the issue is largely concerned with roles and responsibilities, and what are the respective roles of board and principal. This issue is important and must be resolved so that arrangements work well in every setting. Of greater importance, however, is the over-arching purpose of governance and a new view has emerged from the work of the project consultant over the last three years, as described in Chapter 2. It was proposed that governance is the process through which the school builds its intellectual, social, financial and spiritual capital and aligns them to achieve its goals. This is what the most effective governing bodies of successful autonomous schools are doing or endeavouring to do in places like England, where much of the consultant’s work has been done in recent years, and in independent schools and a relatively small number of government schools in Australia. There are important implications for the selection and ongoing professional development of principals and members of governing bodies. The most important matters for development are, of course, related to intellectual capital and a focus on learning and teaching, and it is to this issue that the discussion of findings now turns.

Implication 1

Governance arrangements for government and systemic Catholic schools should be strengthened in light of increasing complexity and higher expectations, acknowledging that successful schools are able to build strength and secure alignment through good governance of four forms of capital: intellectual, social, financial and spiritual (defined broadly).
Implication 2

Extensive professional development on governance should be available for principals and governing bodies.

Implication 3

New governance arrangements should be established to allow federations of schools to be established and that greater creativity should be encouraged in the development of new kinds of schools that will have higher levels of autonomy and different governance arrangements in settings where these are likely to prove more efficient and effective.

Impact of autonomy on learning outcomes

Those participating in interviews and focus groups were generally able to describe the links between autonomy and student outcomes in language that was consistent with the research evidence summarised in Chapter 2. The focus was on responding to the particular mix of needs, interests, aptitudes and achievements of students in the local setting. Particular attention was given to getting the ‘right mix’ of staff and to building capacity for professional development. As noted elsewhere, getting the ‘right mix’ did not necessarily extend to a requirement, expectation or preference for the school setting up a selection process, although it was evident that some would prefer to do this. There was confidence in most settings in central, regional or district staff being able to ‘deliver’, but there was also acknowledgement of the unevenness of effort by such staff to provide what was needed. There was no evidence in the course of the current project that schools are or would prefer to use autonomy to select students in a way that would lead to improved learning outcomes because low achieving students or those from low socio-economic settings would be excluded. There was also no evidence in the current study that principals sought to use their autonomy to exclude ‘troublesome students’, although anecdotal and media reports indicate that this is sometimes the case. The important issue seemed to be that schools had the level of service and support to deal with these situations.

The view was expressed in several interviews that some of the very best schools to be found in any nation may be found in Australia, in both government and non-government sectors. The indicators used to identify these schools are the level of innovation and student outcomes, including the extent of improvement in challenging circumstances. In some instances, it seems that this has been achieved under principals who are able to fully take up the level of autonomy available to them or, in some instances, ‘work the system’ to their school’s advantage. The view was expressed in one interview with experienced principals that in coming years there may be a shortfall in innovation and entrepreneurship, as many current and potential principals retire. This may partly account for unwillingness in some systems to extend current levels of autonomy, but this unwillingness should be replaced with additional autonomy, accompanying levels of responsibility and accountability, mentor support from high calibre colleagues and continuous professional learning.

Discussion

The review of research on the links between autonomy and learning outcomes yielded mixed findings. After many years of inconclusive results there seems to be a consensus that a positive relationship is likely when authority and responsibility are deployed in strategies that directly impact on what occurs in the classroom and/or in support of the learner. Securing the ‘right mix’ of staff, ensuring that teachers and other professionals are at the forefront of knowledge and skill, adapting the curriculum and pedagogy to the local setting, distributing leadership throughout the school, strengthening and aligning through good governance the various forms of capital available to the school, personalising approaches to learning and assessment of learning, are examples of how local decision-making through autonomy can secure improved outcomes for students. This summarises an emerging consensus on the topic as set out in
Chapter 3. An increasing volume of research in Australia is confirming the link (see for example, Silins and Mulford, 2004 cited in Chapter 2). A special issue of the *Australian Journal of Education* (AJE, 2007) in November 2007 is devoted to educational leadership and school renewal and most contributions from Australian and international authors describe a range of strategies by school leaders that lead directly or indirectly to improvement. The Australian contributions are drawn from several states (New South Wales, Queensland, Tasmania and Victoria) and international research is reported from England, New Zealand and Wales. There is no sense that a one-size-fits-all approach to autonomy is assumed or advocated but a relatively high level of leader autonomy is apparently a *sine qua non*, or essential condition, for success.

Among the findings from international research reported in Chapter 2 was the study of Maslowski, Scheerens and Luyten (2007) based at the University of Twente in The Netherlands that re-analysed data from PISA 2000. While it found a positive relationship between autonomy on personnel matters and reading literacy, the relationship disappeared when student composition was controlled in the analysis. The implication was that schools in some countries were using their autonomy to control the student intake to give preference to those with higher socio-economic backgrounds or higher prior levels of achievements. Some reservations were expressed about the study but its findings warrant scrutiny in the current project. As noted above, there was no evidence that school and principals were using their autonomy to exclude students or in other ways change the composition of the student body. Students with social and/or behavioural difficulties are supported through a range of strategies, either set up by the school because they had the autonomy to do so, or because the system had policies and procedures to provide support or to arrange suspension or exclusion, but such policies and procedures were not a consequence of autonomy. It is important to recall that the University of Twente study found no relationship between other forms of autonomy (curriculum, financial, student) and reading literacy.

The issues of autonomy in personnel matters and student composition are complex and further discussion in the Australian setting is warranted. In most large cities, some schools are located in high socio-economic communities and/or develop a reputation for excellence. They operate under a relatively recent policy that allows students to attend a school other than their neighbourhood school if there is space available. Some parents go to considerable lengths to purchase a home in the ‘catchment area’ of the school they prefer. There is no evidence in the current study or from any reliable source that any government school is excluding students who have the right to attend the school because they live in its ‘catchment area’. Where there is excess space, schools may be in a position to select students on the basis of prior achievement, but this is an artefact of the ‘de-zoning’ policy in every state and territory that derives from acceptance of parental choice rather than a consequence of autonomy. It should be noted that there is now legislation in England that allows local authorities to conduct a ballot when the number of applications from outside the ‘catchment area’ exceeds the number of excess places available in schools. Its first application in Brighton, where some schools are perceived more favourably than others, drew much comment in the media and further debate about the issue. However the balance of opinion, confirmed in an independent review, was that this was a fair way to tackle the issue (Lipsett, 2007).

There is another issue about the links between autonomy and student outcomes for schools located in high socio-economic communities that was not acknowledged in the University of Twente study but is evident in the Australian and comparable national settings. It is that experienced and highly-paid teachers tend to prefer and move to schools in higher socio-economic settings. To the extent that there is a relationship between experience and skill, this gives schools in such communities an advantage in teaching talent (intellectual capital) that is not available to schools in lower socio-economic settings. If schools have a capacity to receive applications and select their staff, as they do in systems where there is a high level of autonomy in personnel management, as in Victoria or in independent schools, then equity in terms of teaching talent can only be secured through special incentive arrangements and the funding mechanisms associated with autonomy.
Implication 1

Preparation and professional development programmes for the support of higher levels of autonomy should focus on factors, which evidence shows increase the links between autonomy and learning outcomes.

Implication 2

Strengthened autonomy should not permit schools to significantly change the profile of their student population by refusing admission to students in their ‘catchment areas’.

Autonomy and needs-based funding of schools

Decentralisation to the school level of some of the state or territory budget for allocation according to local priorities has been a feature of measures to increase the autonomy of schools for several decades, in Australia and elsewhere. The general pattern in this country has been to steadily increase the proportion that is decentralised and to remove some of the restrictions on how funds are allocated, providing the local decision is consistent with system-wide policies and is legal. Even where there has been some re-centralisation of responsibility and authority on other matters, these trends have been more-or-less consistent, with major advances on some instances, especially in Victoria from the early 1990s, to the point that about 94 percent of the State’s recurrent budget for schools is now available for local decision-making, within system-wide guidelines. The major component in the case of Victoria is, of course, the staffing element and schools do not receive the amount in cash but as a credit in an overall ‘resource package’. In every other state and territory, the major part of the non-staff budget is available to the school.

While principals who participated in the current project were generally supportive of providing the schools with a ‘global budget’ or ‘resource package’, a number of issues were identified, including the extent to which the staffing element should be included, personnel support to manage the budget, restrictions on the use of funds, and opportunities to supplement funds from the public purse with funds raised locally or from other sources. Some areas were problematic, for example, whether the cost of maintenance ought to be included in the package.

Discussion

This issue did not generate as much comment as might be expected. All stakeholders saw merit in decentralising funds to schools and there was general agreement on the issues identified above. In an international context, it should be noted again that it is rare for a system of public education to decentralise the staffing component, either in cash or as a credit. The Netherlands (100 percent), Victoria (94 percent) and England (90 percent) appear to lead the way, with the minority of systems in Canada and United States that afford schools a high level of autonomy generally decentralising around 80 to 85 percent.

There are three particular issues to be addressed if there is to be a further strengthening of autonomy in this area. These were canvassed in Chapter 3. They are explored further at this point in light of the findings in the current project. The first is the determination of a mechanism to allocate funds from the centre to the school. There is general agreement among international commentators (see, for example, Levačić and Downes, 2004) that Victoria has developed one of the best methodologies for needs-based funding. A detailed account of the approach is given by Caldwell and Spinks (2008). Its chief features include a core student allocation and an equity allocation. The core student allocation includes a per student amount according to stage of schooling, an enrolment linked base, allowances for small schools, and a rural school adjustment factor. Equity allocations reflect a range of factors that are known to be related to student achievement, including student family occupation, different levels of student disability, English as a Second Language, mobility, and special allocations to reflect need in the middle and secondary years. This funding mechanism has been under continuous development for
more than 12 years. Many systems of Catholic schools have followed a similar approach for several decades based on the pioneering work of Farish and Ross. Similar methodology has been followed over the same period in the pioneering Edmonton Public School District in Alberta, Canada (see Levačić and Ross, 1999 for a detailed account of approaches in several countries). A feature of the approach is its high level of transparency. Systems that use it normally publish a detailed account of the criteria for allocating funds to schools and in some instances publish the actual allocations on a school-by-school basis. The Seattle Public School District (USA) releases detailed allocations for each school on its website (www.seattleschools.org/area/finance/budget/bluebook/08/index.htm). This is one of the reasons why an international study concluded that the approach minimises opportunities for corruption in the use of public funds (Levačić and Downes, 2004).

The approach in Victoria is worthy of closer examination if autonomy is to be strengthened in this area in other states and territories. There was some reluctance to do this a decade ago because the approach was seen as one of the radical initiatives of the Kennett Liberal Government that was perceived as a ‘market’ approach to public schooling. Debate on its merits was often presented in political and ideological terms. Much of the steam was taken out of the debate when the approach was accepted and, indeed, extended by the Bracks Labor Government. Regular review of the mechanism, with a strong and transparent evidence base, has increased the level of acceptance in Victoria, and there is general satisfaction among stakeholders even though there are ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ when adjustments are made from time to time.

A second issue is how, once receiving its ‘resource package’, a school chooses to allocate funds. It is beyond the scope of the current project to describe how this is best done. It is sufficient to note that many schools across the country are particularly adept in the process of formulating goals, identifying needs, setting priorities, allocating funds according to priorities, implementing related initiatives in curriculum and pedagogy, and monitoring the outcomes, all within a multi-year framework for school improvement. The process is becoming more student-focused, which adds complexity but increases the likelihood of impact on learning outcomes (see Caldwell and Spinks, 2008 for a detailed explanation and illustration of approaches to student-focused planning and budgeting). If done well, this is educational leadership at its best, with extensive opportunity for distributing leadership throughout the school in the preparation of plans and budgets. There is a management component, including accounting and control, which calls for skilful support for the principal and other leaders. It is the absence of such support that was mentioned on several occasions in the course of the current project. This matter has been taken up elsewhere in Chapter 15 but it is worth noting again that there is a disparity between levels of support in government and systemic Catholic schools on the one hand and large independent schools on the other. It is also worth noting the anecdotal comments made to the consultant during the current project and over recent years that some schools did not anticipate the level of skill that was required to manage a complex budget and chose to upgrade or re-classify existing secretarial staff who had provided sterling support in an earlier era but who were not well prepared for the new role.

A third issue is the extent to which need-based funding mechanisms and internal processes for resource allocation have an impact on learning outcomes. The research by Masłowski, Scheerens and Luyten (2007) that showed no relationship between school autonomy in resource allocation and reading literacy was cited in Chapter 3 and referred to in several placed in other sections of Chapter 15. This was large-scale research involving thousands of schools in 25 countries and there is little likelihood that autonomy in resource allocation of the kind described here would have an impact on the findings. It is fair to conclude on the basis of other studies reported in Chapter 2 that, when resources are allocated through a process such as that described above, the links between autonomy and learning can be readily mapped. The consensus of view is that the links will be strong when resources are focused on learning and teaching and building the capacity of staff.
A key finding of Maslowski, Scheerens and Luyten is taken up again at this point, namely, that the positive relationship between autonomy in personnel management and reading literacy disappears if student composition is controlled in the analysis of data. It was noted earlier in Chapter 15 that there was no evidence in the current project that schools were using their autonomy to select students to give the school a more favourable profile on the basis of student achievement. A related issue, not addressed in the University of Twente study, is whether mechanisms for needs-based funding permit schools to change their profiles in other ways that may give some schools a particular advantage over others, thereby creating inequity in a system of public education. One other way is the manner in which staff are allocated to schools and accounted for in the staffing component of the system’s budget. It has been noted elsewhere that experienced teachers tend to prefer appointments in schools in high socio-economic communities. To the extent that experience is related to level of skill, this means that schools in favourable socio-economic settings are likely to have a higher proportion of skilful experienced teachers than those in highly disadvantaged or less preferred settings. There is no mechanism under centralised approaches relating to allocating staff to prevent this situation unless there are powerful incentives to attract teachers to the latter. Where the staffing component is decentralised to schools, as it is in Victoria, there is similarly no mechanism to prevent the situation when the budgets of schools are charged the average salary of teachers, that is, there is no additional charge to the school when it selects or receives a highly skilled, highly paid teacher, and the same charge is made to the budget of a school that receives a teacher of lesser skill on a lower salary. The issue came to light in the early years of the pioneering system in school autonomy in Edmonton which adopted what became known as an ‘averages-in and average-out’ approach. The situation changes in dramatic fashion if an ‘averages-in and actuals-out’ approach is adopted, because schools are funded on the basis of average salaries and are charged actual salaries. It is beyond the scope of the current project to develop the methodology and the approach is self-evidently contentious. It should be noted, however, that it was indeed contentious when proposed for England several years ago, but is now accepted as part of the culture of autonomy that may lead to a better distribution of intellectual capital among schools in different socio-economic circumstances.

**Implication 1**

There should be stronger autonomy for schools in how they deploy financial resources that flow to the school as a result of increased decentralisation of public funds.

**Implication 2**

The approach to student-focused needs-based funding in Victoria should be adopted as a template for adaptation in other settings.

**Implication 3**

The staffing component of school-based budgets should reflect actual salaries rather than average salaries when provision for staff is included in funding for increased autonomy.

**Differences among principals in interest and expertise in autonomy**

The extent to which autonomy was taken up or practised differed as much among principals as among the various jurisdictions, that is, principals differed in their willingness or capacity to take up the autonomy that was available to them to the point that differences within a jurisdiction appeared at times to be as great as differences across jurisdictions.

**Discussion**

What is described here may be found in the practice of any policy in any domain except where strict compliance is demanded. However, in the context of the current project, it is worthy of particular comment. In some instances it may be due to the principal’s assessment of the
context, including the work environment, as indicated by the willingness of the staff and the wider community to take up the degree of autonomy that is available to the school. There may be resistance that derives from the stance of unions that have traditionally resisted the strengthening of school autonomy. The principal may also have assessed the stage of organisational development in the school and determined that it may take some time to build a capacity for local decision-making. More often, however, it appeared to the consultant that the knowledge and skills to fully exercise the level of autonomy that was available varied widely as did a willingness to lead or take risks.

There are implications for the preparation and professional development of current and aspiring leaders and for building support around the principal of the kind described elsewhere in this chapter and that is more widely provided for principals of independent schools. Professional development should focus to a large extent on areas of knowledge and skill around which there is consensus on how to make the link between autonomy and learning outcomes. While management support is critical, principals must have a capacity to understand how a budget is assembled, administered and accounted, even though their primary concern is educational leadership. The development of skills in this area was identified as a priority on a number of occasions in the course of the project. It is important to acknowledge, however, that the majority of informants were executives in principals’ associations and other relatively experienced principals who participated in focus groups.

*Implication 1*

Strengthened autonomy should allow for differences among principals in respect to their readiness to take up the autonomy available to them and their schools. Preparation and professional development programmes should assist all principals and potential principals build capacities that will enable them to operate successfully within a new framework of autonomy.

*Implication 2*

A stronger culture of service and support should be established in district, regional and central offices in systems of education, for this is a requirement if autonomy is to be strengthened and, indeed, become the ‘default position’ in the governance of public education. Related preparation and professional development is as important for personnel working at these levels as it is for schools.

**Effective models of autonomy**

An objective of the project was to outline effective models of autonomy that reflected the findings, drawing on research on the links between autonomy and student outcomes, and what was found in the study of policy and practice in jurisdictions around the country. The findings of this report suggest that there are several issues that are relevant when considering ways to frame principal autonomy in Australian schools. A range of approaches is possible within the framework of implications set out in the preceding pages.

*Elements of an effective model of autonomy*

Taking into account the above issues and the evidence from research and the case study investigations in this report an effective model for the practice of principal autonomy should comprise the following considerations:

- **Flexibility:**
  - School settings are varied, and guidelines or regulations setting parameters for principal autonomy should allow flexibility in autonomy practices to meet individual school and student needs.
  - A ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach within a jurisdiction or within a school system is unlikely to be successful.
Principal responsibilities include both administrative management and educational leadership activities. The scope of a principal for autonomous action may vary between these two areas of activity.

- **Training:**
  - The unique role of principal requires that aspirants to the position receive appropriate and adequate pre-service training.
  - This may include formal training in financial management, human resource management, and pedagogical leadership.
  - It may also include, where possible, practical pre-service experience of the role, for example through working alongside experienced principals.

- **On-going Support:**
  - Following initial training, appropriate and adequate on-going support must be available to all practicing principals. This could include:
    - Periodic training in all aspects of the principalship, including financial management and educational leadership.
    - In-service support as required, including for example, mentoring from experienced principals.

- **Transparency and Accountability:**
  - All Australian schools receive some public funding. As such, absolute and unaccountable independence is not possible. Autonomy must operate with reference to transparent legal and procedural norms.
  - There must be clear and mutually accepted methods for communication and accountability between schools/principals and funding providers.

Principal autonomy will be most successful where the principal has the full support of the school community, including the parent body and the school board or council. Effective communication between all groups is important in this regard.

Principal autonomy should be framed in individual school contexts with the explicit aim of furthering student learning and development.
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