

**A Country Report:  
Australia's Experience in Self-Managing Schools:  
A Case-Study Based on Experience in a Self-Governing School for  
Nearly Fifty Years**

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**Introduction to the paper**

First I should like to thank the Office of the National Education Commission for inviting me to present a country report for Australia on School-Based Management at this prestigious International Forum in this wonderful Kingdom of Thailand. I also thank Robert Noakes, Education Counsellor in the Australian Education Institute Office of the Australian Embassy in Bangkok, for his encouragement in this exercise.

School-Based Management is a topic which has been dear to my heart over nearly fifty years of involvement in such schools and it is my privilege today to share with you some information about the development of governance of schools in the Australian education system and a brief case study to highlight the advantages and risks of school-based management. I am also very involved these days in international ventures and therefore deem it a privilege to interact with so many of my international colleagues who are here to help in the building of bridges of friendship and co-operation.

**Overview - Schools in Australia – A status report on the scope and governance of the Australian education system.**

The population of Australia is approaching 20 million. In 2001 there were 19,413 million people in Australia. The total population of fulltime school children in Australia in 2001 was 3.268 million rising since the previous year at a rate of 0.6 per cent. There were 9,596 schools in Australia in 2001 employing 221,927 fulltime teachers.

The Constitution of Australia allocates responsibility for school education to six state and two territory governments, all of whom provide and manage government schools, or 'public schools' which operate under the direct responsibility of the relevant state or territory minister. These governments also support non-government schools, or 'private schools' which are established and operated under conditions determined by state or territory government registration authorities, and are also given support, reflecting the dual system of state and non-state schools in Australia.

The government school sector is financed through tax payers and provides secular education. The non-government school sector is financed partially by the government and mainly through its fee-paying clients. Most non-government schools have some religious affiliation – 63.6 percent of non-government school students in 2001 were enrolled in Catholic operated schools for example, and very few are truly independent of both religious affiliation and state affiliation.

Management practices vary widely between the two major groupings – the government and non-government schools – and vary widely within the non-government school sector which encompasses schools with religious affiliations in general, the Catholic system in particular and those which are independent of both state and religion.

The *National Report on Schooling in Australia 2001* – published by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA, 2001) defines the relationship between government and schools in Australia as follows:

Within each state and territory ministers, departments, statutory authorities and individual schools (particularly the non-government schools) variously determine policies and priorities in such matters as curriculum, course accreditation, student assessment and certification, resource allocation and utilization, and teacher employment and professional development.

The Commonwealth determines policies and programmes for schools<sup>i</sup> and provides funding to both government and non-government school authorities to support agreed priorities and strategies. The overall result is that government schools receive the majority of their government funding from state and territory governments and less from the Commonwealth directly, while non-government schools receive the majority of their government funding, such as it is, from the Commonwealth directly, and less from the relevant state or territory.

In Australia in 2003, sixty-eight percent of school children are enrolled in government schools and thirty-two percent are enrolled in non-government schools. Of the 9,596 schools in Australia in 2001, there were 6,942 (72.3 percent) government schools and 2,654 non-government schools of which 1,697 (64 percent) were part of the Catholic education system and 957 (36 percent) were other religious or independent bodies. In secondary schools in Australia in 2002, sixty-three percent were government schools and thirty-seven percent were non-government.

The fee-paying parents of non-government school children provide a saving in public expenditure of \$2.7 billion annually.

The policies and programmes for schools determined at the national level – the *'National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century'* – the present national educational policy settings – derived from the *Adelaide Declaration* of 1999 establish a foundation for collaborative action to improve the quality of schooling nationally. The goals provide broad directions to help schools and education authorities to

“develop in Australia’s students the knowledge, understanding, skills and values they need for a productive and rewarding life in an educated, just and open society”

noting that high quality schooling is central to achieving this vision. The goals entail, among other things,

“a commitment to collaborate in setting explicit and defensible standards that will guide improvements in student achievement, and by which the

effectiveness, efficiency and equity of schooling can be measured and evaluated.”  
(Adelaide Declaration, 1999)

Another significant goal, particularly in the context of this conference – is the commitment as a national goal to

“collaboration for the purpose of further strengthening schools as learning communities where teachers, students and their families work in partnership with business, industry and the wider community”

something which could only be achieved, surely, through devolution from the centralist management position and the enhancement of school-based management practices.

Under the umbrella of these agreed national goals the states and territories themselves establish and operate their own policy settings in respect of the governance of all the schools existing in their state or territory. In New South Wales for example the State Department of Education and Training, under the authority of its Minister for Education, periodically determines strategic directives in respect of the management of its government schools. The current policy settings for New South Wales are established in the document ‘*NSW Public Schools: Strategic Directions 2002 – 2004*’ (NSW DET, 2002) These policy settings focus on the usual themes of commitment, success for students, outstanding teaching, quality learning environments and educational leadership and management. Directives of note include aims to ‘assist school principals and executive staff to lead and manage schools effectively; to engage parents, care givers and the community in decision-making processes; to enhance partnership with other government agencies, universities, industry and community organizations.’

Clearly the current national and state policy settings in Australia reflect the almost universal international concern that the education product being delivered by government sector school systems does not meet the desired outcomes and emphasis is therefore on improvement and reform to unlock the latent potential evident in these schools.

About thirty years ago in Australia, as elsewhere, an awareness began to emerge that the public education system was generating mediocrity in many of its outcomes (Karmel Report, 1973) and I myself spoke publicly many times about this perception of mediocrity (Morgan, 1973(a), 1973(b)) The major cause was observed by me and others to be its operation and management as a government monopoly devoid of competition and parental choice and the will to innovate; its detachment from the communities which the schools purported to serve, and the system’s inefficient, unproductive and defensive nature was observed by many to be typical of centralised, cumbersome bureaucracies. - And you may wish to consider whether or not some of the procedures for example in granting a licence for new private schools to operate in Thailand fit the model of centralised, cumbersome bureaucracies. - It was further observed that such monopolies work to maximise the benefits to the producers rather than the customers, (Gannicott, 1997) and that political ideology, rather than the guidance of professional educators, was determining policy.

But how did this situation come about? Surely it was never the intention of government policy makers and education practitioners in Australia and elsewhere to deliver a system which would, by the close of the twentieth-century, be unable to modify its management practices and to have the ability to change in concert with broader social, technological and economic change, and instead be delivering such an unfulfilling and

mediocre education to so many of its graduates? And surely it was never intended, even as its failings became obvious, that the system would resist change on the basis of the political ideology sponsored by vested interest groups?

To answer these questions we must look briefly, to gain perspective, to the historical evolution of school education in Australia, identifying the underlying pressures which influenced change and reform over the years and from which some of the dangers of the future might also be revealed, and showing the similarities which have faced a majority of nations in the evolution of their education systems, the modern product of which has almost universally been the creation of what many of us have observed to be unsatisfactory schooling based on centralist methodologies.

And in doing so we are reminded that

“We define ourselves by what we have done, and have some idea of where we are going by where we have been” (Bogiorno, 2003)

### **An overview of the development of schools in Australia from 1788 – 1970 demonstrating their evolution towards school-based management.**

At the moment of foundation of British settlement in Australia in 1788 no schools were envisaged in the plans for what was to be a convict penal settlement at Sydney but despite government inaction they were established.

Schooling in this period of foundation was generally regarded as a function of the church. In Australia the Church of England was treated, by virtue of the settlement being a British Colony, as the established church. In Britain, and in other developed states, the academic education models for schools and universities were based on self-governing models extending back as far as the time of Socrates – the Socratic Model – by which students sat at the feet of the teacher – and were taught. Australia was, however, an undeveloped state at the time of settlement.

Therefore, the colony’s administrator, the Governor, supported the colony’s first chaplain in appointing convict teachers and establishing schools. The first school in Australia was, in accordance with these established values, a Church School which opened in 1793. By 1797 five others had opened. They were all subsidised financially by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel.

Alan Barcan, educator and historian, comments on the period that in the raw, pioneering environment of early nineteenth century Australia, education contributed little to social, political or economic development though it had some importance in the discussion of moral and religious problems – which were, of course, a feature of convict penal colony society. (Barcan, 1988)

This religious base for the provision of teaching and also its partner, the ancient and established alternative tradition in Britain and Europe that schooling, for those of the highest social order, was provided from within the household, is mirrored, is it not, in the evolution of education here in the Kingdom of Thailand. Professor Dr Krasae Chanawongse has observed (Nov 2002) that Thai education in ancient times was strongly based on household learning especially for the nobleman – and at the grass-root level temples and religious institutions served as semi-official learning institutes that enhanced the Thai people’s literacy and numeracy – this being the case in Thailand up until the

reign of King Chulalongkorn in whose era the westernisation of school education – the provision of school education for all – commenced.

In 1823, in my country, in the reign of King George III, a British Parliamentary investigation into Australian affairs was conducted by Sir Thomas Bigge. The Bigge Report – the *'Report of the Commissioner of Inquiry on the state of agriculture and trade in the colony of New South Wales'* – discussed education in its section on ecclesiastical establishments advising that public education in Australia should, reflecting the social conditions of the infant colony, aim for 'the effectual separation' of children from the corrupting influence of parents 'in the lower classes', particularly those of convict origin.

In 1826 the Church and Schools Corporation, based on the Church of England was established as the management base for school administration over the small number of existing schools, reinforcing that church's role as the colony's educator.

Increasingly however English dissenters, Scottish Presbyterians and Irish Catholics, Methodists and later Lutherans, reflecting their increasing immigration to the settlement, began to voice opposition to the assumed right of the Church of England to be sole educator. New ideas in education were emerging and the pre-eminence of the Anglican clergy and their faith was challenged. During these years the government and religious denominations argued bitterly over the best methods of providing schools.

The development of education systems in colonial Australia was thus accompanied, almost from the outset, by sectarian controversy, fierce competition for scarce resources and finances, and often poor-quality education under an inherited system of essentially self-governing schools. <sup>ii</sup>

The Church and Schools Corporation was dissolved in 1833 and from that date funds for schools were provided by government on a proportional basis to all religious denominations. For the next fifty years debate raged over the place of the various churches and the state in the provision of elementary schools. Much of this debate took place in London because ultimate authority for the resolution of such conflict resided there, not in the emerging Australian colonies. Nonetheless the denominational rivalry of publicly funded self-governing church schools from 1823 onwards undermined their dominance as education providers leading to the emergence of utilitarian reformers who sought to wrest control of education from the clergy. (Camm and McQuilton, 1987)

In New South Wales in 1838 the Church of England still ran most of the colony's schools. The population, although small, was growing and there were now thirty Church of England schools. <sup>iii</sup> There were in addition five Presbyterian schools, twelve Roman Catholic Schools as well as one other which was independent. <sup>iv</sup>

Other new colonies were gradually established across the Australian landmass and the early development of education in these colonies mirrored the experience – through philosophical and religious debates – which had marked its early development in New South Wales.

There were many problems evident in providing education in the newly settled colonies and governments therefore became increasingly involved with the provision of basic schooling. Importantly, in this period it was not compulsory for parents to educate their children – this did not in fact become the case in New South Wales for another forty-two years.

A prominent regional historian Theo Barker made the observation that many parents did however educate their children – by using the church schools that were

established with government subsidies. There were however others in the community with no religious affiliation, could not pay even the modest fees that were charged, or who were merely indifferent to the whole process of education. For the government, Barker observed, these people presented a problem with two aspects. One was the provision of a school system free of church influence, and the other was how to educate the ‘hordes of urchins’ who never saw the inside of any schoolroom and never would if the matter was left to their parents. (Barker, 1992, 1998)

Commencing in 1848 the first part of the problem was answered by the creation of a system of National Education which Barker describes:

“The model for this new system, established in Australia by Governor FitzRoy was based on the Irish national system which attempted to solve sectarian problems by separating children for religious instruction by ministers of their own faiths. Under this arrangement a community that demonstrated both a need and local support for a National (or State) school, attracted government subsidies for the building itself and the teacher’s salary. As these schools became established throughout the colonies they were placed under the control of local committees, made up of citizens who were acceptable to the government and their own communities, which answered to the Board of National Education in Sydney, the government body that had overall responsibility. The Board was responsible for distributing government funds amongst [both] the ‘state’ and ‘church’ schools and for the latter task was assisted by a Board of Denominational Education. This comprised representatives of the Church of England, Catholic, Presbyterian and Methodist churches, these being the ones that conducted schools of their own. Similarly, local community committees were established to supervise ‘church school’ education locally.” (Barker, 1998)

So in Australia, as early as 1848, the school based management model was already being widely practiced in all types of Australian schools – but was destined, later, to wither as centralised systems became dominant over the next thirty years.

By 1849 there were 187 schools in the colony of New South Wales of which twenty five were National or ‘government’ or ‘public’ schools and 162 were church or ‘non-government’ or ‘private’ schools. The National Schools, specifically, served the poor. Across the continent by this same year six regions of British colonial settlement had been established in what had been designated four States and altogether 413 schools existed.

These new National Schools however, faced peculiar difficulties from the outset. Many church people, especially of the Church of England, were hostile to them, usually on the grounds that they were nonreligious but also because they objected to anything that cut into the educational vote – in other words – undermined them politically.

The churches on the other hand were usually able to succeed in their schools because they had zealous clergymen to lead the faithful and to ensure that government departments were continually reminded of their needs. But the National Schools had no easily identifiable pressure groups behind them and tended to have the stigma of negative virtue – they were assumed not to stand for an established principle like Christian education in an overwhelmingly Christian society, and were seen as only a ‘sop’ for those who found the existing system unsatisfactory for various personal reasons. (Barker, 1998)<sup>v</sup>

In 1866 in New South Wales the government<sup>vi</sup> passed a *Public Schools Act* which abolished the two previous administrative bodies and replaced them with a Council of Education. The council had wide powers including the granting of limited aid to church schools subject to satisfactory inspection – and by this act the gradual process of centralization of management of the ‘state’ schools began.

For the next thirteen years in NSW, as elsewhere, the education debate continued to divide the community and in 1880 the government introduced the *Public Instruction Act* by which the Council of Education was abolished and the National Schools were placed under a Minister for Public Instruction, later to be renamed a Minister for Education.

Politicians of the period believed that not only should the state assume responsibility for educating its children, being the only institution with sufficient resources for the task, but it should also place education systems and policy firmly under the authority of an elected minister, mirroring the trends which were taking place in Britain and Germany in this period.

The centralist management approach was therefore in place. It was justified to the extent that it could establish ‘minimum standards’ and monitor ‘equity’ in colonial state school systems.<sup>vii</sup> Few if any state schools of the period were ever regarded as being able to provide services and education outcomes comparable to the best of the self-governing private schools that continued to flourish after 1880.

In New South Wales all financial aid to church schools was to cease at the end of 1882. This withdrawal of state aid to the church schools secularised the government education system. One unexpected outcome of this was the strengthening of the Roman Catholic school system in Australia and it remains a very significant contributor today.

Through the *Public Instruction Act* public school teachers became public servants. The emergence in Australia of mass elementary schooling meant the creation of a large occupational group, the public teaching services. The emergence of this body, whose offspring was to be the Australian Teachers Federation, which some regard as an obstructionist body championing a self interested centralist doctrine today was, at the time, able to provide the benefits to its members of short term gain through a collective voice.

By the same *Act* in New South Wales in 1880 school attendance for all children between the ages of six and fourteen was made compulsory.<sup>viii</sup>

A debate about whether education should be provided by the state free of charge was also underway in the 1880s. Clearly secular education designed for all children had to be cheap. Some argued that free education would increase taxes and create an impost on the very citizens that the proposal was endeavouring to assist. Others saw an equitability in such a proposal. The eventual compromise reached determined that a small fee be charged to help defray the cost of public education which was otherwise borne wholly by the government. By 1908 however all the Australian states had abolished fees for secular education. In the case of the self-governing schools the cost was wholly borne by the schools themselves through fee paying clients and in the ‘church schools’, by subsidies from their affiliated churches topped up with the charging of fees.

By the end of the nineteenth century, as the NSW example reflects, secular education systems had been established in all Australian colonies commencing with South Australia in 1852 and finishing with Western Australia in 1893 and so education

funded by the central government of each state under ministerial control had become a feature common to all the colonies.

Improvements in literacy had been the desired aim, and was the result. In the 1860s generally less than 60 per cent of children of school age were literate. By 1901 nearly 80 per cent were literate and by 1911 close to 90 per cent of the total population were literate.

At the start of the new century, as the Australian States were federated into a single nation of six states and two territories, these earlier developments had by now led to an educational environment in which a tightly regulated centralist government school system was co-existing with a volatile market in small private schools, the by now long established and dominant self-governing church schools and the collective educational enterprise of the large Roman Catholic minority through its established centralist-managed school system.

Education management was formalized and ratified at the time of national federation in 1901 as the constitutional responsibility of the states although the national or commonwealth government played a major strategic role by its provision of much of the funding of education to the states through general and specific purpose grants (Caldwell, Apr 2003, p.1)

It is clear that the modern diversity of school management systems in Australia is borne of the conflicts and debates, the conflicting aspirations and ideals of educators and politicians which typified the evolution of education systems in the colonial period up to the moment of Federation at the commencement of the twentieth century, a clearly controversial process developed against a backdrop of social and political conflict – a conflict that was set to continue.

After 1901 there was a general shift in focus. The need for technical education and the establishment of state run secondary high schools became a priority everywhere. Various kinds of post-primary vocational schooling had already developed and state high schools began to provide selective entry for a further small minority. In New South Wales intermediate state high schools were established in 1912. By the 1920s governments across the nation had claimed to have provided an educational ladder from primary school to university which pupils climbed by passing through an elaborate system of public examinations. This was intended to ensure the principle of equal access to educational opportunity through merit rather than by right or wealth achieved under a new humanist – realist curriculum which reduced the nineteenth century dominance of only literacy and numeracy and increased the study of the humanities such as History and Geography.

During the late 1930s and in the years of World War II another significant change in public attitudes to secondary education took place as the principle of secondary education for all children became widely accepted. This led to rapid expansion of the state secondary school system in the 1950s, initially because more children were staying on at school to complete their secondary training and later because of the maturing of a large cohort of children born in a very significant post war baby boom. One outcome of this new commitment to mass secondary schooling was the re-emergence of the demand for state aid for church schools and other independent non-government schools which by now were being disadvantaged by the government monopolies. The merits of state and

independent school systems became, once more, a significant theme in educational debate.

Numerous committees of inquiry into secondary education were undertaken across Australia, the most significant findings being realised in the *Wyndham Report* in New South Wales in 1957 which became a benchmark in secondary school reform in the period. (Wyndham, 1957) Wyndham, whom I knew, felt bound to set down the commonly understood aims of education as a basis for assessing the provision of education in the state and he recognised the necessity for educational policy to resonate with social values stating that the program of a school could only be carried out if it were acceptable to a significant proportion of the community served. He also made the assumption that the goals of education would not be determined on the lowest accepted level of contemporary practice, many of his aims of education remaining relevant today. (Vinson Enquiry 2001)

Increasing opportunities for university enrolments brought about by the creation of new universities reflected the impact of economic growth, selective opportunity and a further rising of meritocracy in the 1960s and early 1970s. Reform policies of the 1970s reflected concern for school retention rates of pupils over fifteen years of age triggered by the *Karmel Report* of 1973 which its supporters claimed assimilated a new spirit of egalitarianism within the new progressive education ideals, and it stimulated the flow of funds to ‘the new interest groups’ whose influence on the present education debate in Australia is still being felt. And it was the *Karmel Report* which Caldwell (Caldwell April 2003) identifies as the seminal event in the changes in thinking which have led, eventually, to the movement away from centralist management in the state school system.

Under Australia’s socialist government of the mid 1970s university fees in Australia were also abolished and thus in the tertiary education system a regime of meritocracy was at first strengthened, and yet was later weakened as resources were stretched and the meritocracy was diluted by the sheer weight of numbers enrolled into the universities – and the decline both in per-capita financing and in academic standards required for admission which resulted, and which also affected the quality of graduates entering the teaching profession.

Later in the 1970s the economic tide had turned. This was reflected in a decline in school enrolments, the growth of unemployment and the diminishing of funds for school education.

As the twentieth century ended government involvement in institutionalised learning, established over a century earlier, had developed into a vast bureaucracy of administration responsible for a massive network of kindergartens, schools, universities and colleges. The system was not driven or measured however, in terms of its desired outcomes of learning, in which the customer or client embodies aspirations of excellence in the educational product being offered to their children, so much as by the social doctrine of the provision of education for all as an end unto itself.

### **Australian Schools – developments, 1970 – 2003 showing the benefits of school-based management and the constraints imposed upon its implementation.**

The *Karmel Report* of 1973 – *The Interim Report of the Australian Schools Commission* – elevated the concept of devolution of school management away from the centralist

bureaucracy towards the schools themselves as a core value that underpinned its recommendations for education reform.

Caldwell (Caldwell, April, 2003) has recently drawn attention to its key statements which, in the early 1970s set the stage for the present engagement with school reform. He includes, amongst others:

“The Committee favours less rather than more centralised control over the operation of schools; Responsibility should be devolved as far as possible upon the people involved in the actual task of schooling; After almost one hundred years of public education a reappraisal of relationship of the school to the wider society is taking place in Australia, as it is in most industrialised nations; Australian society is much larger, more diversified, and better educated than when government-controlled education systems took shape in the late nineteenth-century; The size of the units that try to achieve educational goals may now be inappropriate for efficient and effective operation; Antipathy towards and apathy about community participation in the governance of schooling is widespread throughout Australia.” (Caldwell, April, 2003)

The *Karmel Report* and the Australian Schools Commission also radically changed the resourcing of Australia’s schools, about which I had a lot to say in that period. (Morgan, 1973(a), 1973(b))

Pre-empting Karmel’s observation about community antipathy and apathy for their involvement in the governance of schools was the emergence of a rudimentary form of school councils in place at the beginning of the 1970s in South Australia. This initiative was led, along with much of South Australia’s education reform, by Dr Albert Jones (who was a lifelong friend of mine), at that time Director General of Education in South Australia.

Part of Jones’s vision included the *Freedom and Authority Memorandum*, which delegated power to manage schools to their principals, while urging them in turn to devolve authority to teachers and even students. He was one of the first high profile defenders of ‘progressive education’ and, as circumstances later developed, was ahead of his time. Jones’s constant theme was that excellence in education was to be valued, but that it should be available to all students, not just to a few, and that the only mechanism for this to be realised was through the radical reform of the government school centralist system.

Jones’s contribution was also significant because he was one of the first in the public education sector to recognise that the successful independent self-governing schools – like the Pittwater House Schools system – to which I will refer later - the school I founded in 1962 – were providing the models of school-based management and educational innovation through which the implementation of such reform in the state run education bureaucracies could eventually occur.

The process of devolution in school management took hold in the 1980s and continues (in fits and starts) to the present.

It had become clear in Australia that society and economy were shifting away from the industrialized economic framework of the previous century, mirrored in its ‘production line’ educational systems, towards a society and economy based on knowledge – a knowledge-based services-intensive economy. (see Gilbert, in Evans, 2003)

A comprehensive account of the developments in administrative reorganisation in public school governance in Australia during the 1980s was generated by the Australian College of Education and published in 1991. (Harman, Beare and Berkley, 1991)

As Caldwell points out the report contained some significant findings about the decentralization of school management, the most important being:

“...schools are being given increased legal and professional responsibilities, in the form of a global budget, with discretion over funding, the responsibility to select their own staff as well as to fill promotion positions from the principal down, [and] the management of physical plant. Put simply Australian Public schools are becoming self-managing, and are more and more resembling private sector schools in their modes of governance and operation.” (Harman, Beare and Berkley, 1991, pp. 310-311) (Caldwell, April 2003, p.4)

This observation is supported by the work of Dr Robert McLeod, a member of my own management team at Pittwater House whose Doctoral Thesis in Education explores mechanisms for improvements in the ‘cultures of learning’ in schools and who observes;

“In reality most non-government schools had been operating in a ‘school-based management’ environment for many years” (McLeod, 1998)

Caldwell observed that every state and territory had implemented or extended an approach to self-managing schools since the developments described above took place in the 1980s. Of particular note was the fact that the state of Victoria had led the way by decentralizing 94 percent of its recurrent funding to schools for local decision-making, amongst other significant devolutionary reforms.

This achievement was made possible in Victoria under the policies of a liberal / conservative government in office during much of the 1990s in that state. A later labour / socialist government that replaced it initially retained and built on the reforms although now we are just beginning to see the emergence of ‘counter-reform’ in Victoria. As recently as three months ago the present Victorian State Minister for Education, in her *‘Blueprint for Reform’* – a revision of the states policy settings – made the statement that

“...the way schools are funded will be reviewed as the system of school global budgets, whereby schools receive an annual allocation, is causing problems.” (See Education Review/Campus Review, Vol 12, No 32, Aug 20-26, 2003)

surely indicating the commencement of a reversal towards centralist management to some degree in that state.

In states other than Victoria the decentralization process has moved more slowly and in all cases has been affected by the differing ideologies of incumbent conservative or socialist governments and by the media-driven education debate which sets much of the populist agenda in the formation of education policy in Australia, and which reflects the intransigence of very powerful vested interest groups – the same ones who remained so obstructionist throughout much of the past century.

In the last decade educational priorities have been much more influenced by political considerations and more subject to political mandate than in the past. The influence of the political mandate is revealed in the tensions which exist between the centralists and the devolutionists in school management, particularly in New South Wales.

This tension is described in detail in the *Vinson Enquiry into Public School Education in NSW*. It had been established by public sector vested interest groups in education policy and not by government. In the enquiry's report Vinson acknowledged the increasing devolution of responsibilities to schools in the early 1990s through the application of private sector management principles to the education system as recommended by the earlier Scott Report of 1990.

He noted that under these devolutionary policies the school itself was being considered the central organisational element in the system. Schools were made responsible for their own 'school renewal plans', their own global administrative budgets, decisions concerning training and development, and, to a limited extent, staffing. School Councils were encouraged, as was school community involvement in the appointment of school principals and administrative staff. The state Department of Education State Office was to be reduced in size and its functions confined to policy development, corporate planning and coordination, and managerial oversight. A new administrative tier the 'school cluster' (with about fourteen schools in each cluster) was created between the ten existing educational regions and the schools. These clusters were to directly support the educational activities of schools and be responsible for quality control. (Vinson, 2002)

Yet another report, the *Carrick Review* was instigated focussing on parental choice in schooling and, following Victoria's lead, allowed for the first time, parents to choose which government school they wanted their children to attend. The *Carrick Review* also freed-up the requirements for the registration of non-government schools consistent with a belief in the value of private sector education. It led to a new *Education Act* (1990) which included, also for the first time, the legislation – or placing into law – of minimum curriculum requirements in NSW schools, known as the *Key Learning Areas*, and gave the Minister for Education the power to approve new standards-based curricula developed by individual institutions. (Carrick, 1989)

These were all substantial devolutionary reforms in favour of school-based management however under the changed government of the mid 1990s some aspects of the 'Scott Implementation' were reversed and the period of 'counter-reform' in New South Wales began.

Vinson observed that later in the decade a move back towards centralization – in the guise of cost-cutting and efficiency – took place. These changes were exactly coincident with the replacement in NSW of a liberal / conservative government, which had initiated the reforms, and a new labour / socialist one which began to curtail some of them.

The school clusters and regions were abolished. A simplified two tier structure was created which set up forty school districts with an average of fifty-five schools in each – to be considered not as autonomous management areas but as 'arms of the centre' or 'conduits' of head office. By this mechanism the regional and local freedom to plan and manage teaching and learning was curtailed. A more centralised top-down system of governance was thus restored, self-management therefore taking a backward step.

This political tension is the principal cause of the failure of government to implement change and reform in education in Australia at a rate which keeps pace with the changed expectations of the community, the newly emerged knowledge economy and

clear community dissatisfaction with elements of the learning environment and culture in terms of desired educational outcomes, and delivered at a consistency that makes it work.

Those who defend centralization, according to Vinson, argue that it is essential to the maintenance of equity – without central administration, they believe, inequities in the provision of teachers and other resources might prevail. Those who argue for a standard core curriculum point to the importance of equal opportunity – that all students in the state should be exposed to the same education, regardless of regional differences.

Warnings were made about the veracity of reform and are revealed by some of the critics of school-based management. McLeod (1998) draws our attention to the work of Ball (1993) who suggested that school-based management was a discursive trick and one in which things were not so much done to schools, as done to schools by themselves, with the consequence that the state was left in the ‘enviable position of having power without responsibility’ (Ball, 1993, p.77) and Sharpe (1993) an ardent supporter of school devolution who was concerned that school-based management was ‘characterised by a paucity of formal evaluation and a lack of objectivity on its effects’ (Sharpe, 1993, p.20) and also Smythe (1996, p. 1099) as reported by McLeod, who concedes that school based management is easy to sell as it is participatory, economical, compelling, and inclusive but in most cases only produces an economic notion of school-based management, without embracing democratic decision making and establishing consultation processes with the local community.

Clearly the present status of educational reform in Australia is a mixture of some school-based management practices – the politically safe elements - and some centralist management – preserved or reinstated at the behest of vested interest groups or governments, as my Headmaster at Pittwater House has observed, ‘who want to hold on to power at the centre’. (Orrock, 1997)

Right now strong centralist control determines curriculum in Australian schools. External examinations are developed centrally and imposed uniformly across all schools, stifling diversity in some learning areas. (Orrock, 1997) These state imposed external examinations are the only criterion by which entry to tertiary education of every kind is determined as an outcome of school education. In government school sectors staffing decisions remain largely controlled by central management through state-wide staffing systems. Other noticeably centralist procedures include, in NSW, the imposition of the new Higher School Certificate curriculum, standardised basic skills testing, in the government schools the roll-out of new information and communications technology, student behaviour policies and child protection issues. The centralization of this last group is a response by government to political considerations driven by populist media agendas and the need in politics for political victories. (Orrock, 1997)

Also right now some areas of school-based management reflect progress made. Schools have greater discretion than ever before in how they spend their funds, and therefore what they can do, although some have used their new-found power to sell off their assets to meet increasing costs of recurrent expenditure. School teachers retain some discretion over what happens in the class room – such as lesson plans, the allocation of students to classes and choice of text books. Many individuals in executive positions in government schools are being selected through a merit selection process, which involves the participation of the school community. In some states education ministers are trying

to reduce the number of bureaucrats occupying 'head office', despite meeting trenchant opposition by relevant employee unions.<sup>ix</sup>

Huge potential remains locked away in Australia's government school sector in spite of its vast array of assets, its dedicated principals, its talented teachers, its large cohort of students - these human assets who all surely seek the provision of the best possible education outcomes. Enormous opportunity exists to unlock this potential, so much of which is as yet unrealised, but will not be unlocked as long as activity at the school level is a product of mandate from the outdated centralist management model. The unlocking of the latent potential in the government school sector is only possible if the schools themselves are given room to innovate for themselves and to be innovative in their connections with the communities from which their students come and in which the schools participate.

And so today, in Australia, a need for reform continues to underlie national and state education policy and, as in other countries where government monopolies have controlled public education systems and gigantic bureaucracies have tried to manage them, reformers – led by the educators themselves, continue to look to the principles of devolution and to school based management systems to find ways to improve the education product and its outcomes for students, while non-educator bureaucrats and politicians, it seems, are determined to hang on to centralized power and also to undermine the levels of independence in the non-government school sectors as well. (McKeith, SMH, 28<sup>th</sup> Aug, 2003)

The independent school sector, as one portion of non-government schools in Australia, is, on the contrary, better suited to unlocking this potential and is not faced with the plethora of obstruction to innovation caused by centralist school management because, apart from operating independently, each school of this type is directly connected with its customer base. If the educational product being delivered by an independent school does not meet the expectations of its clients the school must eventually fail as the clients seek a better product elsewhere, exercising their parental choice, and demonstrating the vigorous competition typical of this education sector in which the independent schools themselves are motivated by a necessity to succeed in the market place.

For these reasons reformers of the government school sector must continue to look to the successful independent schools as the benchmark by which devolutionary reform must be measured and as the model by which they can be achieved. It is the successful independent schools who have, through innovation and accountability to the customer base, developed workable and sustainable self-governing management practices which have demonstrated the required solutions for the long term management of all schools if they are to achieve the goals of excellence and equity to which the community, the teachers, the students and their administrators aspire.

### **A case study of a self-governing school that demonstrates the efficacy of school-based management.**

The Pittwater House Schools, the non-profit school system of which I am Founder and Chairman of the Board, is a successful, independent, self-governing school organization which has many unique characteristics and is delivering enhanced

educational outcomes in its learning environment, and which presents a satisfying model for self-management.

At the outset it should be noted that there are important differences between self-managing schools and self-governing schools notwithstanding recent decisions by Australian state governments that have started to erode some of the key differences. <sup>x</sup>

Caldwell defines the difference between the two:

“a self-governing school involves a degree of independence that is not provided in a centrally determined framework”

“A self-managing school exists in a system to which there has been decentralized a significant amount of authority and responsibility to make decisions about the allocation of resources within a centrally determined framework of goals, policies, standards and accountabilities – an important caveat to the doctrine being that government clearly reserves the right to intervene where necessary to ensure the appropriate levels of outcomes for all students” (Caldwell and Spinks, 1998, p.5) (DEET, 2001, p.1)

In other words self-governing schools are the domain of the independent school sector and self-managing schools are spawned from a centralist management structure and are generally the domain of the government school sector.

At Pittwater House all approaches to management are established within hierarchical structures of accountability which succeed simply because communication flows freely and constructively between all levels of management regarding aspects of policy doctrine, the framework of goals, the establishment of standards and internal accountabilities, and in the delivery of resources and because the whole structure is characterised by strong leadership from the executive.

The school is a non-profit company limited by guarantee which is independent of religious bodies and the state. All such companies in Australia are accountable to the Australian Securities and Investment Commission (ASIC) under corporate affairs requirements. Pittwater House is governed by a Council of Governors who take ultimate responsibility for its management. Its members are drawn directly from the community and tend to have highly developed capacities of business acumen matched with a passion for excellence in schooling, and defined by loyalty, in the present circumstances, to the Founder, whilst he lives, and to the ethos of the school, rather than, as in some self-governing schools, a board consisting of some so-called community representatives requiring the presence of clergy, alumni, accountants, lawyers, and so on, only by definition, none of whom necessarily need to have much interest except in their own agendas, especially if they are current parents of the school. And an examination of many such schools in Australia will reveal major tensions, ending in dismissals, between principals and boards in recent years.

Although such a method of governance enshrines the ‘internal’ independence of the school as a self-managing entity it remains, as do all schools in Australia, accountable to government at the national and state levels through a complex array of measures of compliance.

This accountability must be considered in terms of both the funding arrangements by which the school is the beneficiary of limited and partial funding from the Commonwealth and the State, as are all independent schools, notwithstanding that this funding is clearly inequitable when compared to the funding of government schools and

that up to 90 percent of funding of non-government schools is by the clients - the fee-paying families and not the taxpayer nor the government, and also by the requirement by government that all schools provide education above a minimum standard, as determined by government bureaucracy.

### **External accountabilities of The Pittwater House Schools**

At Commonwealth level Pittwater House, and all schools, must meet the guidelines set in the MCEETYA protocols determined by the Adelaide Declaration of 1999, the national education policy settings which were outlined in the introduction to this paper. It should be noted that these protocols and guidelines tend to change to suit the ideologies of whatever the incumbent national government in Australia happens to be, again demonstrating that political ideology takes precedence over educational philosophy and that political concerns rather than educational ones are the driver of educational policy setting, despite the best efforts of Australia's professional educators to overcome this problem.

Pittwater House is also accountable to the Commonwealth financially. The school is required to undergo an annual audit of its entire financial activities to establish its Commonwealth funding entitlements based on a highly complex economic formula known as the Socio Economic Scale (SES) which delivers limited per-capita funding grants to independent and other non-government schools in return for compliance with philosophical criteria of national education goals as seen by the government in power at any given time.

Further, the Commonwealth delivers a small package of funding to some independent schools for Capital Development Work – buildings, classrooms and other facilities – which is administered under licence by the Association of Independent Schools (AIS). Such grants are known as 'block grants' and are almost always directed to 'needy' schools – so not to Pittwater House – but their existence reflects a further accountability of schools like Pittwater House to the AIS under Commonwealth Licence.

At the State level, in the state of New South Wales, a raft of accountability is imposed on independent self-governing schools and on Pittwater House.

Pittwater House must be registered by the State to exist. The Registration process requires the school to pass a rigorous six-yearly inspection into every aspect of the school's management, methodology, educational processes and standards through the NSW Board of Studies. Every twelve years this inspection becomes a detailed on-site inspection and must reveal total compliance with the requirements established by the Board of Studies for successful registration. This is the most stringent form of accountability to which the school is subjected, which we welcome as an independent form of quality assurance.

Statistical information revealed in the registration process determines the level of state government funding to be granted to the school. This funding is determined by a highly complex formula derived from the Educational Resource Index (ERI) which purports to measure the capacity of the community in which the school is located geographically to pay its school fees. Less funding is directed towards schools which appear to exist in communities which appear to be 'wealthy', determined by a complex and controversial measurement<sup>xi</sup>

Further, the school is accountable to the NSW Board of Studies in its capacity to deliver to its students ‘external’ examinations determined by the state as the standardised measures of education outcome for all schools. The school must achieve ‘accreditation’ before being able to offer the NSW Higher School Certificate examinations and the intermediate School Certificate. The Higher School Certificate results achieved by the school are widely used by the government, the community and the media as a key performance indicator of the success of the school in delivering its educational product, which demonstrates an even wider external accountability. Unfortunately the way the HSC results are used to measure any one school against another, or any one school against the state average, are badly flawed. The school is also required to provide standardised basic skills testing across several ‘year’ bands each year.

Curriculum guidelines, with emphasis on the Key Learning Areas, are a requirement of the state as determined by the Board of Studies. Although these guidelines are declared to be non-prescriptive – allowing the school itself to determine internal academic programmes – they nevertheless require strict compliance to the broad management of subject choices, course content and minimum standards in the number of hours taught for each subject for particular age groups and for the range of subjects being offered. And since the public examinations at the end of Grade twelve are the only criterion by which entry from school to tertiary study is determined, they are in fact prescriptive and in many respects re-strictive. Compliance to the guidelines is a pre-requisite to being granted accreditation to offer the external examinations.

In some aspects of school discipline policy and procedure the school is accountable to the state. This particularly applies to issued defined in the *Working With Children Act* and in the compliance to state laws regarding the illegality of corporal punishment of children.

In terms of the appointment and dismissal of teachers and other school employees the state has imposed the *Unfair Dismissal Act*, and a raft of protocols embodied in a *State Award for Teachers* which determine stringent steps of ‘due process’ to which the school must comply in its handling of the dismissal of any teacher or other employee. The school is able at least, within this restricted framework, to determine an applicant’s suitability for employment or an employee’s continued suitability, at the present time.

These, among other examples of the external accountability of the school, demonstrate that self-governing independent schools are actually not really independent at all. Or to quote the Vice-Principal of Pittwater House:

“There is no such thing as an independent school.” (RVH Morgan, 2003)

In NSW a current *Review of Non-government Schools* is taking place under the auspices of the Minister for Education and known as the *Grimshaw Review*. (Grimshaw, 2003) The implementation of recommendations from this review have created further measures of accountability of independent schools to the state, particularly through a revision of the process of registration – so called ‘improved’ registration standards focussing more closely on accountability and performance, and major extensions to the process of annual reporting on school performance.

Intense debate and not a little concern exists in the community about the next stage of what can only be seen as ‘counter-reform’ enshrined in the forthcoming second report of the *Grimshaw Review* which may lead to changes – probably reductions - in the allocation of funding to independent schools and to potentially radical change in the way

schools can appoint teachers, who may be required to hold greater state determined accreditation themselves before they can be appointed to teach. (McKeith, SMH, 28<sup>th</sup> Aug, 2003) The grim predicted counter-reforms of the *Grimshaw Review* are destined to be revealed at the end of 2003 and are likely to further erode the independence of self-governing schools.

Every one of these developments is driven by centralist management philosophy and they deeply undermine the processes of devolution and self-management which have been shown since the 1970s to be the key to unlocking the potential of schools in the provision of improved education outcomes in the learning environment.

Some observers feel that it is almost as if the independent schools are being punished by government in what they call a cynical act of ‘political scapegoatism’ for the failures evident in the government’s own education monopoly, as government responds to the fact that its own schools are in enrolment decline whilst non-government schools are experiencing sustained growth, led by aspirational parents who seek higher quality education, and educational environments for their children.

### **Internal self-governance at Pittwater House**

Administratively Pittwater House is made up of a number of semi-autonomous learning environments or school units which connect together laterally, vertically and hierarchically under a broader umbrella of administrative, pastoral, and managerial governance.

### **Junior Girls College and Boys Preparatory Schools**

These units of management include, for the younger students, a Junior Girls College, catering for the education of girls from classes in kindergarten to year six, and a Preparatory School, catering for the education of boys in classes in kindergarten to year six, both of which are administered by a Head assisted by a Deputy Head and an assistant head of the sub-primary with special responsibility for sub-primary classes across both school units.

### **Girls College and Grammar Schools**

For senior students a Girls College and a Grammar School are established for the education of girls and boys respectively and are administered by a Headmaster, assisted by a Dean of the College and Dean of the Grammar School, and a hierarchical structure of assistant deans and form teachers at senior (Academy) and intermediate (Middle School) and junior levels.

### **‘Twin Schools’ – single sex and co-educational education**

These four ‘school units’ are arranged as ‘twin’ schools allowing Pittwater House to embrace the attendant benefits of both single sex education in the classroom and coeducational education in the broader societal context of school ceremonial life, social life, community service and in extra-curricular programmes, with none of the

disadvantages of either the single sex or co-educational systems. This philosophy of education was invented in Australia by me, for Pittwater House, in 1976, and is a defining characteristic of the school.

### **Academic Faculties**

Academically the educational management of curriculum, teaching and learning standards for these school units are organised under an umbrella of separate faculties with responsibilities across all the relevant school units. The academic management of these faculties is led by a Dean of Studies who is assisted by faculty heads, all under the guidance of the Headmaster.

### **Pastoral Care Management**

Pastorally the school units are managed by a hierarchical structure of pastoral leaders and form teachers at every level of the learning environment under a pastoral Dean, and all students are also assigned membership into vertically aligned social units or 'houses' which ensure the efficacy of a K – 12 school philosophy and generate a sense of community through direct linkages between students, through peer support, stretching from the three year olds to the eighteen year olds on the campus. All academic staff are also assigned membership of these 'houses' allowing for staff / student interaction within the K –12 framework. This vertically aligned structure ensures a 'family' environment in the social and pastoral management of the school, which is one of its greatest strengths.

### **Administration**

Administratively the school is managed by a holistic management structure led by the school's Director of Corporate Development and Business Manager who oversees the provision of executive services, secretarial support, the management of enrolments, admissions, financial and other business requirements, maintenance and facilities, the issuing of resources and the allocation of budgets.

All senior management positions in the school are answerable to its Executive, made up of the school's Founder, his Vice Principal, the Headmasters, and the Director of Corporate Development. The Executive is the school's conduit to its Council of Governors.

### **University Foundation Studies**

A special academic pathway operates as a further unit in parallel to the school structure called University Foundation Studies. It provides, in association with the University of New South Wales, a certified academic programme mainly for international students whom, upon graduation, are guaranteed entry into tertiary study at the University of New South Wales and other tertiary institutions, thereby providing an alternate path to the external examinations described earlier, through a parallel system administered by Pittwater House. Pittwater House is the only school in Sydney granted Foundation Studies accreditation by the University of New South Wales.

## **Early Childhood Learning Centre**

The school provides an Early Childhood Learning Centre which creates an appropriate and specialised learning environment crucial to the development of the very young. This operates as a semi-autonomous unit under the direction of the Junior Schools' administrative framework and is mirrored in another sub-primary school located on a separate campus but administered by Pittwater House.

## **Staff Management**

Many other elements of the system are designed to harness the latent potential of the school community in positive frameworks based on the maintenance of effective communication amongst all groups. The teaching staff are members of a senior and a junior 'common room' led by its respective headmaster.

## **Pupil Management**

Pupil management is enhanced by a School Prefect system, by the appointment of House Captains, senior and junior monitors, and by the provision of an award and honours system encompassing academic, pastoral, sporting, leadership, extra curricular and community service divisions throughout all levels of the school on the basis that the maintenance of discipline and inspiration relies on positive reinforcement rather than negative sanctions.

## **Communication and publication**

All of the school's policy and guidelines are published annually in pupil and staff handbooks. These publications enunciate a series of school 'core values' which are the philosophical foundation upon which the unique culture of the school is built. A weekly school newsletter is directed to all pupils, parents and staff. The school maintains its own website and publishes a quarterly magazine highlighting achievements across the local, regional, national and international spectrum. The school publishes an annual school magazine which documents the life of the institution in a yearly format. All of these publications accentuate the achievements and contributions of the students.

## **Alumni**

The school nurtures a strong association with members of its Alumni reflecting a pride in its graduates, many of whom are famous high achievers, and promotes their achievements and contributions throughout the whole school family and also promotes, for them, the philosophy of continued 'life long' learning.

## **Community facilities**

The school shares its buildings, plant and equipment assets with the wider community by staging community activity in its facilities (such as the school's swimming

pool complex), and by encouraging public use of its performance spaces (The Great Hall is used for the staging of a wide range of community events and ceremonies for example), and by staging special public events sponsored by the school itself.

### **Transport Systems**

The school provides its own transport systems to assist students in travelling safely between home and school and from school to off-campus venues for excursions, expeditions and sport.

### **International Programmes**

Beyond Australia Pittwater House conducts an extensive, and expanding international programme known as Pittwater House International which delivers English Language at our own learning centres in Thailand and other countries as well as managing the development of partnerships with other schools for the teaching of English Language in schools here in Thailand, in China, in Vietnam, and other countries maintained through a management office in Bangkok and from which further consultancy and programme delivery is conducted in countries such as Russia, Morocco, Taiwan, Hong Kong, China and Vietnam The school developed its own unique curriculum for the teaching of English as a second language and this is employed both on the campus and internationally at all levels of primary and secondary education.

These international activities provide a platform for the development of information exchange with professional educators worldwide, focussing on international co-operation and reflects the vital nature and value of international networking.

### **International Education Bridges - Sister Schools**

Further the school embraces ‘sister-school’ relationships, through memorandums of understanding and through cultural exchange programmes with schools in Thailand, the United States of America, Japan, China, the United Kingdom and others ensuring the mutually beneficial interchange of ideas, philosophies and innovations for enhanced learning experiences amongst these nations for both students and teachers, and administrators through international education bridges established by Pittwater House.

### **Community Affiliations**

The school has substantial affiliation with its own community, its local community and the wider community in the city of Sydney. Its own community of parents share a level of inclusiveness engineered by the school and defined in terms of ‘school family’. An active parent network, through a Mothers’ Association, is a stakeholder in the life of the school through its contributions to social activity, the school’s community events programme, through active participation in the sporting curriculum, and through its contributions to Capital Works and other specialist resourcing projects. Needless to say a highly developed communication network exists at Pittwater

House linking parents, students, teachers, pastoral heads and the administration which allows the flow back and forth of advice, support and information.

### **Educative role in the community**

One of the roles that the school has identified as important is its educative role in the community. Many of the parents of students and the school family generally turn to the school as a source of information, of leadership and for guidance as it becomes increasingly recognised as the major contributor to the well being, positive development of and stability giving element in the lives of members of the school family and as a key determiner of moral and social values and for the setting of community standards generally. Some of these standards are established through the school's extensive participation in community service activities which enrich, not only the lives of the children engaged in such projects, but also enrich the communities that are being served, and through the school's ability and willingness to offer advice on a range of issues to students, staff, parents, alumni, friends of the school and to other schools.

### **Community service**

Australian Army Cadet Corps, Australian Air Force Cadets, Duke of Edinburgh Awards Scheme, music, performing arts, environmental and ecological projects are examples by which the school makes a relevant and meaningful positive contribution to the wider community.

### **Religious Life**

Although the school is independent of 'church' and state it maintains a strong tradition of Christian philosophy and teaching through the appointment of an Anglican school Chaplain who conducts religious services and coordinates religious studies as a foundation for moral education throughout the school. These activities maintain extensive outreach across the student body, the staff, parents and into the wider community. These activities also embrace the celebration of religious diversity as a reflection of the poly-cultural nature of the school community, and no student is denied enrolment on religious grounds.

### **Gifted and Talented Programmes and Remedial Programmes**

The school identifies and promotes gifted and talented students through special extension academic programmes and accelerated study programmes for specially gifted students. A special academic club is established to support high achievers at senior examination levels under the co-ordination of a gifted and talented programme director. A similar programme is established to implement remedial strategies for students who require this type of assistance across the entire school spectrum.

## Summary

The case-study school, as can be seen, is a dynamic and complex and modern institution delivering a very broad band of services that extend well beyond those expected of schools in the past, and of many that exist in the present. Such a large scope of activity can only be delivered through a management model of self-government. Such a vision can only be sustained through innovation generated by the school itself, through direct and meaningful engagement with the local and regional community, and through meaningful engagement with the staff and pupils and parents of the school.

Through this process of self-governance Pittwater House is able to successfully deliver the ‘knowledge, technology, power, materiel, people, time, assessment information and finance’ (Caldwell, 2003, p.2) required to sustain a complex and wide reaching and ‘all encompassing’ educational product in the highly competitive and increasingly fluid marketplace of independent education in Australia, relatively unencumbered by its accountability to the external centralist management imposed upon it.

The case study shows that schools like Pittwater House, by virtue of their self-governing independent nature, can and do provide education in an appropriate context to the communities which they serve through a reliance on innovation, uniqueness of style and strength of management to tailor the learning environment itself to the needs, desires and aspirations of their clients, as interpreted by professional educators.

The successful learning environment achieved at Pittwater House is itself a product of the seamless flow of management in delivering resources of all kinds designed to support and nurture the teachers and students and to generate an atmosphere of mission, a striving for quality, of maintaining relevance and allowing innovation and change to be integral in the learning environment of the classroom by acknowledging the professionalism and expertise of each teacher and encouraging them, in the Socratic sense, to innovate and interpret for themselves, and to get on and teach.

The achievements of the students are themselves the measure of the good management of the school as revealed in their consistently high levels of attainment, well above the state average academically, and through contributions to the community well beyond expected norms. The students tend to thrive at Pittwater House because the environment of the school allows them, through its self-governance, to be recognised and nurtured as individuals. The focus of a successful system of self-governance in schools places priority on the individual needs and aspirations of each child.

## Conclusions

This paper shows that devolution towards school –based management must continue if schools are to unlock their latent potential effectively.

The shift from an industrially driven to a knowledge-based driven school management culture must not be misinterpreted. As Jane Gilbert, a researcher for the New Zealand Council for Educational Research has recently stated;

“...some people might perceive such a shift as a capitalist plot to high-jack education to serve the needs of economy and employer. However, the fact these

ideas are happening and knowledge societies are the way of the developing world, means educationalists have to respond appropriately.” (Gilbert, 2003)

The paper shows that it is self evident that professional educators who run schools, and professional teachers who are engaged in the learning environment are the ones best suited to identify the need for innovation for the benefit of the students when it is appropriate in their classrooms, and to make those innovations by taking the necessary risks.

These innovations, from the perspective of curriculum management, centre around the ability of self-managing schools to develop, as Gilbert suggests, cross-subject teams of teachers, to revisit timetabling practices, focus on student’s team-work skills and establish valid processes for assessing group work. (Gilbert, 2003) Likewise, based on successful modelling at Pittwater House, particularly in the year seven to ten classes, Orrock reminds us that schools must be able to act locally and be flexible in respect of curriculum so that learning is enhanced and distinct cultures can be nurtured. (Orrock, 1997) He identifies the key to this flexibility as an ability to integrate subjects, or at least particular topics so that critical thinking is broadened. School-based management must embrace the ability of the teachers themselves to integrate the teaching of subjects within the curriculum where necessary as the culture of the school community dictates.

It is also essential that we must not be afraid to look upon schools as having a unique symbiotic relationship with their own unique communities. Clearly no two communities served by schools are the same and therefore no two schools should be treated the same. History has shown us that centralist management practices place limitations on innovation and creativity at the school level and impede engagement with the community of which the school is part, and that through standardisation schools deliver a mediocre product. The symbiotic relationship in which one cannot function in the absence of the other and one cannot thrive without the support and engagement of the other shows that a school which fosters programmes of community service amongst its students, either through the undertaking of certain community projects, or through sport, or public events, or performance or ceremonial activity, as an enshrined objective of the school’s internal community is likely to be able to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the external community and therefore to be able to innovate to meet the specific challenges presented in the relationship.

History has shown us that in many countries the major and successful adoption of some self-management strategies in schools have generated a sense of empowerment among educators to embrace change and connect more meaningfully with their communities but that these advances have too easily been undermined by centralist counter-reform, based on the notion that the more freedom you are given the more accountable you must become.

The paper has revealed the extent of the tensions that exist between the reformers and the counter-reformers. The resolution of this conflict is critical to the development of school management practices which can shift the focus of the learning environment towards the delivery of an education best suited to the unique character of each school community. It is essential in resolving this conflict that education is seen no more as a political tool or weapon or product but as the engine that drives the economic success of nations. National investment in education remains the key to future economic prosperity.

And so to what degree should the stakeholders be involved in school-based management?

Caldwell (2003) suggests that achieving a balance in the delivery of six core values that represent the 'public good' in school education will bring satisfaction to the stakeholders. He lists them as; the value of choice to reflect the right of parents and students to choose a school that meets their needs and aspirations; the value of equity to provide assurance that those students with similar needs and aspirations will be treated in the same manner in the course of their education; the value of access to ensure all students will have an education that matches their needs and aspirations; Efficiency to optimise outcomes given the resources available; economic growth to generate resources that are adequate to the task; and harmony to secure and sustain the support of all stakeholders.

The ideal self-governing school or self-managing school might be one in which: staff – student ratios are low; average class sizes are twenty-five students to a class; academic faculties within the school participate in subject integration and team teaching; the Board of Governors are business men or women who are not interested in telling professional educators how to teach; the Board of Governors is small; government sets standards and accountabilities but schools determine their own priorities; the symbiotic school – community relationship is understood by both and is nurtured by all the stakeholders; and school principals have advisory committees at all levels of the school.

The case-study of Pittwater House has presented a self-governing model which helps demonstrate a successful balance in management through the varying levels of stakeholder involvement. The analysis of the nature of the school council of governors illustrated the need for this level of governance to be founded on sound business management strengths. At the executive management level the model presented revealed a strong hierarchy in place to give leadership and oversight to the many semi-independent management facets of the organization. The model demonstrated that every type of stakeholder is reached by significant communication systems and that each has a clearly defined contribution to make to the school as a community and a 'family'. The model clearly demonstrates the benefits of international co-operation and interchange at all levels.

The paper makes some contribution towards the correct premise of the organisers of this conference that through international dialogue and the sharing of information, experiences, ideas and innovations, we can create better schools of the future and we can, through achieving this, leave a great legacy for those who will follow us.

No matter what each country determines to do about school-based management, as educators we must never lose sight of our common goals. Whether we are in government or non-government schools, centralist or school-based managed, we must work together across whatever barriers may exist for the ultimate good of our young people whose future depends on our efforts to give them the appropriate skills and knowledge to make their countries and the world a better, happier and more peaceful place.

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- <sup>i</sup> Administered through a Federal Department of Education, Science and Training.
- <sup>ii</sup> Reflecting this, in 1831, the first book on Australian education was published by the Presbyterian minister JD Lang, who sought to provide advanced education through his Australian College which opened in 1831. In the following years the first Australian published school text books appeared, published in Sydney, which added for the first time an Australian flavour to the predominantly British school text books being used although all were relying on the ‘three R’s – the provision at primary level of literacy and numeracy.
- <sup>iii</sup> Including the still existing Kings School in Parramatta.
- <sup>iv</sup> This school, formed by the Australian School Society in 1834, was the first in Australia that was independent of church and state but which was destined to fail in 1843 due to lack of public support and direct opposition from the colony’s administrator Governor Bourke, who was in favour of Church Schools.
- <sup>v</sup> For a decade the national schools were completely separated from association of any kind with churches but in the colonies of Victoria and New South Wales by 1858 a major change in policy allowed church schools and privately operated schools to be treated as National Schools under the authority of the Board without their fixed assets and buildings becoming the property of the Board. This change, like their establishment in 1848, followed precedents set in Ireland and by this mechanism the school buildings of these ‘non-vested’ National Schools were allowed to be available for use outside school hours for community or religious use, a freedom not available in the ‘vested’ National Schools. The response was immediate and liberating for small church schools and within two years the number of schools under the authority of the National Schools Board had doubled in NSW and Victoria.
- <sup>vi</sup> Led by Henry Parkes.
- <sup>vii</sup> Although, later – as populations continued to grow and the number of schools increased – the centralist management approach, through the increasing size of its bureaucracy and the increasing demands placed upon it in managing an increasing number of schools, caused the educational services provided by each school – the learning environment – to diminish towards a centrally manageable low common denominator.
- <sup>viii</sup> The State of Tasmania had been the first to introduce compulsory education in 1869 and it was eventually universal in all states in Australia not long after 1900.
- <sup>ix</sup> “The Threat of losing 300 jobs brought employees of the Victorian Education Department bureaucracy out on strike on Monday” in ‘Vic department calls strike over job cut threats’, by Geoff Maslen, *Campus Review*, Vol 12, No.32, August 20-26, 2003.
- <sup>x</sup> The *Grimshaw Review* is an example.
- <sup>xi</sup> Presently based on data collected in a National Census of the Australian People seven years ago – the 1996 Census.

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