

Better Schools in Western Australia: A Programme for Improvement

Western Australia. Ministry of Education, 1987

Overview of the document

25 page glossy report prepared by Western Australia's newly established Ministry of Education as a follow-up to the review of the education system by the Western Australian Government Functional Review Committee. The report proposes a new structure for the Schools Division in relation to a climate of social change and changing government/community needs and priorities. The report outlines an overall rationale for change and new directions for schools including increased financial and administrative responsibility and authority at the individual school level, the creation of School Districts, and a reorganisation/decentralisation of the role of the Central Office. The report concludes with a proposed timeline for implementation which spans 1987 to 1992.

Keywords

Western Australian Ministry of Education; Schools Division; government and community needs and priorities; responsiveness to change; technological change and advancement; maintaining educational standards; self-determining schools; equity; devolution of responsibilities to schools; reorganization of school administration and management; decentralisation; District Offices; efficient use of government resources; Central Office; planning and quality control; authority of individual schools; school-community links.

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1. RATIONALE FOR CHANGE

- Defines the rationale for changing the current ‘administrative style’ of the WA education system. Recognises that Western Australia is undergoing a period of unprecedented change and that new technologies, the desire for students to stay in school longer and the need for education to be more in touch with the needs of the future have resulted in fundamental reconsiderations of the role of the school system.
- Notes that the need for efficient use of government resources is more important than ever and that traditional methods of administration (centralised staffing, overlapping responsibilities, ever-increasing funding needs etc) can’t be justified.
- Argues that the administrative style must be one of responsiveness and adaptability to community needs and Government priorities, flexibility in the use of resources to meet these goals and accountability (to Government and community) for the standard of service and funding.
- Notes that new proposals for the administration of Government schools are based on the following principles: Self-Determining Schools, Maintaining Educational Standards, Community Participation in School Management, Equity, and Responsiveness to Change.
- In regards to Self-Determining Schools notes that:
 - The efficiency and effectiveness of the system can be improved only if schools have sufficient control over the quality of education they provide.
 - “The Educational Department has been involved in the gradual devolution of responsibility to schools and this process needs to be completed.” (p. 5)
 - It is only at the level of the school that: the professionalism of teachers can be exercised; meaningful decisions about educational needs of students can be made; and programmes can be devised which reflect the wishes/circumstances of local communities.
- In regards to Maintaining Education Standards, notes that Government schools must guarantee that educational standards are met, should be accountable to the government and local community and should have mechanisms for monitoring school performance.
- In regards to Community Participation in School Management notes that close contact between schools and the community can foster a sharing of local resources and enhance the relevance and quality of school decision-making.
- In regards to Equity notes that the state-wide educational system should aim to maintain its high standards of equity and uniformity.
- In regards to Responsiveness to Changes argues that a new approach to administration is essential (in which flexibility and responsiveness to change are key features) to meet the challenge of providing high quality public schooling that adapts to social and technological advancement.
- In regards to Teachers notes that the existing centralised system does not encourage teachers to fulfil their professional role and an enhancement of the professionalism of teachers is a key principle underlying this report.

2. NEW DIRECTIONS FOR SCHOOLS

- Provides an overview of the proposed ‘new directions’, stating that “individual schools must become the focus for the administration and delivery of education” (p. 7)
- Notes that the proposed changes respond to changing priorities and aim to use government funds most efficiently.
- Describes the following mechanisms which are being introduced with the aim to ensure that the authority of individual schools will be achieved: The School Grant, the School Staffing Entitlement, School Staff Management, Selection of Teachers, Stabilising School Staffing, School Program Administration, School Based Decision-Making Groups and School Administrative Support.
- In regards to the School Grant notes the following:
 - A consolidated cash grant should be provided to each school, so it has greater discretion over resource acquisition and use. Schools will use funds for PD services, payment of school staff salaries (for specialists, casual/relief staff, ancillary support), purchase of resources materials (text books, furniture, etc), building/equipment maintenance, and utility charges.
 - Payment of salaries of permanent staff will not be devolved to schools (this will be administered by the central office).
 - When establishing the amount of the School Grant for each school, the factors that will be considered include: student numbers, geographic location, social factors (such as economic base of local communities), and special needs (programme requirements). The School Grant will be paid annually and initially ‘phased in’ over three years.
- In regards to the School Staffing Entitlement notes that each school’s staffing entitlement will be calculated to reflect student numbers, special needs and the circumstances of the school, however, individual schools will be free to decide the required mix of staff, as well as all instructional, clerical, administrative and ancillary staff.
- In regards to School Staff Management notes that:
 - Significant responsibilities for School Staff management will be devolved to schools and significant changes should occur to increase the capacity of the school to build a stable and effective staff team.
 - School principals will now be responsible for supervising all school-based personnel, the deployment of staff and assignment of workload, determining the permanency of new teachers, approval of all leave for school-based staff, and providing references to teachers for promotional purposes.
- In regards to Selection of Teachers notes that much of the responsibility for the selection of teachers will be devolved to individual schools so schools can become properly self-determining. Notes that this change will be introduced gradually but in the meantime steps will be taken to decentralise procedures and shift decisions to the district and school levels.
- In regards to Stabilising School Staffing notes that the high turnover of staff is disruptive to students and hinders the development of educational programmes, and that it is essential to stabilise the staffing of schools. Suggests that the movement of teachers be reduced by up to 50 percent, which can be achieved by changes to promotional levels and minimum periods of service before transfers.
- In regards to School Programme Administration notes that responsibility should be devolved to schools to enable them to be more responsive to the particular interests of local communities (for example in the selection of students for specialised

programmes and in the provision of student activities such as music, swimming lessons).

- In regards to the School Development Plan notes that schools should exercise greater self-determination and responsibility by being required to undertake a School Development Plan each year. Notes that this will involve documentation of the school's:
 - Educational goals/priorities (consistent with Government policies and community concerns).
 - Educational programmes to achieve goals.
 - Proposed use of facilities and resources (both financial and staffing).
 - Evaluation strategies to measure desired educational goals and standards.
 - Controls and reporting systems established to enable monitoring and auditing of resource usage.
- In regards to School-Based Decision-Making Groups notes that:
 - Schools are encouraged to form School-Based Decision-Making Groups to represent the community and staff (and allow participation by students). This will provide for greater community participation in the management of schools.
 - Such groups would be responsible for various matters including setting broad policies/priorities, establishing a resource management plan for the school, overseeing school expenditure and use of resources/facilities, participating in defining the principal's role and advising on appointment of principals.
 - Principals should work within the parameters set by the School-Based Decision-Making Groups, but should continue to exercise authority in professional matters regarding school operation.
- In regards to School Administrative Support notes that:
 - The question of administrative support in schools has been a concern for several years and with the recommended changes suggesting increased school-level responsibilities, this is a matter of priority.
 - The administrative support capacity of all schools will be improved by increasing administrative staff levels, the considerable upgrading of accounting methods and the considerable upgrade of information technology to minimise workload (e.g. the introduction of computing systems).

3. THE SCHOOL DISTRICT

- Proposes overall structural changes to the Schools Division in order to create a decentralised network of services.
- Notes that this will occur by grouping schools together to form School Districts, each of which will have between 20-40 geographically proximate schools with around half of the districts in the metropolitan area and half in the country.
- Proposes that schools in each district be responsible to a District Superintendent, who will be based locally in a District Office.

4. THE ROLE OF THE CENTRAL OFFICE

- Proposes that central administration be reoriented towards forward planning and quality control with its main role involving:
 - Formulating strategies to ensure policies and programmes of Government schools are coordinated and directed towards common goals and priorities.
 - Monitoring and evaluating goals and standards across the system.
 - Ensuring comparability and equity of education.

- Undertaking developmental work for new curriculum initiatives.
- Notes that once the proposed reorganisation is complete only around half of the positions currently held in Head Office will remain centrally located.
- Discusses the Corporate Executive of the Schools Division and notes that it will be assisted by the Executive Support Unit to plan and research future educational trends and to advise on initiatives to ensure equitable provision of education. Notes that the Corporate Executive should comprise the Executive Director (Schools), four Directors of Operations, the Director of Curriculum, the Director of Personnel and the Director of Corporate Services.
- Discusses the Operations Directorate and notes that four Directors of Operations will be located in Head Office, who will be responsible for: supervising the work of District Superintendents; ensuring schools services are in accord with system policies, priorities, goals and standards; and contributing to strategic planning for the Schools Division.
- Notes the following in regards to the Curriculum Directorate:
 - The role of the Curriculum Directorate should be to establish and monitor curriculum policy and educational goals and standards, provide schools with guidelines and syllabuses, coordinate and plan system-wide curriculum initiatives and provide system-wide curriculum support services and materials.
 - The Curriculum Directorate should consist of three branches:
 1. The Schools Support Branch: This branch will be responsible for producing guidelines for schools on curriculum policy goals and standards to be met (and monitoring and reporting on these standards/goals); establishing a framework to help schools, District Superintendents and District staff to monitor, evaluate and report on curriculum standards/goals; establishing mechanisms for providing advice on policy and planning issues affecting curriculum quality; liaising with other agencies in relation to curriculum policy; and representing the Schools Division on curriculum issues.
 2. The Programmes Branch: This branch will be responsible for developing state-wide guidelines for curriculum innovations (e.g. Literacy programmes, centrally prepared tests, etc).
 3. The Services Branch: This branch will be responsible for administering on-going state-wide curriculum programmes (particularly Commonwealth Programmes) and providing curriculum services which cannot be devolved to districts or schools (e.g. Curriculum resource materials, consultancy services, state-wide sports and physical education events, the integration of handicapped students into schools etc).
- Discusses the Personnel Directorate and argues that it should be responsible for broad policy issues related to the equitable staff of schools and School Districts and it should comprise three branches: the Industrial Relations Branch; the Personnel Service Branch; and the Staff Planning Branch.
- Discusses the Corporate Services Directorate and argues that it should merge the relevant activities of the existing Administration and Finance Directorates, and the activities of the Buildings Branch and the W.J. Rooney Library and should comprise three branches: the Buildings Branch, the Administrative Services Branch and a Finance Branch.
- Presents the Organisational Chart which visually displays the hierarchy of job descriptions and departments proposed. The Executive Director is at the top, moving

downwards through the various Directors, Superintendents and administrative Branches.

5. IMPLEMENTATION

- Offers a brief overview of the importance of maintaining direction and momentum towards the proposed changes and makes a specific note that the successful reorganisation of the school systems will depend heavily on the commitment and capacity of school principals to effect changes at the school level.
- Proposes that during 1987-1989 specific resources should be committed to implementation over and above those levels appropriate for the normal operation of the Schools Division.
- Presents a two-page table titled 'Proposed Timeline for Implementation of Changes' which is organised via the various proposed foci for change down the left column, with the remainder of the table charting the proposed timeline for implementing each focus (between 1987-1992). The foci for change are:
 - School Development Plans (1987-1990)
 - School-Based Staff Entitlement (1987-1990)
 - School Staffing Levels (1987-ongoing)
 - School Staff Management (1987-1992)
 - Staff Mobility (1987-1989)
 - Automated School-Based Management Systems (1987-1990)
 - School Cash Grant (1987-1990)
 - School Decision-Making Groups (1987-1990)
 - District Structure (1987-1988)
 - Corporate Executive (1987)
 - Head Office Directorates (1987-1988).