



Office of the Auditor General Western Australia

SUMMARY OF THE PERFORMANCE AUDIT

Right Teacher, Right Place, Right Time: Teacher Placement in Public Schools

Report 6 – August 2011

Background

The successful delivery of educational outcomes depends on having qualified and skilled teachers in every school. The Department of Education (DoE) employed just over 22 000 teachers during 2011. Teacher salaries totalled just over \$2 billion (53 per cent) of DoE's 2010-11 budget of \$3.8 billion.

WA is one of the most geographically dispersed education districts in the world. Ensuring that 'hard to staff' schools have sufficient teachers has been a key driver behind developing a staffing system that can centrally transfer teachers anywhere in the State. Each year approximately 8 000 to 9 000 central placements occur.

In line with the Classroom First Strategy announced in 2007, DoE has recently given schools new ways to attract teachers who are more suited to their local needs. The key changes are the Independent Public Schools (IPS) initiative announced in 2009 and the School Selection of Teaching Staff (School Select) policy announced in May 2011.

Introducing any significant change to staffing processes carries risks for DoE. Changes have to meet the diverse needs and concerns of schools, teachers, children, the education system and the community.

This audit focused on the filling of teacher vacancies in public schools at metropolitan, country and remote locations. We examined two questions:

- Are DoE's processes for filling teacher vacancies meeting its objectives?
- Has DoE identified and developed strategies for managing risks associated with all its processes for filling teacher vacancies?

Audit Conclusion

Having a staffing approach that delivers the right teacher to the right place at the right time is critical to students achieving successful educational outcomes. Despite critical findings from five reviews in 10 years DoE has been deterred, until recently, from making significant changes to its staffing processes. This has been due to the complexity of the challenge and the risk of failure.

In the past three years, DoE has incrementally introduced alternative staffing processes that allow schools to opt out of the central placement process. However, DoE has not undertaken a comprehensive and structured risk analysis of these changes to staffing processes. Doing so should be a priority as 2012 could be the first year that a majority of positions are filled through devolved processes.

DoE has informally identified some risks associated with changing staffing processes, however risk management strategies have not yet been put in place to address these. Failure to address risks could eventually result in unfilled vacancies as well as disadvantaging some schools and teachers.

DoE has not yet established measures of efficiency and effectiveness based on clear objectives to enable it to assess whether the new processes are delivering improvements and benefits for schools, teachers and students.

Key Findings

The devolution of recruitment to schools through IPS and School Select means that schools should be better able to match their needs to the skills and capabilities of available teachers.

Central placement has been reviewed five times in 10 years, each time identifying problems with flexibility, timeliness, inefficiency, gaming and other unintended negative consequences. DoE has been slow to act on the recommendations from these reviews largely because of the risks involved in changing the staffing processes.

The number of IPSs is increasing and, with School Select now available to all schools, 2012 may be the first year in which the majority of teacher placements occur through devolved rather than central processes.

DoE has not undertaken a structured and comprehensive risk analysis of the implications of using a devolved model of recruitment. As a consequence the risks associated with changing these processes have not been identified or adequately considered.

DoE has not yet put in place strategies to address the key risks that it has identified. In the absence of risk management strategies, the needs of some teachers and schools may not be fully addressed.

DoE will not know if the changes to staffing process are delivering benefits until it establishes clear objectives and performance measures, in particular:

- The objectives for the new staffing processes have not been fully defined and linked to strategic and operational planning.
- DoE has not estimated the costs of its new staffing processes, or its cost effectiveness compared to central placement.
- DoE is not tracking key data to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of its staffing processes.