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The challenges of providing free education in Papua New Guinea

Grant Walton, Tara Davda and Peter Kanaparo

Abstract

Introduced in 2012, the Tuition Fee Free (TFF) policy has become a flagship policy of the Papua New Guinea (PNG) government. Since 2012, further changes to this policy have been introduced; these changes continue to reduce financial barriers to school attendance and attempt to recentralise control of education funding. What have these policy changes meant for schools, administrators, non-governmental service providers (such as the church), and other key stakeholders? This paper draws on qualitative and quantitative research conducted in 2012 and 2016 in East New Britain and Gulf provinces – the former performs relatively well in delivering services, the latter relatively poorly. Interviews were conducted with education representatives, community members, government and church officials and other stakeholders to assess the impact of PNG's fourth and most enduring attempt at providing free education. Researchers visited 10 schools, four district administrations and two provincial administrations. The research approach allows for a comparison of progress and regress in these schools between 2012 and 2016. It is argued that while the TFF policy has helped improve access and strengthened school autonomy, recent policy reforms have threatened school-community relations, undermined school quality and weakened conditions for effective service provision. The paper will provide recommendations about how PNG policy makers and others might address some of the challenges.

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The challenges of providing free education in Papua New Guinea

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A busy classroom in East New Britain

1. Introduction

The Papua New Guinea (PNG) government's Tuition Fee Free (TFF) policy was introduced in 2012 and has become a flagship policy of the PNG government. In its present form, the policy provides elementary, primary and secondary schools with 100 per cent subsidies for students' tuition fees. An early evaluation of this policy (conducted in 2012), which featured in National Research Institute of Papua New Guinea (NRI) and Australian National University's (ANU) *Lost Decade? Report* (Howes et al., 2014) found that it was mostly delivering on the promises set out by the National Department of Education (NDoE), although concerns were raised about the impact on school quality and monitoring of subsidy payments.

Since the introduction of the TFF policy, there has been a move to further reduce the fees associated with schooling in PNG. At the start of 2015, the government banned schools from charging project fees (fees levied at the school level to fund particular projects) and subsequently banned church agency fees (fees charged by church administered schools). There have also been moves to recentralise some funds. What have these policy changes meant for schools and sub-national administrators in PNG? The *Lost Decade? Report* provided a quantitative assessment of the initial roll out of the first year of the TFF policy. This paper examines the impact of recent education policies by providing a more in-depth and qualitative look at the issues facing schools in two provinces: East New Britain (ENB) and Gulf.

Why examine these two provinces? The *Lost Decade? Report* provided an assessment of schools and health facilities in eight provinces, including Gulf and East New Britain. It found that Gulf performed poorly across a number of indicators, while East New Britain topped the tables for school quality and infrastructure. For example, between 2002 and 2012, the proportion of parents claiming that most children in the community attended school rose from 37 to 90 per cent in East New Britain; yet in Gulf it fell from 63 to 37 per cent (Howes et al., 2014: ix). The aim of the research informing this paper is to better understand the reasons for these differences. Why does East New Britain out-perform Gulf, particularly when both are faced with significant remoteness issues? We also examine the different ways church and state schools have responded to the implications of these policies.

These questions are approached through a case-study methodology, which draws data from select schools in both provinces. The paper proceeds as follows. The first section provides a background on PNG's recent education policies[2], while the second presents the methodology guiding the research. The third section presents the key findings from the schools visited in both Gulf and East New Britain. It examines the impact of free education policies on student enrollments and attendance as well as teacher availability; evaluates the fallout from the government's ban on school and project fees; considers the changing importance of national funding over time; examines oversight

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[2] *The objective of this paper is to highlight the findings of the research, and present policy recommendations. Given this, we have not provided a literature review in this paper; for those interested in a broader background on education policy in PNG we point the reader to Howes et al, 2014.*

and community engagement; and concerns about the 're-centralisation' of education funds to District Development Authorities (DDAs). Finally, the paper concludes with a reflection on the significance of these findings for those seeking to improve education standards in PNG.

2. Background

Introduced in 2012, PNG's Tuition Fee Free policy is one of the few government initiatives that have shown significant signs of success – particularly during its initial roll out (Howes et al., 2014). More recently however, questions have been asked about whether the policy is unravelling, as accusations of mismanagement (Robinson, 2016) and questionable policy changes emerge.

One of the key features of the TFF policy is that subsidies are sent directly to school accounts, bypassing provincial and district administrations. When the policy was introduced, each primary school was allocated funding equivalent to 270 kina per student, allowing schools to decide how it should be spent. Once subnational administrators had approved their budgets, schools were able to directly access this funding. This meant schools controlled more funding than before.

The *Lost Decade? Report* found that, in 2012, most primary schools were receiving TFF subsidy payments, and both school administrators and the community had more say in how the funds were spent (although few reported receiving visits to monitor spending). Since then, there have been attempts to reduce the level of involvement schools have in the management of subsidies.

At the start of 2016, the PNG Government issued a directive announcing it would split the TFF payment into three components: a cash administration component of 40 per cent; a teaching and learning component of 30 per cent (for the purchase of school materials); and an infrastructure component of 30 per cent (Kuman & Kombra, 2016). According to the directive, schools would only be paid the cash administration component, leaving 60 per cent to be distributed by district and national level government officers. While the government has had a policy of retaining funds for teaching and learning materials which pre-dates this directive, the new policy means that additionally, funding for infrastructure is to be held in a trust account in district treasuries, with the distribution of these funds determined by district officers through newly established District Education Implementation Committees (DEICs) (Kuman & Kombra, 2016).

At the time of writing (April 2017), this policy had not been fully implemented. Conversations with officials from the NDoE revealed that the department had yet to implement the proposed funding dissection. The roll-out of DEICs has also stalled, with the Minister for Education Nick Kuman recently suggesting that, while approved by Cabinet in late 2015, administrative structures and accounting mechanisms are yet to be finalised (Staff Reporter, 2016). Despite this, personal communications with department officials confirmed that progress had been made in the National Capital District (which covers the nation's capital, Port Moresby) and Central province. By coincidence, the pilot for the research informing this paper was conducted in Central province and researchers consulted with district officials, parents, and school management and teaching staff about the impact of this new initiative. Section three of this paper includes findings from Central province about their experience with DEICs, along with impressions of the new institution from stakeholders in Gulf and East New Britain.

In 2015, the PNG government went even further in its objective to make schooling more affordable and bolster enrolments: it abolished project fees, in addition to previously abolished school fees. Minister Kuman reasoned that the government already subsidises schools and that it would mean fewer children would be turned away. The penalty for non-compliance is ostensibly harsh. During a media conference, Kuman threatened schools that failed to comply, saying, "Any school that imposes project fees will not be given the TFF [subsidy]" (Walton, 2015).

Since this initial policy change there have been numerous backflips – for instance a circular published in national papers in January 2016 allowed for project fees to be charged (Kuman & Kombra, 2016). However, in January 2017, Minister Kuman and Education Secretary Uke Kombra made it clear that the charging of project or school fees was not permitted. They stressed that "No fees of any sort relating to student enrolment be imposed upon parents" (Loop PNG, 2017). Kombra has said that if found to be charging fees, schools would be suspended, the accusations investigated, and "the

TFF payment for the school will be withheld until such time as the investigations are completed and the findings are presented to the Department to decide on which action to be taken" (Loop PNG, 2017).

The TFF policy is no doubt fragile. In real terms, the allocation for the TFF subsidy has been declining since 2012, and there are concerns that the current fiscal crunch could squeeze subsidies further (Swan and Walton, 2017). There are numerous reports of TFF payments being released late, resulting in the Morobe (PNG's largest province) Education Board announcing that all schools in the province will be required to impose school fees in 2017 to make up for shortfalls in TFF funding (Badui-Owa, 2016; Swan & Walton, 2017). At this stage, it is difficult to know if the TFF and associated free education policies will continue beyond 2017, but the signs are not good given PNG's worsening financial situation. Despite these challenges, the TFF policy remains the longest running of the country's four attempts to institute fee-free education (Walton & Swan, 2014).

3. Aim and methodology

This section outlines the methodology framing the research undertaken to inform this paper. It first outlines the aims and research approach; it then outlines the research questions, locations, research instruments and provides a profile of respondents.

3.1 Aims and research approach

This paper forms part of a collaboration between the University of Papua New Guinea's School of Business and Public Policy and the Australian National University's Development Policy Centre. Broadly, this collaboration aimed to enable a better understanding of the impact of decentralisation policy and expenditure reforms on schools and education systems, as well as health facilities and systems. This paper focuses on findings from research into the country's education system; it provides a multi-scaled analysis of provincial and district administrations through to schools and their communities.

The research builds on the results of two previous quantitative surveys. In a 2001/02 survey, researchers from tNRI and the World Bank sampled randomly selected schools across eight provinces of the country. The resultant report highlighted the challenges faced by schools and health facilities (World Bank & National Research Institute, 2004). A decade later, in 2012, the National Research Institute and ANU Development Policy Centre replicated this survey by visiting, where possible, the same schools and health facilities. The result was the aforementioned *Lost Decade? Report* (Howes, et al 2014). The research informing this paper provides both qualitative and quantitative approaches to understand the impact of policy changes for schools and subnational education administrators. Researchers went to ten schools (all of which were a part of the 2012 survey), across four districts in two provinces. This allowed for more in depth study of the issues facing schools and the education system. All subsequent discussions that refer to 'the sample' make reference to a sample of ten schools, five in Gulf and five in East New Britain, which were visited in both 2012 and 2016.

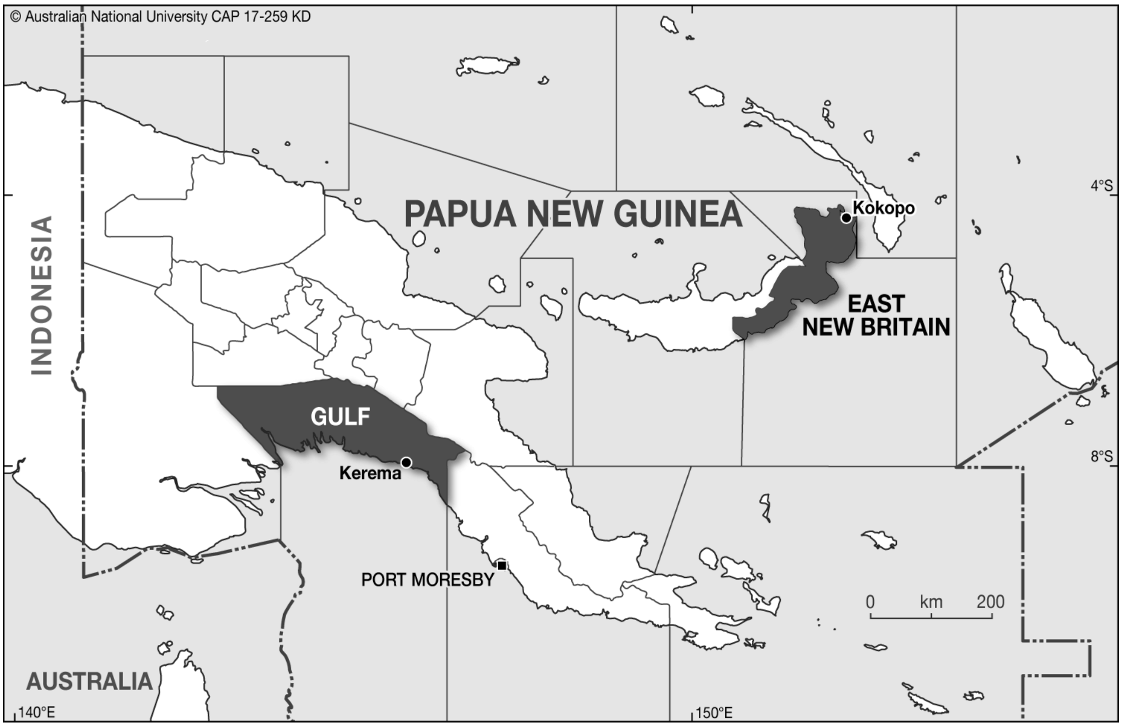
The research informing this paper takes a multiple case study approach, where schools and education systems are compared. At the school level, schools of different types (church versus state), and in different locations (Gulf versus East New Britain) are compared. This means the analysis does not provide a statistically representative sample of schools, rather it allows for a more in-depth look at how schools and the education system operate in different contexts, and have responded to key policy changes.

The research involved a design and preparation phase, which was conducted in early 2016 and included a pilot in Central province. The data collection took place over a two-month period, between May and June 2016. Analysis of results took place between July 2016 and March 2017.

3.2 Locations and selection process

The research was conducted in East New Britain and Gulf (Image 1). Within these provinces, two districts included in the 2012 study were chosen (Pomio and Gazelle in East New Britain, and Kerema and Kikori in Gulf). In each province, five schools were sampled (ten in total).

Image 1: Map of Gulf and East New Britain



The research sought to understand how schools performed in better and worse performing districts in Gulf and East New Britain. To choose which districts to visit researchers drew upon a 'quality index' – a composition of performance indicators[3]. Data on school performance (compiled through the 'quality index') was collected in 2012 as a part of research for the *Lost Decade? Report* (Table 1).

Table 1 uses the 'quality index' to show the average score at province and district level of schools visited in 2012. At province level, it highlights that schools in ENB generally performed better than schools in Gulf. At district level, it shows that schools in Gazelle performed better than those in Pomio, while schools in Kerema generally performed better than those in Kikori. As Gulf only has two 'open' districts, it was an easy decision to visit both (Kikori and Kerema). In East New Britain, researchers chose to go to the

[3] *The quality index is a composite score of school performance in 2012. It comprises: quality of classrooms and teachers' houses, other school infrastructure, percentage of teachers regularly working, effectiveness of the school's Board of Management, time teachers spend teaching, attendance, and sufficiency of text books. A higher score indicates higher quality. We thank Anthony Swan for providing analysis for this index.*

best performer (Gazelle) and the worst (Pomio). This approach allowed the researchers to analyse good and poor performing districts within the same provinces.

Table 1: District quality index scores (data collected in 2012)

Province	**District**	**Average Quality**
ENB	Gazelle	0.69
	Kokopo	0.67
	Pomio	0.61
Gulf	Kikori	0.46
	Kerema	0.50

Table 2 uses the same index to provide a profile of individual schools visited in East New Britain, while Table 3 profiles those visited in Gulf. Both tables show how school quality and administration varied. Church schools in both provinces were run by Catholic or United churches.

Table 2: School profiles, East New Britain (data collected in 2012)

School	District	Quality index	Administered by church?
1	Pomio	0.66	No
2	Pomio	0.52	Yes
3	Pomio	0.81	No
4	Gazelle	0.71	Yes
5	Gazelle	0.81	No

Schools in Gulf province were generally poorer in quality (Table 3) than those sampled from East New Britain (Table 2). This is a reflection of the province's overall poor performance in the education sector. In both provinces schools were located in both accessible (for example near a major highway) and remote (for example accessible only by boat) areas.

Table 3: School profiles, Gulf (data collected in 2012)

School	District	Quality index	Administered by church?
1	Kerema	0.51	Yes
2	Kikori	0.55	No
3	Kikori	0.36	No
4	Kikori	0.41	Yes
5	Kerema	0.63	Yes

These two provinces have very different histories and capacities for service delivery. In sum, East New Britain has been given a head start by its culture and historical engagement with the West, as anthropologists Errington and Gewertz (1993) have highlighted. It is one of the few provinces where government is relatively effective, and generally indicators of service delivery are high (Howes, et al, 2014), compared to other provinces in PNG. Gulf, on the other hand, has faced enormous geographic, historic and social challenges (Walton and Jones, 2017; Errington & Gewertz, 1993). As a result, there is evidence of different development outcomes in these two provinces, and hence, they are case studies that provide very different contexts[4] in which to study the implementation of 'national' education policies.

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[4] *Key differences between East New Britain and Gulf are further explored in Walton and Jones (2017).*

3.3 Research instruments and respondents

The research in this paper drew upon four different research instruments. The first comprised structured interviews with provincial and district administrators, and head teachers. The questionnaire for these respondents was similar to those utilised in 2012, with most of the same questions. Essentially, questions helped to quantify the changes that have taken place in schools between 2012 and 2016. Eighteen individual structured interviews were conducted, with ten carried out in East New Britain and eight in Gulf (Table 4). More males than females were consulted as more males were employed in administrative positions; respondents included head teachers (acting and permanent), standards officers, and provincial education advisors.

Table 4: Respondents to individual-structured interviews

		Interviews	Total
Gender	Male	13	18
	Female	5	
Position	Acting head teacher	2	18
	Head teacher	8	
	Standards officer	6	
	Provincial education advisor	2	
Province	East New Britain	10	18
	Gulf	8	

The qualitative component consisted of a series of semi-structured interviews (the second research instrument) and focus group discussions (the third research instrument) with key stakeholders from the government, church, community and school. This included provincial and district bureaucrats, head teachers, teachers, members of school management boards (BOM) and school Parents and Citizens (P&C) Committees, and church administrators or representatives. Forty-four semi-structured interviews were conducted, with roughly two-thirds of respondents in Gulf, and one-third in East New Britain (Table 5). The majority of respondents were male, reflecting the gender distribution encountered in administrative and school positions.

Table 5: Respondents to semi-structured interviews

		Interviews	Total
Gender	Male	35	44
	Female	9	
Position / Occupation	Teacher	6	44
	Head Teacher	9	
	Community rep	6	
	LLG, district or provincial government administrator or church administrator	23	
Province	ENB	18	44
	Gulf	26	

Given the gender imbalance of semi-structured interviews, additional focus groups were conducted with women. A total of eight were conducted - three with males, five with females – with the same number conducted in both provinces (Table 6). All were conducted in Tok Pisin (PNG's lingua franca), audio recorded and subsequently transcribed into English.

Table 6: Number and location of focus group discussions

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2"></td><td>Focus groups</td><td>Total</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Gender</td><td>Male</td><td>3</td><td rowspan="2">8</td></tr>
<tr><td>Female</td><td>5</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Province</td><td>East New Britain</td><td>4</td><td rowspan="2">8</td></tr>
<tr><td>Gulf</td><td>4</td></tr>
</table>

These research instruments were supported by a number of informal interviews (the forth research instrument) with a variety of stakeholders.

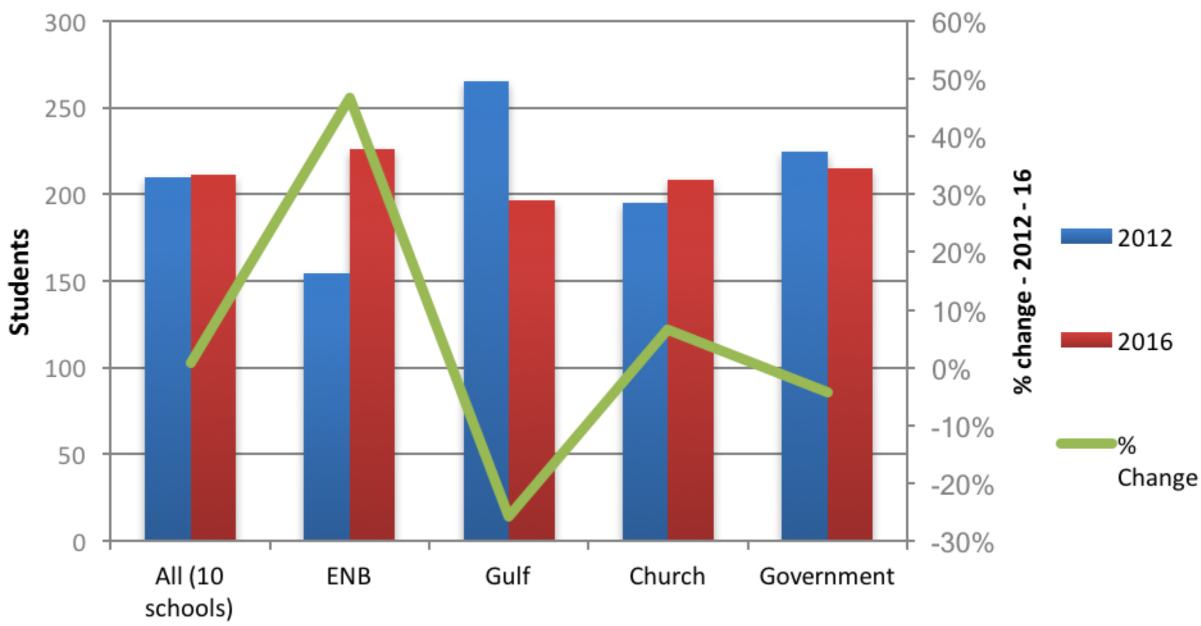
4. Results

As described in the previous section, sampled schools were situated within very different social, economic, cultural and administrative contexts. Schools were visited in both 2012 and 2016, providing insights into how they have been shaped by policy changes over that period. Again, it should be noted that these trends are not statistically representative of schools across the nation or individual provinces (this would require randomisation and a larger sample); however, this case-study does provide an in-depth understanding of the way schools and administrators have responded to recent policy changes – insights that larger surveys can overlook.

4.1 The impact of free education policies on enrolments and attendance

Improving access to schooling has been the TFF policy's first objective (Papua New Guinea Deparment of Education, 2012). Figure 1 shows that on average, the ten schools sampled in 2016 had experienced a stabilising of per school enrolments since 2012, with an average of 211 students enrolled in 2016. Schools visited in East New Britain had experienced a substantial rise in enrolments, while enrollments in Gulf schools had declined.

Figure 1: Average enrolments per school (2012 - 2016)



Schools in East New Britain were acutely aware of the changes to enrolments they had experienced. A district officer in the province said:

> Before there was no TFF, you could not see crowded classrooms…and then people saw the money come. As soon as it was mentioned that education was free, all our classrooms became overcrowded. We have to build extra classrooms every year.

There was much evidence to suggest that classrooms were being built across the province, from Gazelle to Pomio. For example in one school in Pomio, East New Britain, construction was underway to accommodate new students (see Image 2). In Gazelle, researchers saw a crew of builders constructing new classrooms paid for by TFF subsidies.

Image 2: Classroom construction, Pomio, East New Britain.

Schools sampled in Gulf reported a very a different experience under the TFF policy, with enrolment numbers declining. Some respondents suggested this was a product of poor quality facilities. One board member in Kikori district said:

> Our children are not being prevented [from going to school]…. But look at the facilities… most of the children have left the school just because the learning room here is very small. They are just squeezed.

In one school in Kerema, a teacher reported that teaching staff and community members had built tables and chairs, to compensate for inadequate resources at the school. The teacher himself had made three tables. Teachers in other parts of the province also suggested that poor infrastructure meant that students were losing interest in schools. A teacher in Kerema commented: "[Some students] quit because there were no materials. So enrolments have really dropped". In another school, one teacher said, "we have some classes that stopped altogether because there's no teacher". Given the reductions in enrolments, in an attempt to encourage parents to reengage, some schools were trying to promote greater community participation. One teacher in Kerema said the school had started "Pikinini [child] sports just to make things happen and get [parents reengaging]" and to encourage them to consider enrolling their children.

The TFF policy's emphasis on increasing enrolments has also reshaped the learning environment within schools. As the TFF policy is open to all citizens, regardless of their age, many older students have come into the system. One standards officer in Gulf said:

> The older kids, we discourage them. There is one who is 36 years old. It makes a lot of difference. They are not motivated; they don't stay too long in school. They come at the start of the year, but many drop out.

Another standards officer commented that older students often started at a lower grade, and were sometimes accelerated quickly because of their age, which could be disruptive to other students' learning.

As enrolments have stabilised, so too has the percentage of female to male students, with an average of just fewer than 50 per cent of female students in both 2012 and 2016 (Table 7).

Table 7: Percentage of enrolled students who are female

	2012	**2016**
All (10 schools)	48%	49%
ENB	49%	51%
Gulf	43%	47%
Religious	51%	47%
Government	46%	54%

Classroom attendance improved in the sampled schools: in 2012, 67 per cent of grade 5 and 6 students were present a week before researchers visited, in 2016 that had risen to 79 per cent.

This had been achieved, in part, through the efforts of the schools themselves. In Kerema one teacher explained how they worked to improve attendance at their school:

> We have the attendance list with the head teacher and the teachers. If there is a consecutive 21-day absence, parents must come and explain…if there's no good reason, [the matter is] handed over to the BoM [Board of Management]. Or they are asked to transfer to another school.

In Kikori one head teacher explained their school's process for checking attendance:

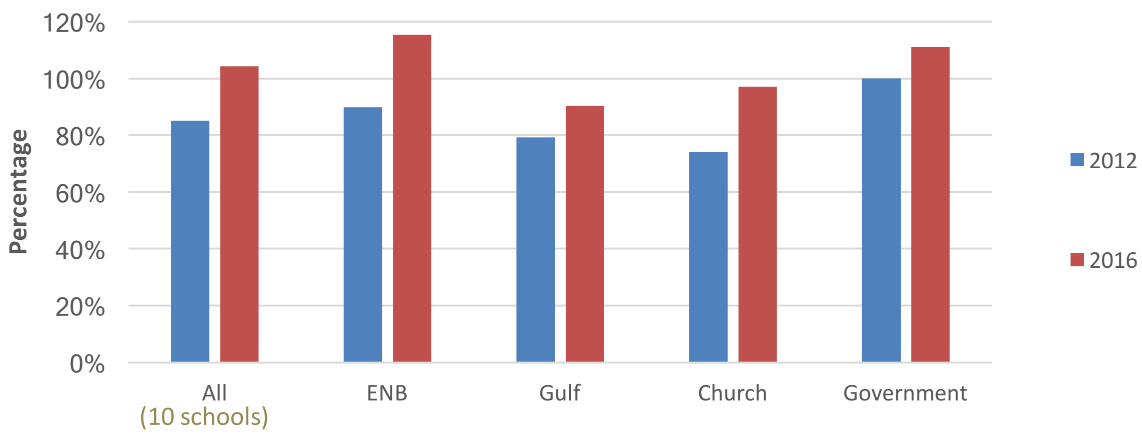
> The teachers are encouraged to have checklist for all students on a daily basis. The attendance clearly tells us which students are keen to learn and coming to school every day, and which students are not attending classes.

While a number of schools saw attendance figures rise, some had significant problems in keeping students in schools. In Pomio district, East New Britain, students were absent due to opportunities for employment in oil palm plantations. In a community focus group, researchers were told that some children were skipping school to work with their parents in the nearby oil palm plantation. There were concerns about attendance in other areas too. In another school in Pomio, a Board of Management (BoM) chairman said: "Some students start at school and do not attend for the rest of the year". In Gazelle district, one district administrator suggested that the reason for poor attendance was a result of parents not valuing the TFF policy, and because:

> They are too engaged with other aspects of life in their community and they do not send their children to school – often it is because they are focused on village customs…Children attend sing sings between one-two times per month. These are related to marriages, weddings, feasts and dances.

There were signs that more teachers were regularly working in schools visited. Interviews with head teachers revealed that overall there were a third more teachers now working in schools: in 2012 a total of 46 teachers were 'regularly working' at schools, by 2016 that had increased to 73, an average of just over 7 teachers per school. This has meant that there have been improvements in enrolled student-to-working teacher ratios, overall there were 46 students to one working teacher in 2012, and 29 students to one working teacher by 2016. This improvement was reflected in the ratios of working teachers to those posted (i.e. the proportion of posted teachers who regularly attend school). Figure 2 shows there was an overall improvement across the sampled schools; with the proportion of working teachers improving from 85 to 104 per cent. It is likely that this figure is higher than 100 per cent due to schools engaging temporary teachers (because the number of officially allocated teachers has not kept pace with the increase in enrolments since the TFF), and misallocation by administrators (explored further below). Government schools and those in East New Britain were more likely to have more working teachers than those officially posted.

Figure 2: Percentage of working teachers-to -posted (2012- 2016)



The availability of teachers was a product of remoteness. While some schools in Gulf had seen more teachers enter schools (on average there was one more teacher per school in 2016 compared to 2012), in the most remote schools struggled to attract staff. A district official in Gulf confirmed this problem; reflecting on the paucity of teachers in Kikori, she said: "teachers are not teaching in remote schools and most of them are and want to teach in and around [the relatively less remote] Kikori station". Yet there are signs that Gulf is trying to turn this problem around. A provincial level official said while staffing difficulties in the province had been acute over the past few years there were efforts to train more local teachers. The provincial government, the European Union and the Australian aid program had supported local students to study teaching around the country. He was hopeful that this would continue to bolster student numbers, so that, "schools closing down because of a lack of teachers will be a thing of the past". Without teachers regularly turning up to work, some sampled schools in Gulf have had no choice but to cancel grades.

In East New Britain, issues around staffing were significantly different. A standards officer noted that:

> Some schools are overstaffed, meaning the head teacher and one or two senior teachers might not have [to teach] a class. I checked against the number of classes and started pulling out positions and reallocated teachers [to different schools]. There is no accuracy about how many staff are needed. The NDoE figures are wrong.

This shows the critical importance that accurate information plays in allocating resources in PNG.

4.2 The impact of banning school and project fees

As described in the background section of this paper, the PNG government's ban on both school and project fees was in place when the 2016 research was conducted. Did this lead schools to refuse to collect money from parents? The results of the research suggests not: by 2016 only one church school, in Gulf province did not charge parents project or school fees. Figure 3 shows that among schools in the sample, although official school fees halved from 24 kina to 12 kina per student between 2015 and 2016, project fees more than doubled – from 19 to 47 kina per student. At the time of data collection, eight out of ten of the sampled schools were charging an average of 59 kina per student (in total), the highest fee level since the introduction of the TFF policy in 2012.

Figure 3: School and project fees, 2011-2016 (2016 prices)

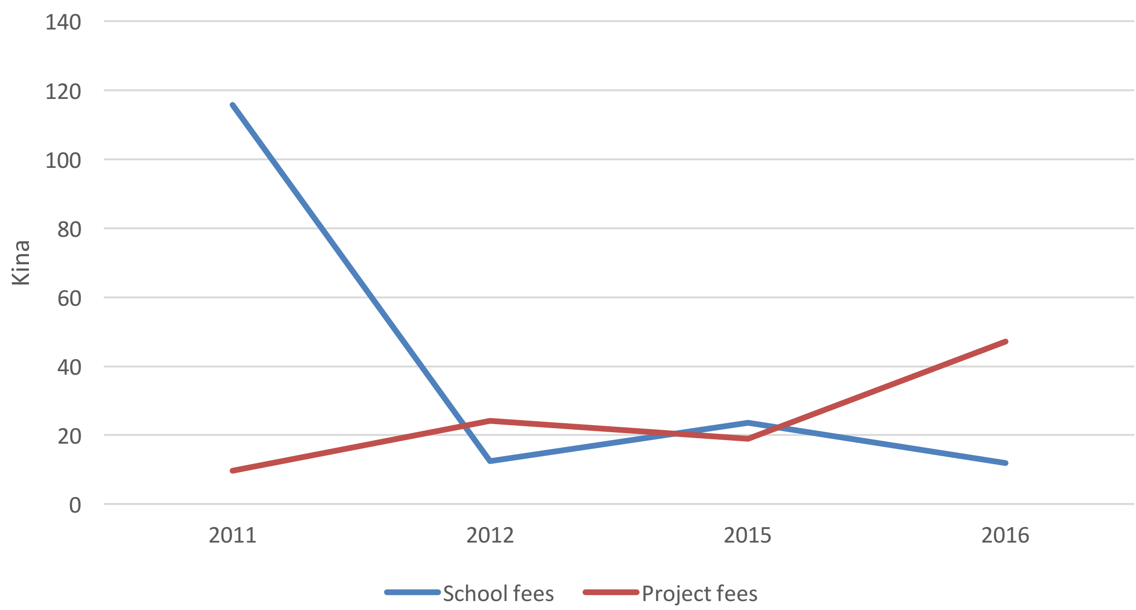


Table 8 shows that among the sample, school fees were slightly higher in Gulf and church schools, than in East New Britain and government administered schools.

Table 8: Official school fees, per student (2016 prices)

School fees	2011	2012	2015	2016
All (10 schools)	115.67	12.42	23.56	12.00
ENB	68.79	0.00	21.20	10.00
Gulf	174.26	24.83	26.50	14.00
Church	77.88	24.83	26.50	14.00
Government	145.90	0.00	21.20	10.00

Increases in charges for project fees were driven by schools visited in East New Britain and government schools (Table 9).

Table 9: Official project fees, per student (2016 prices)

Project fees	2011	2012	2015	2016
All (10 schools)	9.74	24.18	18.97	47.22
ENB	5.19	14.90	25.44	55.00
Gulf	17.31	38.80	10.60	37.50
Church	21.63	30.16	27.09	38.75
Government	3.25	24.83	11.66	54.00

Table 8 and 9 (above) present the amount schools visited officially charge, but the amount actually collected from parents is another matter. It was not possible to collect data for a sufficient number of schools to make a meaningful comparison of the funding received from parents (which, by the time the research was conducted, was illegal for many schools). However, a number of qualitative interviews highlighted the difficulties many schools now face in volunteering and collecting money from parents, as a result of government policy banning the collection of fees.

Indeed, many were concerned that free education policies had reduced the willingness of communities to volunteer their time. This was the case even in East New Britain, where provincial administrators permitted schools to continue charging project fees arguing that the East New Britain Provincial Education Act allows them to circumvent the national government imposed ban on project fees – this is the reason official project fees are higher in East New Britain than Gulf. Despite this, even in East New Britain the national ban appears to have shaped parents' willingness to contribute. This was illustrated by a district official, who said:

> There is talk from the government that they will subsidise the project fee too. This is making some parents become very lazy. They rely too much [on government funding]. They do a bit of community service [and] cleaning up, but anything to do with finance they are starting to consider the government's responsibility. They become more relaxed so that's not good.

In one school in East New Britain, the head teacher and community representatives complained they were not able to raise funds from parents for the same reason. In 2015, the school had raised 12,000 kina through fundraising efforts, but as parents increasingly perceived the government as wholly responsible for school funding, by mid-2016 parents had contributed just 200 kina for the year. The head teacher said he did not think parents would be forthcoming with any more money. This was, he believed, a direct consequence of the government's promotion of 'free' education.

Schools in Gulf faced a different problem. They did not have a Provincial Education Act to push back against the national government's ban on project fees, leaving some schools to find creative ways to generate support from parents. A female teacher from Kikori district described how the school had reframed project fees to make them more palatable to parents:

> Last year parents were paying project fees. Then the education department did not allow us to charge these, so we had to change that 'project fee' name to another name… We called it 'maintenance fees' at the start of the school year [in 2015]. [This was important] because we are not receiving the TFF.

Charging project fees was important for schools facing late or non-arrival of TFF payments. Reflecting on funds received in 2015, one member of the BoM in Pomio said: "we only received two out of the four payments", making the raising of funds from other sources all the more important.

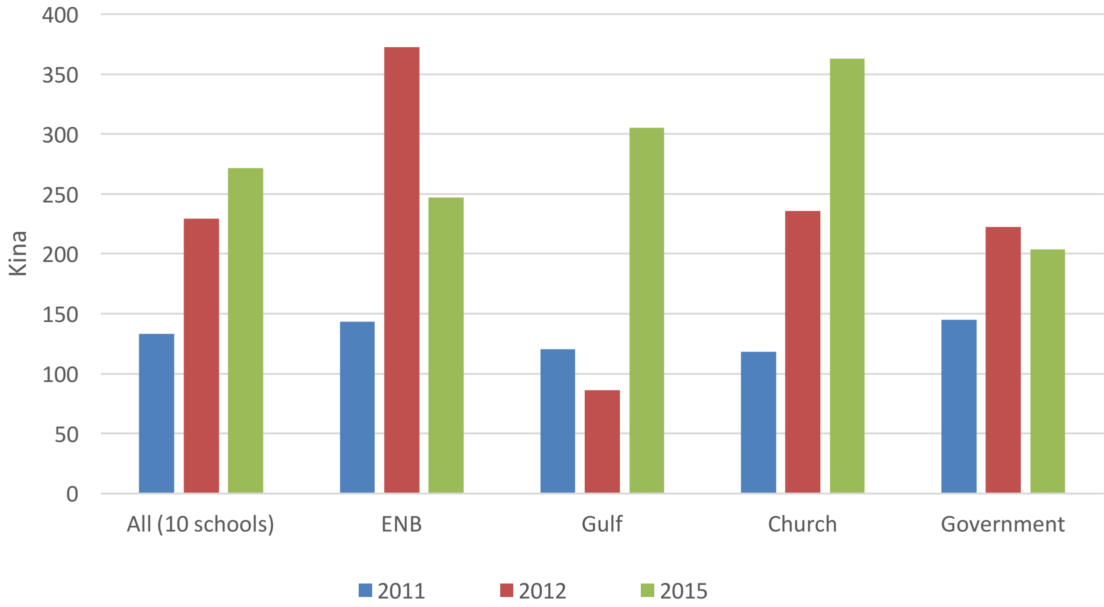
Free education policies have also affected churches, and therefore the ban on project fees has other implications for the relationship between the State and church administrators. The Catholic Church is currently in dispute with the government and Department of Education over the Acting Secretary for Education's Circular No. 6 of 2016 which orders schools in receipt of the TFF subsidy not to impose any fees, including project fees and church agency fees. A letter contesting this circular was addressed to the Prime Minister, signed by the President of the Catholic Bishop's Conference of PNG, Bishop Arnold Orowae, and published in the Post Courier in May 2016 (Orowae, 2016). It argued that the circular transgressed the National Education Act, and Provincial Education Acts in the 13 provinces where these are in place. As table 8 and 9 illustrate, the ban on agency fees has not stopped church schools from charging parents (although church schools visited charged less project fees than government-run schools, suggesting church schools may have adhered more closely to the ban on project fees).

4.3 Official payments to schools

The TFF policy has made funding from the national government more important for schools than ever before. Before this policy, funds from the national government were directed through provincial or district administrations and collected by school officials. Since its introduction in 2012, funds have been delivered directly to school bank accounts. This meant that in 2012, schools across eight provinces relied on national subsidies for 80 per cent of their funds, compared to only 52 per cent in 2011 (Howes et al., 2014). In 2012, provincial governments were providing just 2 per cent of school funds, down from 9 per cent in the year before the policy was introduced (Howes et al., 2014).

This raises questions such as how much of the TFF subsidy has reached schools, and whether schools are still dependent on the national government for funding? In the schools sampled, income from the national government's TFF subsidy increased substantially between 2011 and 2012, the first year the TFF policy was introduced (Figure 4). By 2015, even more funding-per-student was reaching schools visited – on average schools received 272 kina per student, two kina more than the official national subsidy. This increase was driven by schools visited in Gulf. At the same time, schools visited in East New Britain experienced a reduction of almost one third in per student funding.

Figure 4: Average funding from national government, per student (2016 prices)



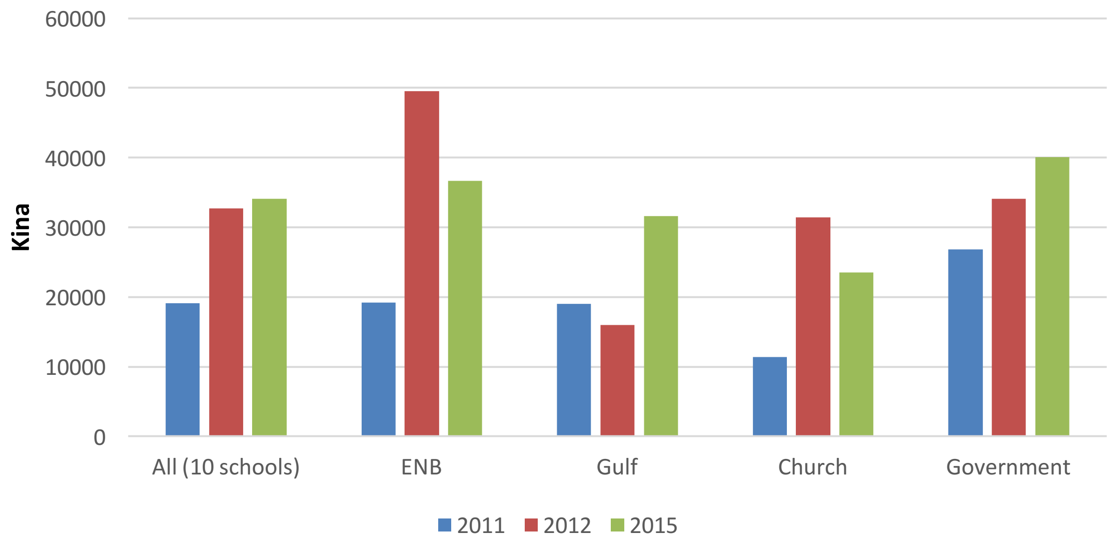
The reasons for the divergent fortunes of these schools over the past few years is evident in interviews with key school stakeholders. A head teacher in Gazelle district, East New Britain, commented, "What we see is high enrolments but the TFF [policy] is not matching up [with enrolments]." A district education officer, who also noticed this, said:

> We don't know how they are calculating the TFF to our schools… it was supposed to be based on enrolments. But [even though enrolments have increased], the TFF is becoming smaller. We don't know how they come up with that amount.

With schools receiving less TFF subsidy than expected, it has been necessary for them to fall back on surrounding communities to get things done. As one BoM chairman from Pomio said, "Sometimes teachers have no material and because of [the] TFF [policy] we have no money. But the village works together to help [the school]". At one school in East New Britain, scarcity of funds has led the school to move away from engaging with contractors, instead favouring cheaper labour from within the community. A member of the Board of Management said that previously the school had paid contractors for school building work, but more recently it paid community members one kina per day to work on school buildings and maintenance. This, he said, had substantially cut labour costs.

To what extent can schools rely on funding from other organisations? Overall, school income from provincial and national government and other organisations (such as NGOs and businesses) increased between 2011 and 2012, but remained constant between 2012 and 2015 (Figure 5). However, there were significant variations, with schools visited in East New Britain and church schools receiving less funds on a per school basis between 2012 and 2015.

Figure 5: Combined school funding – from national and provincial governments and other organisations (2016 prices)



In terms of the total funding schools received (funding from all sources), on a per student basis, schools across the sample experienced an increase in funding between 2011 and 2012. In 2015, funding also increased to 294 kina (see Figure 6). However, schools sampled in East New Britain suffered a reduction in per student funding of approximately one-third between 2012 and 2015, while those visited in Gulf experienced an increase, likely due to a decline in enrolments throughout the year. In the same period, funding to church schools in the sample increased slightly, while government schools in the sample witnessed a small decline in overall funding.

Figure 6: Total funding from national, provincial, other sources; per student (2016 prices)

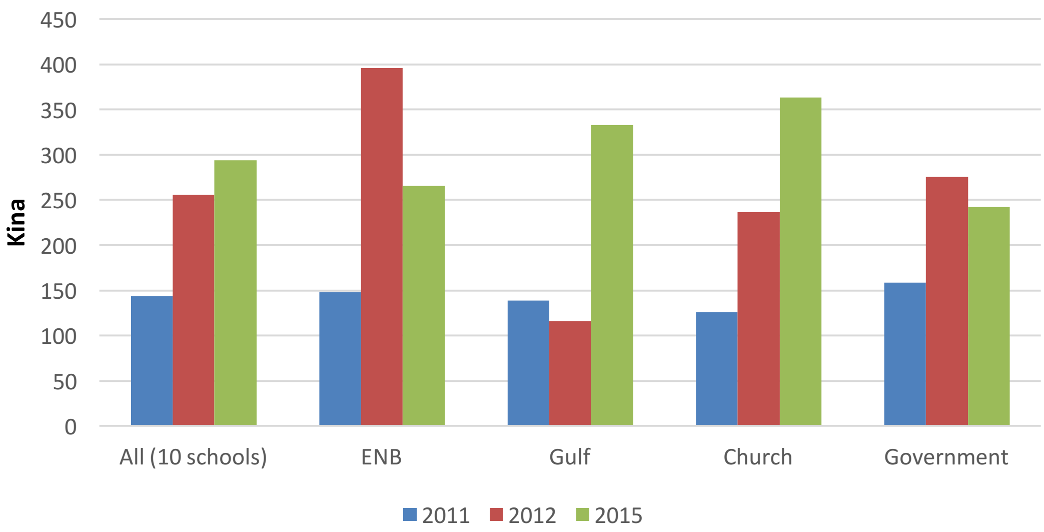
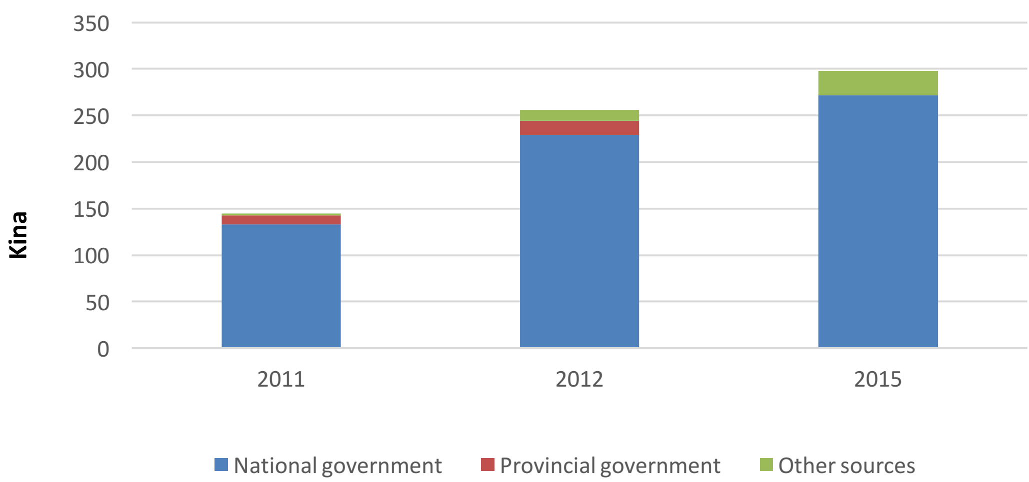


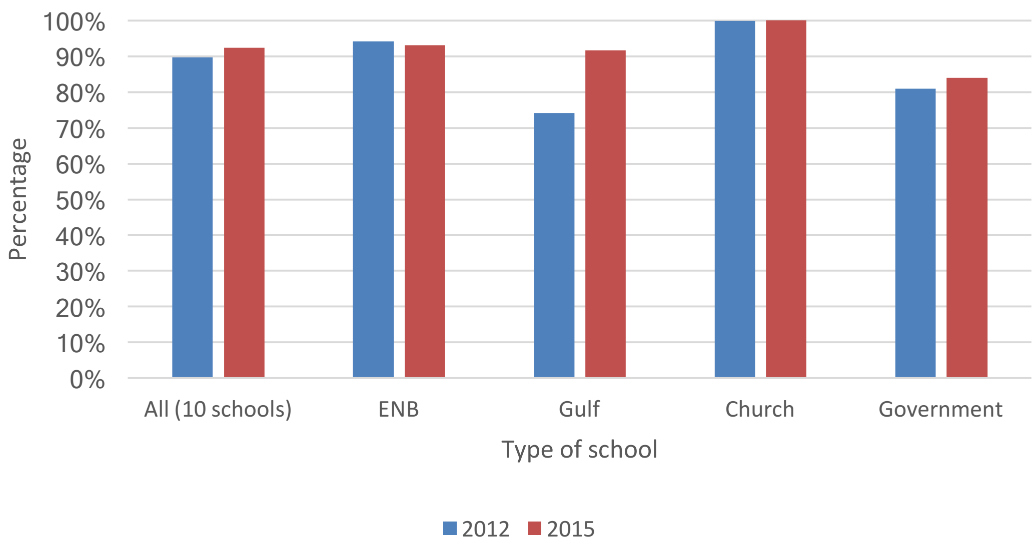
Figure 7 shows the extent of school reliance on national government funding. While schools visited received funds from provincial governments in 2011 and 2012, by 2015 this support had completely dried up, and there were no examples of schools receiving funding from provincial governments. Between 2012 and 2015, over 90 per cent of official school funds came from the national government (compared to funding from other organisations, such as provincial or district funds, or donors/NGOs).

Figure 7: Per student income by official funding source (2016 prices)



Across the sample, church schools were most reliant on government funding (Figure 8). In both 2012 and 2015, all official (and legal) funding received by church schools came from government sources. Schools were lucky if the church provided small donations. In 2015, only one church school (in Gulf) received 100 kina in funding from the church, out of a total income of over 36,000 kina.

Figure 8: Percentage of funds received from national government (2012 and 2015)



Dependence on government funding has shaped how local communities view the role of the church. Before the introduction of the TFF policy, funding for church schools was channeled through the church administration. Now that subsidies are transferred to individual school bank accounts, schools have far more autonomy over how the subsidy is spent and managed. As a result, the church plays a diminished role in school administration. As one senior church administrator said:

> Before [government funding] was coming to the church and we monitored [it], and there was improvement. Now when [funds go] into the schools, the head teacher, the board, and the committee to control infrastructure [the proposed 30% infrastructure component of the TFF policy] and everything else…we have no say…

He said that this has led to more instances of misappropriation because the churches have less control and oversight of funds. It is difficult to know how extensive mismanagement at the school level is. What is clear, however, is that sampled schools were far more empowered to manage their own funds than in the past, and consequently, the church administration has been sidelined from school management (although individual local clergy play an important role in other areas). This loss of control is likely reflected in the Catholic Church's recent legal challenge of the government's 2016 free education policy, (Orowae, 2016)[5].

Since the introduction of free education policies and the decision to relay funds directly from the national government to the bank accounts of recipient schools, some schools in the sample have begun to question the benefits of being labeled a 'church school'. In Gulf province, one head teacher in charge of a school run by a church said: "[This school…] can be [classified as] a government school because there's no [financial] contribution from [the church]".

This was a common refrain within church schools in the sample, with some suggesting that the introduction of the TFF policy had significantly reduced the church's role. This suggests that government policies may have started to erode the standing of the church in some communities. While the church continues to play an important role in providing religious instruction, choosing teachers and providing extra oversight, they are far less engaged with delivering and overseeing school funding than before the introduction of the TFF policy.

The sidelining of the church administrators poses a number of problems not least because church schools have specific advantages over government-run schools. For example, the presence of priests and pastors in school administration provides an extra check on school needs, and can expedite the reporting of problems to church administration. In addition, teachers are chosen by the church themselves, often

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[5] *As outlined in section 4.2 the church argued that the government ban on project and church fees transgressed the National Education Act, and Provincial Education Acts in the 13 provinces where these are in place.*

resulting in church schools having higher quality staff (Howes et al, 2014). The government could be inadvertently marginalising one of the few institutions with a proven track record of quality education.

4.4 Monitoring and community engagement

Standards officers are employed by the National Department of Education to oversee and monitor schools. They are stationed at district administrations, and report to senior standards officers who are based at the provincial level. On average, the schools in the sample received two visits from standards officers in 2015, slightly up from the average number of inspections in 2011 (1.6 per year). Standards officers do their best to perform physical inspections of schools, but many face significant challenges in travelling to and accessing the most remote schools; some require officers to walk for several days. In East New Britain, some complained that standards officers were not performing inspections regularly enough. In one school in Pomio the head teacher said:

> There is a shortage of standards officers. There should be more... Some standards officers spend money on visiting Kokopo or Rabaul instead of performing inspections. If they do come, they don't have time to audit the TFF [subsidy]– their visit is too short.

The problem was even more acute in schools visited in Gulf, where standards officers were faced with enormous challenges in getting out to the province's most isolated schools. A standards officer in Gulf lamented that there was not enough funding to get out to the most remote schools:

> We are supposed to visit four times per year, but most schools are on the coast and it is very expensive to get there. For example, [named] school has not been visited in the last six years. I visited last year. It took three or four hours to get there by road. The trip is quite rugged, and there are no funds.

This respondent reported that standards officers only received 2,000 kina a year to pay for their school inspections. However, the cost of travelling to just one remote school often exceeded this allowance, a result of the high cost of boat fuel. Some standards officers economised wherever they could, sleeping in schools to save on accommodation costs and walking as much as possible. But travelling to all schools in the province was beyond even the most hardened and committed standards officer.

Given this, the frustration felt by standards officers at not being able to visit schools was palpable. One said:

> I've come a very long way, but I give up. I have the willpower but not the means to go into my schools. It is very frustrating. I am not [supposed to be] an office worker, yet I sit here all day. I have the SLIP [School Learning and Improvement Plan] but I can't get out to teachers or schools. There is no money for travelling, nor money for photocopying the plan or sharing it.

In Gulf province, a standards officer broke down and cried when describing the difficulties they faced, while some reported taking on personal debt in order to visit remote schools. Another standards officer, who was responsible for some of Gulf's most remote schools commented:

> I spent 1,400 kina of my own funds in 2015 to get to schools. I have applied for reimbursement but it hasn't been given [back].

This shows that the emotional and financial cost to standards officers, particularly in Gulf province, is significant. Not only are standards officers constrained by limited resources, but their morale is gradually being eroded.

While schools now receive the majority of their income through the TFF subsidy, the ability of standards officers to monitor these payments has been severely undermined by a lack of information. In East New Britain, one district education officer said: "We have no idea how much each school is receiving…how do I monitor schools [when] I don't know how much the school is receiving?" In other words, the district and provincial administrators did not know how much funding each school was meant to receive each quarter, nor the actual amount received. To solve this problem, the province's administrators were looking to employ a TFF policy officer to monitor the funds going to each school and relay this information to the districts.

Given the challenges facing standards officers, churches and communities play an increasingly important role in providing oversight. A head teacher in Kerema noted that while inspections by standards officers were not regular, “The parish priest visits us every day because he resides here in the community”. Yet, as noted in the previous section, local clergy are playing a diminished role in the management of some schools. Local clergy also apply pressure to the provincial government and church officials to address school challenges. One senior church administrator explained:

> If there’s no teacher there in that school, parish priests will be the one to say: “Hey man, look at this. My school doesn’t have a head teacher, or there’s one vacant position. What are you doing about that?”

Some churches supply their own provincial administrators to visit schools and provide oversight – although there is evidence their influence in schools is on the wane. One church administrator said that he had received reports from government standards officers, but in recent years these reports had become less frequent.

4.4.1 Challenges to community engagement

Under the TFF policy, the school community has ostensibly become empowered like never before. The policy calls for funding decisions to involve the head teacher, the Board of Management (BoM) and the Parent and Citizens committee (P&C). The head teacher and BoM are responsible for decisions involving the spending of school funds, while through the P&C committee; parents are responsible for monitoring and agreeing to funding allocations. The TFF Management Manual calls for quarterly meetings between parents and the BoM, and notes that:

> Parents, guardians and community leaders are responsible for monitoring the head teacher and Board of Management to make sure they spend the [TFF] money correctly (Papua New Guinea Department of Education, 2012: 5).

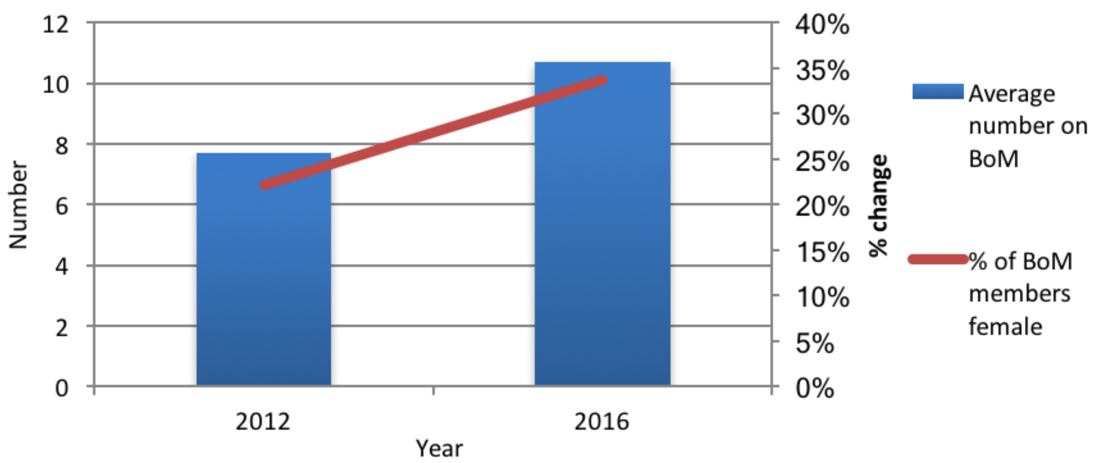
All schools in the sample reported having a P&C committee and a BoM; many reported that the BoM and head teacher consulted citizens about the budget. However, on average schools were not quite meeting the mandated target of convening four meetings per year. Table 10 shows that in 2011 and 2015, the average number of both P&C and BoM meetings in sampled schools remained unchanged at three per year.

Table 10: Community engagement in schools (10 schools)

	2011	2015
Average number of BoM meetings	3	3
Average number of P&C Meetings	3	3

Under the TFF policy, the amount of money managed by the BoM and head teacher has significantly increased. This has likely been a contributing factor in the increase in people involved in the BoM (in sampled schools), with an average of 11 members in 2016, compared to eight in 2012 (Figure 9). There has also been a shift in the gender of BoM members: in 2016, 34 per cent of BoM members were female, compared to 22 per cent in 2012.

Figure 9: Number on BoM; Percentage female (2012, 2016; 10 schools)



Unfortunately, larger BoMs have not always resulted in more harmonious decision-making. With the BoM playing a central role in determining how funds are spent, the head of the BoM – the chairperson – has become a hotly contested position. In some schools, this has led to disputes. In Gulf, a previous chairman said:

> I am trying to be the BoM chairman. I was once, but was sidelined by the treasurer and secretary. I am a caretaker BoM chairman, there is no formal

> position but there is a verbal understanding with the school. There is [ongoing] conflict over who wants to be the chairman.

As a result the school's BoM did not meet in 2016. According to the spurned BoM chairman, this resulted in a funding gridlock:

> The school has funds but they have not been used. [Because of the ongoing dispute over BoM positions] our treasurer doesn't want to approve teachers' spending of funding. Teachers need materials, and we'd like to withdraw funds but the treasurer won't let us. Sometimes the teachers use their own funds and complain to me.

An assistant teacher from the same school explained that the struggle for control of the BoM had to do with clan rivalries, with the BoM Secretary and the chairperson from one ward (the lowest administrative unit) excluding those from another ward. He alleged only the treasurer and chairman:

> have a say in management of [TFF] funds. Not the community, not the other members of the board of management, not teachers, not children, not church, not other stakeholders.

Such conflicts were a similar theme in conversations in a number of other schools visited, particularly in Gulf.

4.4.2 Other pressures on community involvement

Schools rely heavily on the surrounding community to provide a range of services. For instance, in one school in Gulf province, the head teacher explained that every Tuesday, the community helped to fix fences and toilets, and tidy the school grounds. Poor relations between communities and schools can lead to a host of problems, as one BoM chairman in Gulf explained:

> The relationship between school and the community is very poor. The community steals desks, tables and chairs from the school. The community is not willing to allow the school to expand by building more classrooms…All in all, the

community's attitude towards the school is not good and they are [only] expecting something (i.e., money) from the school.

In turn, the quality of schooling can be significantly shaped by the nature of community-school relations.

Across the schools sampled, land issues also posed a significant threat to community-school relations. In both East New Britain and Gulf, a number of schools found themselves in constant negotiation with surrounding communities over ownership of school land. Some had managed to placate landowners by ensuring they were represented on the BoM, however, external developments could ignite conflict over land, leading to compensation claims and hostilities. In Gulf, the promise of royalties from a promised Liquid Natural Gas project changed the way the surrounding community perceived the value of land used by the school. A senior teacher explained that land owners now expected the school to pay them royalties.

Such disputes needed to be handled with care. In Kikori, land disputes forced the closure of a school for a number of years; while in neighbouring Kerema, conflict over who owned school land resulted in its closure in 2013. In the latter example, landowners had recently unsuccessfully petitioned the Department of Education for compensation for the school using their land, even though the school was founded in the 1950s.

In Pomio, East New Britain, landowner disputes were exacerbated by logging and oil palm operations. One male respondent commented:

When the [oil palm] company came in, land disputes became a common issue in the community. Prior to the company, we all were living peacefully, but when these people got access to royalties… [they developed a] royalty mentality and want other services to pay them royalties [such as the school and health facility] like the company is doing.

There was a perception that the dispute was perpetuated by the younger generation; with this respondent saying:

> [When the school was established] the elders and those who joined forces to establish the school worked together and agreed that this land would become a

> state land. However, these younger generations have a different mentality… resulting in the dispute.

Community members had called for the government to mediate, but had yet to receive a ruling on the matter.

In sum, this section has highlighted the potentials and pitfalls of community engagement, the following examines the potential for channeling education funding to district administrations.

4.5 DDAs and education funding: 'de-centralisation' or 're-centralisation'?

The national government's proposal to divert 30 per cent of funds from schools to district administrations – District Development Authorities (DDAs) – has some potential benefits. It promises to pool educational resources so that government administrators are able to build large-scale infrastructure projects – projects that schools would be unable to otherwise afford. DDAs are to establish new District Education Implementation Committees (DEICs) to decide on projects in districts. These DEICs have been established in Port Moresby and Central province, but not in other provinces. This section draws on data from Central province (where the pilot stage of this research was conducted) as well as East New Britain and Gulf, to highlight the potential and pitfalls of these proposed institutions.

4.5.1 The DEIC in Central province

In Central province, the newly established DEIC was chaired by the administrative head of the DDA (known as a CEO or district administrator), who was appointed by the Open MP[6]. As a result, some respondents were concerned this newly established structure could be politically compromised. In the words of one district officer, "The CEO will never say no to the MP. If he says no, he is at risk [of losing his job]". District officers also noted that the District Services Improvement Program (DSIP) funding was being directed to shore up support for the MP and LLG presidents in the 2017 elections. Given

[6] *Open electorate MPs typically cover one administrative districts*

the power MPs have, it is possible they could wield influence over spending decisions, and thus shape the distribution of funds channeled through DEICs.

In the two primary schools sampled in Central province, there was apprehension about what the DEICs would mean for funding allocations. One teacher said that even though they thought the TFF policy had improved schools, the DEICs were "not a good initiative, as we may not get the money we are supposed to." Given that in 2015, district funding (allocated to education infrastructure and channelled through the 'District Education Improvement Program'[7]), and which promised to provide an extra 3 million kina per district reportedly never arrived; this fear is justified.

In some cases, putting decision-making powers in the hands of district officers also increases the risk of substandard infrastructure or maintenance works. At one school in Central province, a contracting company employed by the district to build a classroom in 2012 was allegedly connected to a member of the DDA. The contractor reportedly received 200,000 kina but failed to finish the job and vanished, forcing the school to use 15,000 kina of its own money. The building was completed but poorly built.

In comparison, both schools had examples of the successful independent management, funding and building of teachers' houses and classrooms with funds TFF subsidies. They had engaged community members in the building works. In one example, the president of the school's BoM was in charge of the construction. In both schools, these buildings were in better condition than those built by outsiders. Thus, without significant changes to governance practices, pooling educational funding at the district level is unlikely to lead to cheaper or better infrastructure. Indeed, it may push prices up and reduce quality.

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[7] *Set up in 2015 to fund education projects – this was a separate scheme and not associated with DEICs*

4.5.2 Responses to promised DEICs in Gulf and East New Britain

In Gulf and East New Britain, many public servants and school officials had little knowledge about the proposed policy, but those that did were worried that it would prevent funds from reaching needy schools. For example, a church administrator expressed doubt that the district administration would release these funds, given past promises about increases to education funding that have failed to materialise. One church advisor said:

> Over the years, funds have been released to the districts [such as the 3million district funding in 2015], but schools have never accessed anything from those funds.

While there was scepticism in both East New Britain and Gulf about the potential of DEICs, those in Gulf expressed the most incredulity towards it. There, district administrations were on the verge of dysfunction. MPs often dominated decision-making within DDAs, rendering those designated to keep them accountable powerless, and transgressing the 2014 District Development Authority Act (which sets out procedures for keeping MPs and other decision makers accountable). As one senior district official, with extensive first-hand experience of district administration noted: “The open members [MPs] direct the money themselves – they spend it where they got their votes”. In other words, district funding was being directed, not where it was needed, but to build patronage networks. Given this, there is a risk that channeling more funds to district administration will mean that the most vulnerable schools are not prioritised[8].

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[8] For a more in-depth examination of the differences in administrative capacity between East New Britain and Gulf see Walton and Jones (2017).

5. Discussion and conclusions

Policies aimed at reducing the costs of schooling have changed significantly since 2012. Initial assessments of the TFF policy in the *Lost Decade? Report* were cautiously optimistic (Howes, et al 2014). The research undertaken and discussed here supports this sanguine assessment, with the TFF policy (in particular) receiving praise from a number of different stakeholders. However, as highlighted, since 2012 policy changes have led to a number of negative consequences challenging the benefits of the original 2012 TFF policy.

A key objective of the TFF policy and the government's directive to ban project fees has been to improve student access to schooling. Yet in schools visited in Gulf, enrolments declined as students and parents were put off by the poor quality of schooling. This suggests that free education policies that focus on getting students into schools, without concurrently improving quality education and monitoring, are taking a toll in some provinces. In turn, improving access to education is not only about reducing school and project fees, it is also shaped by the way teachers are supported and monitored, the ability of standards officers to inspect schools, and the quality of classrooms, teaching resources and other amenities. Ensuring quality education is also about improving data collection and analysis. In East New Britain, poor data had led to a misallocation of teachers. This highlights the importance of ensuring that data held by national and subnational administrators is accurate. In the rush to increase access to schooling across PNG, these issues have been overlooked. These findings suggest it is now time to place them at the forefront of education policies.

The TFF policy eliminates school and project fees; however, many schools are charging these despite government directives. This is partly a result of late and erratic delivery of government subsidies, but also a reflection of the absence of other funding sources. With schools more reliant on national government funding, delays place schools in a vulnerable situation. Since the introduction of the TFF policy, church schools have become more reliant national government funding, and church administrators now play diminished role in school management and oversight. Free education policies have also changed the way some communities view the church's role in service provision. Since church schools now receive funding directly from the government, many involved in the schools visited considered them ‘government schools’. Enforced reliance on government funding has resulted in a national dispute over the right of church schools to charge fees (see Orowae, 2016). Given that churches play a significant role in the provision of educational services, and the government subsidy is notoriously late, the reaction of church administrators is unsurprising.

As reports of schools defying the directive on charging fees continue to surface, it is recommended that the government officially reinstate both project fees and agency fees to allow schools to manage funding shortfalls – many schools are charging these fees anyway. As per previous policy guidelines, provincial governments should set upper limits on these fees. Compliance with the limits should be monitored by standards officers, and in the case of church schools, church officials.

The TFF policy’s devolvement of fiscal management to schools has empowered communities to design and implement projects that benefit students and teachers. It allows for funding to be more effectively allocated, as communities, not bureaucrats, have a better understanding of what schools need. Occasionally, it has encouraged thrift. In some locations, schools have drawn on community skills and labour to cut down on building costs. This devolution has also likely encouraged more people and encouragingly, women, to join the BoM – a key institution for school governance. These grassroots initiatives are a strength that should be further supported.

Indeed, nearby communities can play a role in helping schools to overcome a number of the problems identified in this paper. Schools visited in Gulf were able to improve student attendance by ensuring teachers and community members jointly monitored students and reprimanded parents on their children’s non-attendance. This is one area where East New Britain administrators and schools can learn from those in Gulf. In the absence of official oversight, the local community can provide an effective alternative. Local clergy also play an important role in this regard: they help to provide a sense of discipline and ethics through their engagement with schools. They occupy a unique moral position within communities, and can provide guidance when there is little bureaucratic or official input.

However, schools still need oversight from outsiders. Standards officers play a crucial role in monitoring spending and pedagogy. They can also mediate disputes about the

BoM – which appear to be increasing, given the rise in funding associated with these positions. This paper has reported on funding-constrained standards officers who are unable to perform essential oversight and monitoring roles. Without the subnational feedback provided by this role, it is not possible for the national administration to know how schools are faring.

Standards officers need two things: resources and information. Resources are most desperately needed in Gulf, where standards officers face enormous challenges in visiting schools and are becoming increasingly demoralised. There are also signs that the most basic information about school funding is failing to make its way to schools, and vice-versa. If standards officers are not able to visit schools, they are not able to inspect and monitor funding use, nor can they relay information on the impact of government policies to administrators. In both Gulf and East New Britain, senior administrators and standards officers did not know how much funding each school was supposed to receive. This needs to be rectified. The National Department of Education should also be working to improve information sharing with the subnational level. It is heartening that there have been some steps made toward achieving this, with Secretary for Education, Uke Kombra, announcing in late 2016 that TFF coordinators had been appointed in provinces across the country (Naime, 2016). It is important that these coordinators are properly resourced, and have appropriate information about school payments and schools in their province.

The proposed recentralisation of funds – from schools to DEICs (with 30 percent of funds set to be administered by this institution) and from schools to the central government (with an additional 30 per cent of funding set to be administered by the NDoE) – is still slated to occur. Findings presented here suggest that there are three key problems with this policy. First, it may inadvertently increase the cost of infrastructure, particularly if contractors rather than communities are involved. Second, it is likely to further empower MPs and lead to a strengthening of patronage politics, particularly in provinces such as Gulf where the administration system is already stretched. Third, there is growing suspicion that districts are unwilling to redistribute funding intended for the education sector. It is advisable therefore, that the roll out of this policy is delayed until DDAs are better established, and there is greater separation between administrators and politicians.

In summary, this research highlights the impact of recent policies in very different contexts for service delivery. While these are case studies, they point to the types of challenges that schools and subnational administrators are likely to face across the country. The research suggests policy makers now need to focus on the less politically popular aspects of education policy, such as improving teacher quality and oversight and monitoring. It also means being brave enough to roll back policies that will harm education outputs, particularly moves to take even more funding away from schools through establishing DEICs.

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