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Our Reference: DOC2006/007396

Senator Andrew Bartlett
Chair
Environment, Communications, Information, Technology and the Arts
References Committee
Legislation Committee
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Senator Bartlett

RE: INQUIRY INTO WOMEN IN SPORT AND RECREATION IN AUSTRALIA

Thank you for your letter of 3 August 2006 seeking information about the approach taken by the Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) regarding the nature of sporting activities for school-aged children.

Please find a Report (attached) providing background information regarding the Health and Physical Education Learning Area, followed by a series of responses to each of the questions raised by the References Committee.

I hope that the information value-adds to your evaluation processes and appreciate the opportunity to provide a response to your inquiry.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Margaret Banks".

MARGARET BANKS
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

// September 2006



REPORT: INQUIRY INTO WOMEN IN SPORT AND RECREATION IN AUSTRALIA

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The NT Curriculum Framework includes Health and Physical Education as one of its key Learning Areas.

The Health and Physical Education Learning Area is divided into three Strands:

- Promoting Individual and Community Health
- Enhancing Personal Development and Relationships
- Participating in Physical Activity and Movement.

Key elements within the Physical Activity and Movement Strands include:

- Movement patterns and the co-ordinated actions of the body in different contexts and settings
- Development of knowledge, understandings and skills for a range of games, sports and physical activity
- Development as a skilled participant in play, games, sports, gymnastics, aquatics, outdoor activities and recreation
- Concept of health related fitness
- Benefits of physical activity
- Recognition of the socio-economic and environmental factors affecting participation in physical activity.

The NT Curriculum Framework enables schools to deliver flexible and inclusive educational programs that are relevant to the diverse and changing contexts of Northern Territory schools and local communities. Thus, Physical Education programs currently offered in NT schools vary from school to school, and are dependent upon a range of variables including teacher expertise, facilities, resources, student ability, class sizes, skills and developmental level of students. The type of programs offered varies significantly between Primary and Secondary Schools in urban, rural and remote areas of the NT.

Currently Northern Territory schools fall into the category of Primary Schools (Transition – Year 6/7), Secondary (Years 7/8-12) or Senior Secondary (Year 11 and 12). However, with changes towards Middle Years in 2008, schools will be re-classified according to Primary (Transition – Year 6), Middle Years (Year 7-9) and Senior Secondary (10-12), which may have an effect on the delivery and implementation of Physical Education in the compulsory years of schooling (T-9) with plans to mandate two hours of physical activity each week for students in this cohort.

In regards to the Reference Group's request, please note the NT's response to your questions:



1. What physical education classes are required and what are available (but non-compulsory) in each year of school?

Primary Schools offer Physical Education or sport for each class on a weekly basis. Early childhood and Perceptual Motor Programs are required by all schools at least once per week. However, some schools offer 3-5 sessions per week of 30-45 minutes duration. Early childhood classes are generally not involved in sport at school or inter-school level.

Middle/Upper Primary classes are required to provide Physical Education or sport classes at least once per week for 2 hours. In most schools additional time for Physical Education is usually at the teacher's discretion and if the teacher has an interest in sport – this is often doubled. Some Primary schools have a specialist Physical Education teacher or a classroom teacher who volunteers to take 'PE release' for colleagues. Many Primary Schools have a focus on Fitness at some stage of the year – with some classes participating in daily fitness programs early in the morning, but this is often at the teacher's discretion. Some Schools also conduct swimming classes with the assistance of the NT Royal Life Saving Society or local swimming pool instructors.

In Secondary Schools there is a considerable degree of difference – some schools provide compulsory Physical Education for Year 8 and 9 students, whilst others offer a compulsory component for a term or semester in Years 8 or 9 to coincide with staffing, subject choices and timetabling requirements. However, Physical Education is offered as an elective subject in most Secondary Schools from Years 8-12. In some schools 'girls only' classes are provided if there is sufficient interest, and numbers warrant an alternative program.

2. What proportion of physical education classes are required to involve exercise activity?

Most Physical Education classes provide a high proportion of physical activity at all year levels.

3. What school sport during regular school hours is required and what is available (but non-compulsory) in each year of school?

School sport during regular school hours is provided on an ad hoc basis in Primary and Secondary schools. Some Primary schools facilitate a sports afternoon in addition to regular Physical Education lessons for Years 4-7 students.

Inter-House Athletics programs are predominantly compulsory for Primary school students during school hours. Some Primary/Secondary schools offer camps incorporating Outdoor Education activities – generally over 3 days. In addition Primary/Secondary schools conduct lunch time House Sports programs as a follow-on from work covered in Physical Education/Sport/Leadership programs. These programs are predominantly non-compulsory. Inter-school cluster sport competitions are available for Primary/Secondary students to participate in during school hours. Students selected in representative Track and Field teams are required to participate in an inter-school carnival over an evening and one school day.

Some schools offer inter-school sport electives for students, and schools are invited to 'Come and Try' Days (hosted by sporting organisations and Department of Sport and Recreation) which may also double as an opportunity for inter-school sport. Participation in these events is not compulsory, but is strongly encouraged – particularly in Primary schools.

Sports festivals and carnivals may be offered as either compulsory or optional activities for Primary and Secondary students and are occasionally organised through sporting groups, clubs or Sport Development Officers as well as teaching staff.

Some Indigenous school-communities provide a sports day and a games/activity afternoon, as well as 'Bush Sports' in some regional centres during school time.

4. What other obligations are there to participate in school organised sporting activity outside regular school hours?

Non-compulsory Inter-school sporting opportunities are offered to Primary and Secondary students out of school hours and are often seen as a pathway for gifted students within sport to access the next tier of the School Sport NT competition and then School Sport Australia levels.

Many community sporting organisations and or Sport Development Officers conduct school competitions, round robin events or coaching/fun type sessions after school hours and are optional for students.

Some schools have after school facilities that provide optional 'Active After-School Care' for students.

5. In each of the above cases, what is included in the meaning of sport, physical activity or exercise?

Sport is generally seen as participation in some form of organised competition, which can be structured as part of a Physical Education lesson following the introduction of skills/minor games, or offered at a more formal level through interschool/cluster carnivals/events to national/international competition levels. Sport is also seen as an opportunity to play on a team in some form of competition either competitively or for fun, with no emphasis on 'winning' or 'losing'.

Physical activity in each of the above cases – relates to doing something 'physical', and is becoming synonymous with Physical Education in some schools where there is an emphasis on active involvement in skills and games through an educational focus.

Exercise equates with more vigorous activity, fitness lessons, and movement programs.

6. In each of the above cases, who determines whether schools and students are complying with the relevant policy?

Generally compliance with system and curriculum expectations rests with school Principals and implementation processes are overseen by faculty seniors in Secondary schools, or senior teachers in Primary schools. Seven Physical Education Co-ordinator positions across the NT co-ordinate School Sport and provide support and professional learning to teachers to implement Physical Education activities into teaching and learning practices.

The Health Promoting School unit in Student Services (DEET) provides additional support to schools/teachers through Professional Development workshops/updates including policy development in Health and Physical Education. The unit also liaises with the seven Physical Education Co-ordinators outlined above in their respective Primary school cluster.

7. Does the regulation of any of the above matters vary according to the type of school (for example, public, Catholic or other private)?

All schools are expected to implement the NT Curriculum Framework so that students develop the skills and abilities to function as life long learners in an ever-changing world. All school sectors (public, Catholic and private) in the Northern Territory have similar regulations regarding the types of educational programs (Physical Education/Activity/Sport) offered to students.