

Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Amendment Bill 2004

Second Reading Speech

Wednesday 23 June 2004

Dr NELSON (Bradfield—Minister for Education, Science and Training) (10.00 a.m.) —I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

This bill amends the Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000 (the act) to maintain and enhance the Australian government's effort in improving education outcomes for Indigenous Australians over the 2005 to 2008 funding quadrennium.

Accelerating Indigenous educational outcomes is a key element in the Australian government's 10-point national agenda for schooling. Closing the education divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians remains one of this government's highest education priorities. The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy, endorsed by all Australian governments and reflected in the objects of the act, guides program initiatives across Australia in continuing efforts to achieve equity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

The Australian government's approach is to redirect resources to programs that have demonstrably improved outcomes, to provide greater weighting of resources towards Indigenous students of greatest disadvantage—those in remote areas—and to improve mainstream service provision for Indigenous students.

The bill will enable agreements to be made with education providers and others over the 2005-08 program years for the making of payments to advance the objects of the act. It will provide funding appropriations to support payments under the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program (IESIP) and, importantly, for the first time, will also provide the funding appropriations to support payments under the Indigenous Education Direct Assistance (IEDA) program. Funding appropriations for IEDA are currently via Appropriation Bill (No. 1).

Bringing IEDA under the act will provide certainty of funding for this program for a four-year period, facilitate improved program management, and align the program with academic calendar years. This will provide and ensure consistency of accountability arrangements and their scrutiny across the Australian government's Indigenous education supplementary funding programs.

The IEDA program has been significantly reshaped for 2005-08 following a review of the program in 2003 which included consultations across the country. The reshaped program will consist of two elements: better targeted tuition assistance for Indigenous students through the Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme; and the introduction of a whole-of-school intervention strategy. The changes to IEDA will: ensure that Indigenous students can access high quality tutorial assistance at key stages of their education; focus resources on initiatives that have demonstrably improved outcomes; more heavily weight resources toward the most disadvantaged students—those in remote areas; and encourage education providers and Indigenous communities to work together to accelerate outcomes for Indigenous students.

Payments of per capita supplementary recurrent assistance to education and training providers will continue under IESIP with only minor modifications. There will also be funding available under IESIP to support existing and new national initiatives and significant projects, with an emphasis on Indigenous students in remote areas. Initiatives will be directed towards promoting systemic changes and developing flexible whole-of-government approaches to education delivery. The National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy will

continue and, following its evaluation in 2003, will be reshaped by strengthening the application of 'what works', particularly around: the practices of teachers and their support staff; preparing young people for formal schooling; and helping re-engage and retain more Indigenous students to year 12 or its vocational education and training equivalent.

A new flagship project will be the scaffolding approach to teaching literacy. This is a structured approach to teaching that has proven to be especially effective with Indigenous students in remote areas. The Australian government will partner with education providers to embed the scaffolding literacy approach into teaching practices. A range of other new initiatives and ongoing initiatives that have delivered genuine improvements will also be supported under IESIP.

Through this bill the government is significantly strengthening the financial and educational accountability arrangements under the act. In particular the bill provides that, to be eligible to receive funding, parties to agreements must make a commitment to the objects of the act and a commitment to achieve the performance targets specified in the agreements. A significant measure introduced by the bill, which addresses a concern of the Commonwealth Grants Commission about the quality of data available for its *Report on Indigenous funding 2001*, is that funding recipients may be required to report performance data for different geographical locations. If, on the evidence of performance reports submitted, a funding recipient is underperforming, there will be capacity for the Australian government to direct the party to take specified action, and to report on the action taken.

Payments under the act are to supplement, rather than substitute for, the other forms of funding available to advance the education of all Australian students, including Indigenous students. Funding under the act is therefore intended to accelerate closure of the education divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Consistent with this objective, the Australian government is implementing measures to ensure that there is an appropriate level of funding and effort dedicated to Indigenous students by education providers from both own-source funds and from Australian government mainstream funding.

The bill includes a requirement that agreements must include a condition that the other party report on how it has advanced, and intends to advance, the objects of the act from funds other than Australian government mainstream and Indigenous-specific funds. Additionally, under authority of the Schools Assistance (Learning Together-Achievement through Choice and Opportunity) Bill 2004, government and non-government school systems will be required to report annually to the Australian government on how mainstream school funding provided by the Australian government is being spent on improving Indigenous student outcomes. This will include a requirement to report on the goals for Indigenous education, progress in achieving those goals, barriers faced, strategies for overcoming those barriers, and initiatives funded.

These measures reflect the Australian government's commitment to accelerate progress in improving Indigenous education and training outcomes. They represent a significant step to improve mainstream service provision for Indigenous students, and to better focus Indigenous-specific resources to the most disadvantaged Indigenous students. I commend the bill to the House and present the explanatory memorandum.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Cox**) adjourned.