

Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
References Committee

Inquiry into indigenous education funding arrangements

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Organisation: Ross Park Primary School

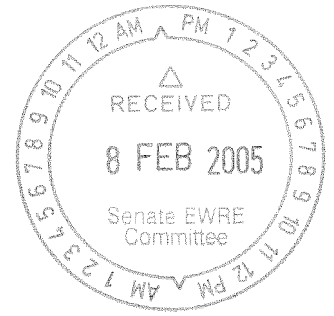
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Ross Park Primary School Council strongly opposes the decision of the Federal Education Department to cut the number of hours the Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme tutors can devote to students in need of this valuable support. At our school, where every fourth student is Aboriginal, this means ATAS tutor hours have been slashed from 85 hours per week last year to just 12.5 hours per week this year. Whereas previously 56 students from years 1-6 benefited from ATAS support only 5 students in years 4-6 will now receive tutoring. Many will be left behind as a result of this decision.

The ATAS scheme has proven very successful at our school. Our dedicated ATAS tutors have not only helped students reach benchmarks over the four years they have been here, but managed to raise individual student levels above benchmarks. They have given students the confidence that they can do just as well as others.

In the early childhood years literacy/numeracy support has resulted in more students achieving test benchmarks than ever before. Ongoing support is essential in these years to lay the foundations for numeracy and literacy skills, particularly where children come from homes where books, reading and education are not seen as high priorities or are not available at all.

In our experience it takes much longer than one year for students to catch up to benchmarks, especially if their home life does not expose them to a rich learning environment and the opportunity to develop pre-formal learning skills and concepts.

Although most of our ATAS-supported students have reached benchmarks, they need ATAS support to continue. The new-found confidence can be fragile if support at home is not forthcoming and the school can no longer afford to provide it. In our school's experience children often fall behind again once this support is withdrawn. Further, benchmarks are very low and some students only just manage to reach them. They need significant ongoing support to at least maintain this level.

Our aim is to increase students' level of attainment to well above benchmarks so that students do not remain at risk.

Under the new ATAS regime some students will be further disadvantaged through no fault of their own. Those who miss MAP testing, for example due to illness or sorry business, will have to wait another two years before they become eligible for tutoring. Even if they were among the lucky five to be selected for tutoring at Ross Park Primary School it may be then be too late to make a significant impact.

It defies comprehension that the same government that is reportedly considering penalising indigenous parents for not sending their children to school would at the same time withdraw support that has a proven record of helping indigenous children to continue with their schooling against often overwhelming odds.

It may come as a surprise to some members of government that a state primary school has strong views on values. Our parents embrace social justice as one of the values we wish to pass on to our children. We feel that the decision to drastically cut ATAS tutoring for the most disadvantaged students is a show of contempt for the principle of social justice and we therefore oppose it in the strongest possible terms. We are asking other school councils in our region to support us in this stance.

Yours sincerely

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