

Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
References Committee

Inquiry into indigenous education funding arrangements

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Submitter: Mr Dean Duncan
District Community Education Counsellor

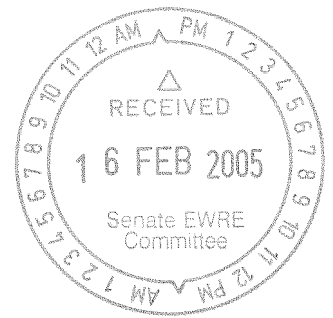
Organisation: Education Queensland
Stafford Geebung District Office

Address: 257 Gympie Road
KEDRON QLD 4031

Phone: 07 3350 7881

Fax: 07 3350 7891

Email: Dean.duncan@qed.qld.gov.au



13 February, 2005

Committee Secretary
Employment, Workplace Relations and Education References Committee
Department of The Senate
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
AUSTRALIA

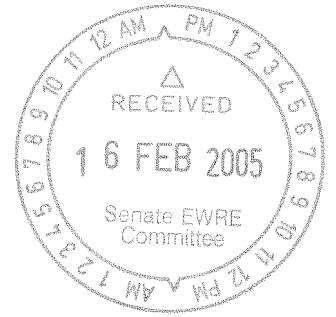
Re: Senate Inquiry Into Indigenous Education Funding Arrangements

Dear Senate Committee Secretary,

I would like to put forward this submission to the Senate Committee Inquiry into Indigenous Education Funding Arrangements, as a private submission, based on my professional position working with Schools, Indigenous Parents, Students and Communities.

I currently work within Education Queensland as a District Community Education Counsellor, servicing four (4) Educational Districts, which comprises service to 37 State High Schools and 123 State Primary Schools, with Pre-Schools in addition. I have worked within the Education field in excess of 10 years, and see the positive inroads that Indigenous Education has been making in the Education Outcomes of our students during that time. However, changes to existing funding arrangements may place undue pressure on staff, students, parents and communities, resulting in the decline of achievable educational outcomes for Indigenous Students.

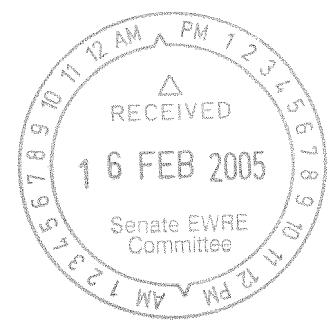
Dean Duncan



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Restriction Of Access To Services And Programs.

With changes to the existing program of Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ITAS), previously referred to as Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ATAS), there will be a definite decline in the number of Indigenous Students accessing any specific program targeting the needs of Aboriginal and/Torres Strait Islander learners. By introducing the change of only targeting students in Years 4 & 6 within the Primary Sector and expanding it into Secondary Schooling, there may be a greater number of students missing out on assistance due to the low rate of application from Secondary students.

By restricting the availability of ITAS to only those students who “fail” the Yr 3, 5 & 7 Net Testing procedures, the changes are not taking into account fluctuations in day to day learning capabilities of Indigenous students. There has been a definite rise in retention and participation rates of Indigenous students in Early schooling programs, due to the direct assistance provided under National Indigenous Education Direct Assistance programs through Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST). However, by now changing the availability of these programs to only those students in Years 4 & 6, there will be greater pressure and strain placed on Indigenous staff employed within schools to assist in the educational outcomes of the students. In a majority of cases, this workforce is relatively unqualified, or currently undertaking school based training. By now placing restriction of access to new enrolments, of these programs, there may be an increased number of students being incorrectly diagnosed as Intellectually Impaired under existing testing methods.

There will also be an increase in the number of Indigenous Staff who will be financially incapable of remaining within positions within schools. Positions that were aimed at;

- i) increasing the learning and educational outcomes of Indigenous students
- ii) increasing the total numbers of Indigenous staff employed within Educational Institutions.

This decline in the workforce will come about due to the reduction of funding attracted through ITAS to individual schools.

It is common practice for Indigenous families to elect not to enroll their children into Early Childhood Learning Centres. Taking this into account, there may be students who lack interactive and communication skills – that may be misdiagnosed as a learning difficulty. With no access to In-School Tutorial Assistance, as provided previously under ATAS, these students in question may then be “labeled” as Intellectually Impaired, and thus, incorrectly being placed within a system that may not be addressing their specific needs.

Reduction In Services Provided To Indigenous Staff Assisting Students.

With the introduction of reduced funding to Individual schools and students, programs previously targeting Indigenous Education will eventually result in the decline of Indigenous representation within the education workforce. Current trends allow staff and schools to budget on existing enrolments to plan and prepare learning outcomes for Indigenous students. Including the employment workforce to assist in implementing these programs. However, by reducing the availability of funding, and restricting remaining students access to such funding, the opportunities for Employment and Engagement of Indigenous people is greatly reduced. Schools and communities may then see an increase in behavioural management issues arising out of frustration from Indigenous students and parents due to the lack of support for educational outcomes targeting Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders.

Under previous guidelines and assistance provided through DEST, Educational Institutions were capable of employing appropriate staff in positions to assist in engaging parents in the process of educating the children within their communities. By reducing funding, schools may not be in a position to attract community members into employable positions. The result will see an increasing decline in already low engagement rates of Indigenous Parents in consultative roles within the community. Thus, restricting schools capabilities to work proactively with Parents and Indigenous Communities to promote positive educational outcomes.

Some schools do not have the capability to employ or engage Indigenous parents without the additional funding that is attracted through these programs.

In order for schools to continue the successful work conducted previously, there is a requirement for them to now complete Concept Plans and Submissions for Funding, under Whole of School Intervention (WoSI) strategies. There are not enough resources and parental input for schools to provide the teacher resource hours, or employment hours, for someone to compile, complete and submit these applications. By placing the restriction of enrolments of 20 indigenous students or more to attract the funding, the program is effectively restricting schools and parents from working successfully on attaining reachable Educational Outcomes for Indigenous Students.