

Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
References Committee

Inquiry into indigenous education funding arrangements

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Submitter: Ms Donna Blight
Chairperson

Organisation: Spencer Park Primary School
ASSPA Group

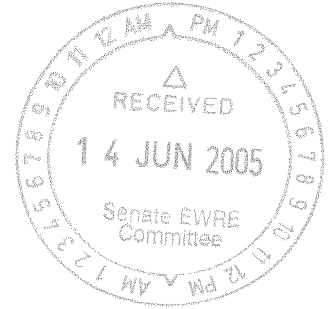
Address:

Phone:

Fax:

Email:

Senator Trish Crossin
Chairperson
Senate Employment, Workplace Relations
and Education Committee
Department of Senate
Parliament House
Canberra 2600



Dear Senator Crossin

We write to protest about changes to the way Commonwealth funding is now allocated to schools via DEST. The PSPI program that has this year replaced the ASSPA program is overly bureaucratic to the point that many communities will either not bother to be involved in the process of applying for funding or give up in frustration.

The issues we have are as follows:

1. Just to write a submission will be for many Aboriginal people a task that is beyond their skills. This effectively disenfranchises them from having appropriate input into what is applied for. In most if not all instances the task of writing and preparing submissions will be carried out by school staff, who are already overloaded from a work point of view.
2. Once a submission is finally prepared it has to go through an inordinate number of steps to be approved. A concept plan has to be approved by our District Aboriginal Council and by someone in DEST and then more detailed plans also have to go through the same steps. It is our understanding that at any of these stages proposals can be rejected, leaving Aboriginal parents or school staff the onerous task of reworking submissions for approval or finding it all too difficult and giving up on the whole idea. This process effectively reduces the role that Aboriginal parents have in deciding what they believe to be their own priorities for funding at a school level. Whilst District Aboriginal Education Councils may appear to give a semblance of local input, in our District there are very few Aboriginal people who attend these meetings and to ask these people to make decisions about which schools projects should have priority is placing them in a very difficult position. This is particularly the case if representatives on the committee are asked to make decisions about projects that come from their own schools.
3. A recent meeting with our local DEST Officer left us frustrated by what appears to be very restrictive guidelines as to the use of the funding. Essentially it would appear that DEST through this program is unwilling to fund anything that it perceives should receive funding from the State Government via the Department of Education and Training. We have the ridiculous situation of funding being contingent upon the use of some words and not others.
4. Through the ASSPA program funding was allowed to subsidise expensive programs for Aboriginal students. This included camps and programs like in term swimming lessons. These will apparently not be supported through PSPI, and can only lead to poorer participation in these programs by Aboriginal students. We think the implications of this from a socialisation point of view

are significant in terms of a widening divide between Aboriginal and Non Aboriginal children.

5. The notion that projects should be strategic and result from data collection may sound simple and sensible, but how do you exactly measure the worth of children being able to access camps, excursions and in-term swimming without financial difficulty. How do you measure the worth of cross-cultural programs aimed at strengthening the relationships between Aboriginal and Non Aboriginal students? These are not always reflected in literacy and numeracy test results. And schools that already have good attendance and participation also have difficulty in making an argument for projects aimed at these kinds of issues.

Our suggestion is, if money has been made available for our students to support them in their education, make it as simple as possible for us to access this. One of the strengths of the previous ASSPA program is that it was relatively simple to apply for funding and that decisions about where the funding was to be directed to were made by us as a community. PSPI is very difficult, if not almost impossible to access and whilst we are asked to make decisions about what we want our funding spent on in the end these decisions can be overturned by people who have no understanding of our school and its needs.

We are beginning to wonder whether the changes brought about by the introduction of PSPI are part of a deliberate strategy by a conservative Federal Government to minimise funding that specifically targets Aboriginal students as a group.

Yours sincerely,



Donna Blight
Chairperson
Spencer Park Primary School
ASSPA Group