

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Additional Estimates 24-28 February 2014

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Department/Agency: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Outcome/Program: 1.1 Prime Minister and Cabinet

Topic: Education

Senator: Senator the Hon Jan McLucas

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Question:

It was reported in The Australian on 13 February 2014 that the Minister for Indigenous Affairs had flagged sending more children from remote Aboriginal communities to boarding schools as a way to improve school attendance.

- a. Has the Minister or department officials consulted with remote Indigenous communities about sending children away from the community to go to school?
- b. Who would bear the cost of sending children to the boarding schools?
- c. What is the effect of a Government policy to send children from remote communities to boarding schools on schools in remote communities? Has this been discussed with State and Territory Governments? If not, why not?
- d. Is the department currently undertaking policy work on this initiative?
- e. Senator Scullion is quoted as saying that the “Federal government would look at using the significant excess capacity in existing boarding schools before considering building new facilities.”
 - i. How many places are currently vacant in boarding schools referred to by the Minister?
 - ii. Has the Minister been provided with advice on the vacancy levels of boarding schools?
 - iii. Is it the Government’s intention to increase the capacity of boarding schools or build new facilities? Has the Minister sought and/ or been provided with advice about this?

Answer:

- a. Yes. The Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Senator the Hon Nigel Scullion, and departmental officials consult with Indigenous communities on a regular basis.

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During these consultations a wide range of matters are discussed, including education.

- b. The Australian Government provides funding through general school funding, ABSTUDY and a range of stakeholders, including scholarship providers such as the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation and the Indigenous Youth Leadership Programme. Funding is also provided from benefactor organisations.
- c. State and territory governments are responsible for the approach to schooling within their jurisdictions. Parents decide if they want their children to go to boarding school. The Australian Government provides assistance.
- d. The Australian Government regularly reviews all elements affecting Indigenous education.
- e.
 - i. There is no consolidated reporting on vacancies in boarding schools.
 - ii. The Minister for Indigenous Affairs has been provided with advice where information is available.
 - iii. The Government will continue to consider a range of options and policy approaches to boarding schools and boarding facilities, particularly for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, in conjunction with state and territory education providers.