



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

Petition

Registration No:	8
Title:	Irrkerlantye Learning Centre - Closure
Presented on:	Wednesday 30 November 2005
Presented by:	Mrs Braham
Referred To:	Minister for Employment, Education and Training
Response due:	13 June 2006
Response received:	24 March 2006
Response presented:	28 March 2006

Petition

To the Honourable The Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory:

We the undersigned respectfully showeth that on the 1st November 2005 the Northern Territory Government through Minister Sid Stirling the Education Minister, gave seven weeks notice that funding and support to the Irrkerlantye Learning Centre (an Arrente Community Education Centre – governed by Ngkarte Mikwekenhe Community Inc which is representatives from the Eastern and Central Arrente would be withdrawn by the end of 2005.

Your petitioners therefore humbly pray that: The Northern Territory Government review and reverse the Education Minister's decision and reinstate support and funding to the Irrkerlantye Learning Centre pending such time as the Northern Territory Government is able to initiate a full review and evaluation to fairly assess whether students have progressed or made any achievements to their individual full potential using current statistics and qualitative outcomes as measurers of progress. Secondly, that the outcome of the formal evaluation and review be used as a document to open consultations with the Aboriginal Arrente Community members and the Northern Territory Government to identify education strategies to deal with disadvantaged children which are high at risk.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray

Response

Thank you for your correspondence of 14 February 2006 in which you forwarded me the terms of a petition read in the Legislative Assembly on 30 November 2005 (Petition No. 8) regarding my decision to transfer students from the Irrkerlantye Learning Centre to schools in Alice Springs.

I note that the petitioners request that the Northern Territory Government review and reverse this decision pending a full review and evaluation to fairly assess whether students have progressed or made any achievements to their individual full potential using current statistics and qualitative outcomes as measures of progress. I note also the request that the outcome of the suggested review be used as a document to open consultations with the Aboriginal Arrente Community members and the Northern Territory Government to identify education strategies to deal with disadvantaged children who are high at risk.

The decision to have students continue their education in Alice Springs primary and high schools was based on a number of factors. These include few students, low attendance rates, unacceptable

educational outcomes and the poor state of the Irrkerlantye Learning Centre facility. I do not believe that the educational provision at the Irrkerlantye Learning Centre is the best that the government school system has to offer and these students deserve the best.

Alice Springs has a number of quality schools with Indigenous student populations ranging from forty to sixty-seven per cent of the total number of students at each. These schools have excellent facilities, resources and programs and students from similar backgrounds to those at the learning centre are achieving significantly better results and have higher attendance levels.

All students should have access to the quality facilities and professional support services that exist in our schools, such as libraries, sports facilities, playgrounds and equipment, information technology, wellbeing officers, and special education and English as a second language support. Attending these schools will also give the students currently enrolled at the Irrkerlantye Learning Centre the opportunity to interact with other Alice Springs students.

The Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) has developed a transition plan to support students as they move into schools, which I will be monitoring very closely. Teacher staffing levels will be maintained and resources such as assistant teacher positions will remain to support students. I would also be pleased to see the kind of support offered by Ngkarte Mikwekenhe Incorporated continue for families and their children.

All Government schools in Alice Springs are working hard to address the challenges of providing education for diverse groups, particularly those Indigenous students who have become disengaged from mainstream schooling. Alternative education programs and Indigenous units are operating effectively in several schools. Partnerships and mutual endeavours, for instance in relation to school transport for students living in town camps, have been established between DEET and peak Indigenous organisations such as Tangentyere Council.

In specific relation to the Irrkerlantye Learning Centre, senior DEET officers in Alice Springs have been pro-active in opening up productive communication channels with Hgkarte Mikwekenhe Incorporated. To facilitate a smooth transition, a project officer has been appointed to liaise with Ngkarte Mikwekenhe Incorporated and the families of the Irrkerlantye Learning Centre students. It is anticipated that the project officer's work will continue until the end of Semester One, 2006, by which time the students are expected to have settled in to their new schools.

In addition, a consultant was recently engaged to facilitate a meeting of all the parties associated with the centre. Those present discussed the opportunities for continuing support for language and cultural programs and agreed on a timeline for the transition of the Irrkerlantye Learning Centre students, which includes the possibility of them moving to a school as a group.

I assure the petitioners that my decision to transfer students from the Irrkerlantye Learning Centre is based on my commitment to provide them with the best possible educational opportunities.