



INDIGENOUS EDUCATION CONSULTATIVE BODIES (IECBs)

MEDIA RELEASE

23rd May 2016

...“WE EXPECT A STRONGER FOCUS ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER LANGUAGE, CULTURE AND IDENTITY IN OUR SCHOOLS”...

The network of Indigenous Education Consultative Bodies (IECBs), the peak bodies representing the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders across Australia on education and training, met in Sydney earlier this month and discussed the upcoming election in regards to Indigenous education policies put forward by the major political parties.

The IECB applauds the Australian Labor Party’s recent policy proposals to retain the Gonski needs-based funding and to fund 400 Indigenous teacher training scholarships. The IECBs view these policy assurances as aligning with Education Ministers’ commitment to the principles and priority areas endorsed in the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy 2015. The IECBs further welcome The Australian Greens’ policy commitments and support for an Australian education system that is culturally appropriate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, students and families and are inclusive of both language and culture.

The recent [report from the Australian Education Union](#) highlights the benefits that have already become apparent from the allocation of the Gonski plan’s additional needs-based funding to support the development of local community engagement and culturally relevant education and support programs that deliver educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Furthermore, the IECBs recognise the importance of not only recruiting more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers, but increasing their capacity and retention as outlined in the More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative (MATSITI).

While the IECBs applaud these policy commitments, we the IECBs believe that the government of the next Parliament has a core responsibility to develop and implement specific strategies for tailoring education initiatives to urban, as well as regional and remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contexts. Policies and initiatives directed at improving



the learning environments and outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students must be informed by the consultation with Australia's First Nations Peoples. Success in these policies can only come from genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and the IECBs have long represented a unified national voice of First Nations communities across Australia, due to its strong community networks. While the IECBs recognise the value of a Western education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, we strongly argue that this is not imposed, as it has been, in a manner which neglects the importance and value of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identities, cultures and languages.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' education policies have significant importance for Indigenous Australians and for the nation itself.

According to the [Australian Bureau of Statistics](#), in 2015, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students totalled 200,563 (84.0% in government schools, 10.4% in Catholic schools, and 5.5% in Independent schools).

The Commonwealth Government's [2016 Closing the Gap report](#) indicates mixed progress on improving the literacy and numeracy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (years 3, 5, 7 and 9), where these students are on track for only four of the report's eight measures.

It is clear there needs a continued emphasis on relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education policies developed and implemented in partnership with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities for culturally relevant education and support programs that deliver educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, students and young people.

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