



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

TONY WINDSOR MP
INDEPENDENT
FEDERAL MEMBER FOR NEW ENGLAND

Shop 5
259 Peel Street
TAMWORTH NSW 2340

All Mail: PO Box 963
TAMWORTH NSW 2340

Ph: (02) 6761 3080
Toll Free: 1300 301 839
Fax: (02) 6761 3380
e-mail: Tony.Windsor.MP@aph.gov.au
Web Page: www.tonywindsor.com.au

MEDIA RELEASE

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Ross Hill School program concerns raised in Parliament

Independent Member for New England, Tony Windsor yesterday raised the concerns of the Ross Hill School staff and parents about changes being made to the very successful “In-class tuition” Program in the Federal Parliament.

Speaking to the Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Amendment Bill, Mr Windsor said

“Tonight I am pleased to be able to speak to the Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Amendment Bill 2004. There are a number of issues that I would like to talk about, the first of which is a recent visit I made to a school in my electorate. It is called Ross Hill Public School and it is in Inverell. The visit was in order to look at “In-class tuition”. Part of this bill is about “In-class tuition” for Indigenous children, and the scheme I looked at in Inverell at Ross Hill was about ‘In-class tuition’ for children in years 1, 2 and 3. It is a similar program to the one that is being endorsed in the bill, although there the age group is being shifted to years 3, 5 and 7. One of the issues that was raised very clearly at Ross Hill—by the staff and, very importantly, by the parents—was the fact that although the kids that were receiving the tuition were, in the main, Aboriginal children, not all of them were Aboriginal children. They were children who were starting to slip behind in terms of their academic futures and needed some special treatment—very similar to the “In-class tuition” that the bill talks about.

I was very impressed with the way in which the tuition was being given and the cost-effectiveness of the tuition. You could see the progress of these kids over the period since the tuition had started—I think they had been going for something like six weeks at that particular time. Some of the Aboriginal parents were coming to the school to assist, and others were also assisting. The program allowed for two teachers plus some assistants for two hours a day—and the program runs for something like six months. But one of the points that was made to me at that school was that there was great concern that if the changes took place as indicated in this bill—if that “In-class tuition” and intervention to help these kids was moved from years 1, 2 and 3, if it was shifted to years 3, 5 and 7—in most cases it would be too late.

When the minister responds to the debate—I will not be supporting the opposition's amendment, even though I do have some very real sympathy for part 3 of the amendment that talks about the tuition in relation to years 3, 5 and 7—I ask him to outline, if he can, what he sees as the benefits of shifting to a higher age group. It seemed to me—and it seemed to the teachers and the parents at Ross Hill Public School—that this was a program that was working very well: it was very cost-effective; the kids were gaining confidence; and it had not been left until they were older and were set in concrete in terms of some of their ways and their capacity to address some of the issues relating to numeracy, English expression and the sorts of things that they were learning. I ask the minister if he would explain why the shift has been suggested and I would ask him to look very closely at it. I personally invite him to come and see what is happening at Ross Hill Public School, because I think there are some great things to be learnt there. I ask him to reconsider the current position and at least to address it in terms of his concluding speech.....

I will be supporting the legislation. I do ask the minister, though, to look very closely at the third section of the opposition's amendment, because it does reflect some very real concerns out in my electorate, particularly about the shift of in-class tuition from years 1, 2 and 3 to years 3, 5 and 7.”

For further information contact Tony Windsor, Ph (02) 6761 3080 or 0427 66 8868