POSITION PAPER 2: RESPONSIBILITY FOR INDIGENOUS EDUCATION

In September 2013, responsibility for Indigenous education moved from Minister Pyne’s Education Portfolio to that of Minister Scullion’s Indigenous Affairs Portfolio.

AAAE has formed the view that this portfolio reshuffle has the potential to adversely affect the way Indigenous education is managed at the national level.

Prior to this change Aboriginal education had been the responsibility of the Minister for Education for almost four decades. This arrangement ensured that policy and programs relating to the learning needs of Aboriginal students were part of the work of the department responsible for ‘mainstream’ education.

The AAAE:

• is concerned that current ministerial and departmental roles and responsibilities for policy, programs and monitoring in Indigenous education will diminish the attention and effort to this critical area in education and the broader community
• recognises that there is clear evidence of enduring and specific issues in the educational outcomes of young Indigenous Australians requiring a critical need to address these as a national priority
• believes that a sustainable solution will rely on a culturally responsive curriculum that is well taught by high quality teachers
• endorses the Federal Government’s Schools First policy focus on curriculum and quality of teaching, under the responsibility of Minister Pyne and his Department.
• considers that efforts to implement these policy directions, to meet the needs and aspirations of Indigenous young people (and their families and communities) will be compromised by the separation of responsibility for Indigenous education from the Education portfolio
• advocates that officers in the Department for Education need direct access to colleagues with strategic knowledge and understanding in Indigenous education to assist the design and monitoring of mainstream programs that address the learning needs of Indigenous young people
• is concerned that the Council of Ministers of Education may not maintain Indigenous education as a priority given that it is no longer the responsibility of the Commonwealth Minister
• is concerned that as a result of the change of portfolio and the perceived downgrading of priority the education sector – jurisdictions, schools, communities, professional associations and others, may decrease their efforts to work towards improving the learning outcomes for Indigenous students.

The AAAE believes that removing Indigenous education from Minister Pyne’s Education Portfolio has the potential to reduce the importance of Indigenous education being an integral and major part of the education landscape, as it has been the case for many years.

Statement of AAAE position

The AAAE and its member associations stand ready to play their continuing part in efforts to improve learning outcomes for Indigenous students. However, AAAE believes that the current ministerial and administrative arrangements will not deliver the coherence, connections and drive needed for Australian education to deliver for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

The AAAE strongly urges the Commonwealth Government to reverse its decision and return the responsibility for Indigenous education to Minister Pyne’s Education Portfolio.

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1 In the context of this paper, the term Indigenous refers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.