



Policing review needed in Aurukun; school should not be sole focus, Noel Pearson says

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ABC News
28 May 2016

A review of community policing is needed in Aurukun and the Cape York Academy primary school should not be the sole focus of the community's problems, Indigenous leader Noel Pearson says.

Mr Pearson said a visit by Queensland politicians in Aurukun was "baffling" and a "knee-jerk reaction", as he defended the reputation of his primary school in the community.

Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk, three senior ministers and the Police Commissioner visited Aurukun on Friday for talks with the mayor and community members after 20 teachers were forced to leave the community. Ms Palaszczuk has floated the idea of the State Government taking control of the Cape York Academy primary school, after the school was shut down for the second time this month and teachers moved out because of safety concerns.

Mr Pearson said he completely accepts a review of the school was needed, but also wants a review of the policing in the community.

"I'm very confident that the school has the data to show the efficacy of all of its programs with the children, the champion work undertaken by those teachers, the champion diligence of the kids who attend and the parents who send them," he said.

"Let's have the review of the school, but hey, let's return to the original question: where is the review of policing?"

"Because those teachers have been battling against the law and order problem for four years.

"I wrote to the Minister for Police last September, laying out and sending all of those case studies from the teachers about things that they'd experienced and the things that they witnessed down the street.

"Let's have a review of the law and order and the policing provision in Aurukun, the drug, the violence and, quite frankly, the failure of the community's leaders to take control of the situation."

Queensland Government Minister Steven Miles said the situation in Aurukun was complex and the State Government was working to address the concerns.

"The Police Minister and the Queensland Police Service have been taking the situation in Aurukun very seriously for many months now," he said.

"The issues there, like in so many of our Aboriginal communities, can't simply be pointed to one problem, one department, one issue - they are complex.

"Obviously many of these concerns emanate from the school and I think it's right that the Education Minister [Kate Jones] has said there will be a review of the school and its operations.

"We don't want to pre-empt the outcomes of that, but clearly something there needs to change."

'Knee-jerk reaction' by Queensland Government

Mr Pearson defended the reputation of the school, but said the State Government was welcome to do whatever it liked as it was a state school.

"But when we took it over in 2010, it was a veritable Augean stable of longstanding failure and dysfunction," he said.

"That was the case when the state ran the school for about 30 years, since the mission times - they never did get the Aurukun school right.

"In 2010 we took over, with the Cape York Academy, we introduced an evidence-based program in direct instruction.

"We introduced club and culture programs that extend beyond the school day to 4:30 in the afternoon.

"We have a fantastic music program with the kids, with ... a stage band.

"The school has never been as good as it has been in these past five years.

"So this knee-jerk reaction by the minister when she went to Aurukun yesterday is just baffling, but I suppose it's her prerogative."

Policing issues raised with Government last year

Mr Pearson said he had raised problems with policing in Aurukun with the State Government late last year.

"That's the amazing thing ... these problems of community members attacking teachers and teachers not feeling safe and teachers reporting incidents they've seen and no action being taken by the police - they go back last year," he said.

"I wrote the letter in September last year, there was no response from the State Government, and so there's been this switch.

"There's a law and order issue down the village and the school has been scapegoated in this process, and particularly by the actions of the Premier and Minister for Education yesterday.

"There was virtually no focus yesterday on the grog, on the juvenile delinquents that have been responsible for attacking the teachers and the principal.

"There's absolutely no discussion about the completely terrible state of community policing by the Queensland Police Service.

"Instead, it's just been just been easy to say: 'All the problems of Aurukun stem from the failure in the education system'."

School staff not the only targets

Mr Pearson said it was not only school staff who were the targets of crime.

"If you're a service provider in Aurukun, you have got every chance of getting your car stolen," he said.

"It's not just the teachers that are being targeted. But of course, teachers that are only - the Department of Aboriginal Affairs withdrew their bureaucrats - I don't know, more than a year ago.

"They don't have any staff stationed in the community, because of these problems.

"The people who can't afford to leave, of course - who have to stay there 24/7 for 10 weeks at a time - are the teachers.

"You would think that what the Government's done now is scapegoated them and their work with the children at the school."

Police allowed 'off the hook'

Mr Pearson said the school's leaders had told him there were "just gutted".

"They're just amazed - they're in fact the victims of what's gone on in the community and yet it is their work at the school that has been scapegoated by the politicians and by the community leaders.

"The terrible thing about what the politicians did in Aurukun yesterday was that - not only have they allowed the police off the hook - because we've seen all the videos, right, of police allowing community members to fight, like it's some kind of circus or something."

He agreed with the notion that police seemed to be taking a hands-off approach.

"Absolutely, and it's been going on for community members ... because, I think, they're just at sixes and sevens about how to approach community policing," he said.

"After the death in custody at Palm Island of Mulrunji, Queensland police right across the state have been at sixes and sevens about how to - they don't want to.

"They think they will inflame the problems if they intervene too much.

"I think they're quite shell-shocked in a policy sense and therefore community members don't receive proper policing as they're entitled to receive."