



Police weigh charges on Djarragun `fraud'

Author: Sarah Elks

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THE fraud investigation into alleged multi-million-dollar misconduct at Australia's premier indigenous school is intensifying and will finish this week, when police will consider laying charges.

Detectives have interviewed the current principal of Djarragun College at Gordonvale, south of Cairns, as well as North Queensland's top Anglican bishop, government officials and past and present teachers as part of the probe. There is no suggestion those interviewed are involved in any wrongdoing at the school, which caters mostly to indigenous students from remote communities on Cape York and in the Torres Strait.

Far North Queensland regional crime co-ordinator Bruno Asnicar confirmed the months-long police inquiry was nearing an end. ``The investigation is being finalised and it's anticipated it'll be concluded in the near future," Detective Inspector Asnicar told *The Australian*.

He would not speculate about the nature of charges that could potentially be laid or against whom.

A series of reports in *The Australian* earlier this year revealed allegations of enrolment anomalies at the independent school.

An audit ordered by Queensland Education Minister Cameron Dick showed that the college had allegedly wrongly claimed government funding for 150 ``phantom" students over three years.

Federal Minister for Schools Education Peter Garrett also ordered his department to determine whether the school was required to repay any of the taxpayers' money allegedly wrongly claimed.

``The department has completed its audit of the college and is now in discussions with the new management to resolve the issue," a spokeswoman for Mr Garrett said.

Since the scandal erupted, the school's administration and management have been overhauled.

A new principal has been installed and Cape York Institute of Policy and Leadership director Noel Pearson has been elected chairman of the board.

Mr Pearson's takeover of the school from the Anglican church is expected to be finalised early next year. Bishop Bill Ray, head of the Anglican Church in North Queensland, said there were still technical issues to be resolved before the handover could be completed.

``I'm happy for Cape York to take over, we've made that quite clear," Bishop Ray told The Australian.

Searches of company documents reveal Jean Illingworth, who was stood down by the school's former board when the enrolment allegations became public, is still a director of the college's company, Djarragun College Ltd.

Ms Illingworth has consistently denied any wrongdoing.

Djarragun College general manager Adam Peut said Ms Illingworth was on leave.

``(She) has no day-to-day involvement in the operation or governance of the college," Mr Peut said. ``Her formal position will be resolved in due course."