

## **Aurukun: Noel Pearson 'astounded' by critics of education model**

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Indigenous leader Noel Pearson has defended his education model and says he's astounded the closure of Aurukun's school is being used as "a scapegoat" for policing and law and order problems.

Premier Anastacia Palaszcuk flew to Cape York township on Friday with senior ministers and Police Commissioner Ian Stewart, flagging a review of schooling in the region.

More than 20 staff were evacuated for the second time in a fortnight on Thursday following continued unrest, most recently involving children as young as six who allegedly threw rocks at security guards and attempted to steal a car near the teachers' living quarters.

Federal Leichhardt MP Warren Entsch says the problems are proof of a failed education model in Cape York.

But Mr Pearson, the chairman of the Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy, dismissed the criticism, saying many "ignorant statements" had been made following the evacuations.

"It's astounding to see that the school is now the scapegoat of what is very clearly a law, order and policing problem," he said.

He released a list of the academy's achievements, including a dramatic jump in attendance rates from 28 per cent in late 2007 to a peak of 75 per cent in early 2011, when the Cape York Welfare Reform began.

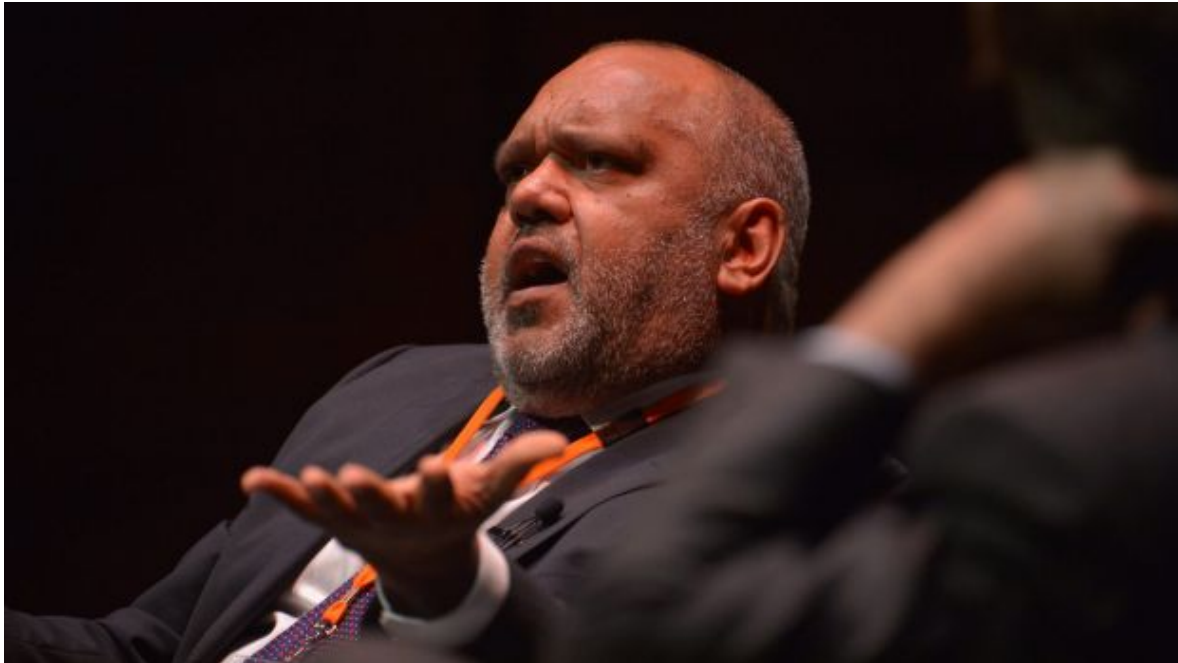
Mr Pearson said more than a quarter of the children attended for at least four days a week and an all-time historic high of 57 children were at secondary boarding school.



*Palaszcuk and Education Minister Kate Jones meet with Aurukun Mayor Dereck Walpo and councillors. Public housing, multiculturalism and education are close to her heart. Photo: Twitter/Anastacia Palaszcuk*

The academy also supported two tertiary students, one of whom is studying justice at the Queensland University of Technology.

Mr Pearson conceded attendance had been undercut by alcohol and community violence in recent years.



*Noel Pearson said more than a quarter of the children attended for at least four days a week and an all-time historic high of 57 children were at secondary boarding school. Photo: Joe Armao*

But he said the school played an important role in "the slow path to restoring social norms in Aurukun".

Ms Palaszczuk has defended the sudden shut-down after elders questioned why a minority of misbehaving youths could be allowed to control the town.

"Our priority is of course for the children here to get quality education," she said on Friday.

A new principal will arrive in Aurukun on Monday for what Ms Palaszczuk called "a new start".

The premier and Education Minister Kate Jones spoke to about 200 people in the town square following a morning tour of the town and meeting with the Aurukun Shire Council.

Ms Palaszczuk told the crowd she was not prepared to make decisions about Aurukun from Brisbane.

"It is good to hear first-hand about issues and to see your community first-hand," she said.

**AAP**