
Noel Pearson complains to CCC over Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy audit release

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Indigenous leader Noel Pearson says he will lodge a complaint with Queensland's corruption watchdog over the release of an audit into his Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy.

The Academy, led by an independent board and chaired by Noel Pearson, has been operating three primary schools in Indigenous communities in far north Queensland, in partnership with Education Queensland.

The financial and administrative audit, obtained by the ABC, found the Academy had been involved in "high-risk" business practices potentially leaving the schools open to possible fraud and official misconduct.

A spokesman for Education Minister Kate Jones said the report was not confidential, and its release to the ABC was the result of an Right To Information request.

"Any private information was redacted," he said.

Mr Pearson however said he would be making a complaint to the Queensland Ombudsman and the Crime and Corruption Commission.

The Academy is a division of the not-for-profit umbrella body Mr Pearson founded, Good to Great Schools Australia (GGSA), which now delivers education programs into about 40 remote Australian schools.

Mr Pearson said in a statement: "If there was an RTI request from the ABC why was GGSA not consulted?"

"My concern is the abuse of bureaucratic power.

"Misuse of the reports and the distorted manner in which select excerpts were represented for the purpose of damaging innocent schools and organisations supporting those schools."

Mr Pearson said allegations of financial impropriety are scurrilous and he was confident they would be exposed.

"The attempts to pin administrative and financial management issues onto GGSA has damaged schools that are supposed to be their responsibility," he said.

"I am confident that this audit will validate GGSA's statements that the financial stewardship and internal controls including enrolments, are the responsibility of DET [Department of Education and Training]."

The audit, revealed by the ABC, found GGSA's staff was involved in "providing direction for day-to-day operational activities, including budget management and decision- making".

The audit found this involvement exposed the education department to a "high risk" of possible financial losses.

The audit also found GGSA received more than \$200,000 in payments which remained unexplained and exposed the department to a "high risk" of an "increased possibility in official misconduct, conflict of interest, and fraud".

"There is a lack of clarity around which party is responsible/accountable for costs incurred by the Cape York Academy and Good to Great Schools Australia."

The Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy will continue to run schools in Coen and Hopevale in partnership with the Department of Education next year, but it has withdrawn its support for the troubled Aurukun school.

The school was briefly closed this year after violent threats toward staff, including allegations the school principal was attacked by a group of teenagers, one of whom was armed with an axe.