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## Noel Pearson denies abusing Education Minister Kate Jones

• NOVEMBER 28 2016

Indigenous leader Noel Pearson has emphatically denied racially abusing a Queensland minister, and says there's no culture of bullying in his schools program.

Queensland's Education Minister Kate Jones has told the ABC Mr Pearson abused her in 2009, when she was the environment minister, using the phrase "f---ing white c---".



*Noel Pearson is founder and co-chair of Good to Great Schools Australia. Photo: Marian Faa*

Mr Pearson didn't deny using "colourful language" in dealings over his Good to Great schools program, but he's told the ABC: "I completely, completely reject the suggestion that I directed any of those words at minister Kate Jones in 2009".

Mr Pearson went on ABC radio on Monday to answer allegations he used highly offensive language in his dealings with Queensland public servants who had raised concerns about his indigenous schools program.



*Education Minister Kate Jones.*

The ABC has cited a June letter from the director-general of Education Queensland Dr Jim Watterston to Mr Pearson, in which he raised serious concerns about his conduct.

"Dear Noel ... when we met on 25 May 2016, I felt there were several times you behaved in an intimidating manner and made inappropriate comments [I clearly recall pejoratives such as 'arse coverer', 'maggot', and 'bucket of s---', to name a few]," Dr Watterston wrote.

"Where I draw the line, however, is when similarly intimidating and abusive behaviour is directed towards my staff."

Mr Pearson is the founder and co-chair of Good to Great Schools Australia, which runs the Cape York Academy schools of Aurukun, Coen and Hope Vale in partnership with the Queensland government.

Asked about the allegations of offensive and abusive behaviour, Mr Pearson said: "As with anything like that, there are bits and pieces that are accurate and so on, but there's a lot of verballing as well."

"I accept that I'm a very passionate and relentless advocate on behalf of reform. I am surely not the only one who engages in colourful language."

But he denied his schools program had a culture of bullying.

"... you come across the occasional employee who likes to conflate a hard work culture with a bullying culture, but none of those claims have ever been made out."

Aurukun's Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy was shut down and teachers were evacuated in late May after increasing unrest, including the car-jacking of its principal twice in a fortnight.

The unrest sparked a review of the school's performance, resulting in a decision to reassert Education Department control over the facility.

After the unrest, Mr Pearson said Queensland's "bastard government" had maligned the direct instruction technique used at the academy's Cape York schools.

He ultimately wrote to the government to advise Good to Great Schools Australia would cease operations in Aurukun from next year.

Despite Mr Pearson's denial, Ms Jones said the report was accurate.

"But it was many years ago and I'm not choosing to dwell on them," she said.

When asked if they were the worst words she had heard, Ms Jones said she had been in politics for a long time.

"I've heard many robust words over that time," she said.

"This is a distraction from the main game which is ensuring that we get the best possible education for every student in Queensland and that includes the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the Cape."

**AAP**