

**Norfolk Island 2006
Submission**

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**NORFOLK ISLAND CENTRAL
SCHOOL (NICS)
NORFOLK ISLAND INQUIRY 2006**

**RESPONSE TO ISSUES PAPER
CGC 2006/1**

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Submission to the Commonwealth

Provided by the undersigned

Part A: Continuation of relationship with NSW D.E.T.

Norfolk Island Central School has proudly educated students for 100 years on its current site. Under the terms of the Memorandum of Understanding on Education with the Commonwealth, Norfolk has been responsible for the cost and administration of education through the NSW Department of Education and Training, our provider. The NSWDET provides an educational package (based on teacher salaries and an administrative fee), that has stood the test of time, including:

- A curriculum guarantee.
- Curriculum package – all syllabi and support documents provided
- Highly experienced staff via merit selection process
- School Certificate
- Higher School Certificate
- Basic Skills Testing, CAS, ELLA, SNAP.
- Access to consultants and inspection processes.
- Training and development for all school staff.
- Distance Education courses.
- VET and TAFE certificate courses
- Home schooling support as needed for illness or travel.
- And much more!

Norfolk Island and the DET should be proud of what they have achieved in the past century. There has always been a very positive relationship with the NSWDET as parents generally value their children's education and are aware that the DET is recognised world wide as one of the most successful educational providers and therefore their educational credentials are highly regarded. The system has and continues to work well for the island.

Generally, the NIG have been very supportive of education, allowing the school to run smoothly under the leadership of NSW principals and staff, merit selected to their positions. The Chief Minister has publicly recognised the high quality and achievements of NICS. Together, Norfolk and the NSWDET have achieved many positives for the school and the island community:

- A free, compulsory education system that began on Norfolk 150 years ago
- Well educated students – originally to Year 10 and since 1993 to Year 12, who often go on to university or TAFE in Australia and then become valuable members of the workforce.
- TAFE links through VET and certificate courses available through the NSWDET.
- A well maintained historic site that is the centre of many community activities.
- Improvements in the grounds and buildings over time, other than major building projects.
- A reasonably well resourced school in most areas, other than technology.
- A successful century long working relationship with the NSWDET.

There have also been some challenges in more recent years with the downturn in the economy:

- It has become difficult to maintain the technology needs of the school.
- It has been difficult meeting other resource needs such as texts.
- The cost of education has often been a contentious issue with some government members due to rising teacher salaries.
- Some capital projects have not been realised due to government priorities and lack of funding, and as in many government departments here and on the mainland, budgets have been cut.
- Some previous Ministers for Education have not been as publicly supportive as they could or should have been which has caused some stress for staff, students and parents.
- Difficulty in maintaining funding for casual relief.

We would like to see NICS continue to grow and develop with the support and services of the NSWDET. It has proved to be a successful partnership and this community deserves to know that education will be a continuing high priority for both the NIG and Commonwealth. The biggest strain for the NIG and the cause for the majority of debate on education has been meeting the cost of teacher salaries and the commitment to the delivery of Years 11 and 12. It would not appear to be either logical or economic to change education systems, particularly at such a time when the Norfolk Island community will be facing huge upheavals to their way of life. (The option of an independent school has been mooted in the past as a cost saving measure but two government initiated investigations concluded that it was not economically viable and that we had the best system for our needs - the community spoke up very strongly in support of the continuation of the NSWDET package.)

Regardless of what role the Commonwealth will play in the future of Norfolk Island, we would believe the following would benefit the school and its community:

- A commitment to continuing Years 11 and 12 at NICS.
- Continuation of the arrangements with the NSWDET providing educational services to Norfolk.
- Access to NSWDET resources such as computer rollouts (T4L)
- Access to programs such as CAP and PSFP
- Access to Commonwealth grants related to educational initiatives as is available to all states and territories.

OPTIONS???

Neither of the following options are suggested or favoured by any of the teaching staff at NICS but have been raised by Legislative Assembly members or a community member at some stage.

The Independent School Option

Whilst this has been proposed on several occasions (1997 and 2002) as a means of saving money by recruiting staff on a reduced salary, when fully investigated, the opposite conclusion was formed, to quote "In fact the arrangement with NSW for the provision of educational programs is certainly very much in NI's favour with regard to cost." (Focus 2002 p1) Essentially the findings were that the curriculum guarantee, HSC credentialing, reporting, research, testing and recording processes plus substantial Training and Development funding paid for by the NSW DET provided benefits to Norfolk at no additional cost. A privatised school system would have to either ignore these aspects and thus provide a very inferior schooling or find considerably more funds to pay for them than is required at present to run the school. It is doubtful that there is sufficient local expertise to manage an independent school without spending further money on a salary to hire outside expertise in this role.

New Zealand staff

It has been suggested that New Zealand teachers should be hired as they are cheaper. This option does not deserve much attention as it seems incongruous that an Australian Territory should educate its citizens in, for example the History and Geography of another country and /or use staff trained in a different curriculum to present an Australian curriculum. Would the NSW DET allow New Zealand staff to deliver its curriculum? This idea has been linked to the independent school proposal.

In conclusion

It is not to the Island's benefit to find that under Commonwealth management the school is less well resourced than it is at present in real per capita student terms.

It seems highly desirable to maintain the HSC accreditation and TAFE provisions available through the NSW DET. There are obviously several models by which this can be achieved. Recommendations are

- the Commonwealth Grants Commission fully fund the NSW Education package delivered to Norfolk under the current structure which would then relieve the financial pressure on the NIG and allow it to channel its resources to manage other areas. This may also alleviate the repeated political attacks to remove Years 11 and 12 or privatise the School.
- Alternatively a Commonwealth Grant to cover teacher's salaries would allow the Norfolk Island Government to continue to manage and resource the remaining areas of the School.

Neither of these recommendations require the Commonwealth to completely take over the responsibility for education on Norfolk under a State or local model of governance.

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Part B: Maintenance of Years 11 and 12

NICS via the education package provided by the NSW DET has provided a quality senior education to HSC level, including TAFE accreditations for those students choosing to access this pathway, since 1993.

Parents have been strongly supportive of maintaining the senior school as many feel there would not be any viable alternative to educate their children either due to cost of sending them away or because they don't wish to break up the family or they feel their student would cope with being away to complete their schooling.

The maintenance of Years 11 and 12 has been a contentious issue over time, with some members of the Legislative Assembly, largely due to added cost of staffing and resources. It has been seen by most staff to be highly desirable that NICS continues to have a senior school enabling students to complete Years 11 and 12 on Island. It is also seen as highly desirable that the uncertainty created by the recurring threat to the senior school be removed.

Here are some of the issues involved::

- It provides an equitable opportunity for Norfolk Island Youth to compete for jobs away if they choose to do so.
 - It allows youth to obtain a qualification (UAI) which enables them to continue to tertiary education
 - The senior school does provide TAFE courses when there is no other vocational education provider on the Island, at no additional cost. This would cease if Years 11 and 12 ceased.
 - Without the specialist staffing provided to teach the HSC courses, the Junior school 7-10 would be forced to restrict elective choices and/or have untrained staff in specialist areas eg. English teacher teaching Food Technology
 - If Island children have no option locally other than to leave school at Year 10 then essentially they are forced to remaining the unskilled labour workforce on the Island. This would provide a cheap unskilled labour force for the resorts, catering and the few industries on the Island, again to benefit a few rather than the majority,
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Part C: Need for counselling and family support services

It is acknowledged that one of the strengths of the Norfolk community is the extended family and community support given to individuals in crisis. It is well intentioned, loving and caring. However there are circumstances where students at the school and/or their families are experiencing emotional, psychological or physically stressful or abusive situations that they are unable to cope with or rectify.

The mandatory reporting requirement of the NSW DET can be difficult to implement here as the only avenue is to report to the Police. There is no equivalent of DOCS. The school has a trained counsellor who also functions as a Support Learning teacher and hence is often overcommitted if crises occur.

The Island did employ a community counsellor and this position is currently being refilled.

Such issues as drug and alcohol counselling, parenting, safe sex, STD's, unwanted pregnancies, Attention Deficit Disorders, sexuality, single parent families, depression are just as relevant to our student population and the community in general as in any other community.

Lack of funding for the provision of services to meet these needs is an ongoing problem not solved by, as is the current practice, publicising the phone numbers of relevant agencies in Australia (such as Lifeline) or listing community service organisations as useful as these may be in other areas.

To provide relevant and meaningful services in this area would require extremely sensitive and careful investigation and design. It is suggested that this may be an area where the Commonwealth government could provide funds to assist the NIG with the design and implementation of a level of support similar to DOCS, but locally relevant.

It is critically important that nothing is done to diminish or undermine the current community culture of mutual support.

Technology Needs at NICS

Norfolk Island Central School has been funded to supply an excellent level of education to the children of Norfolk Island for the last 100 years. There are currently 305 students enrolled at NICS and 31 staff members. It has only been in recent years, with the economic downturn on Norfolk Island, that funding has failed to keep pace with today's technology based curriculum.

67% of the school's current computers are not meeting the requirements of their users, with many being 6 years (or more) old. If the school were to become a fully integrated school within the NSW DET, NICS would gain access to the NSW DET T4L (Technology For Learning) computer rollout, and NICS would be supplied with an appropriate number of computers on a continual 4 year cycle. This would relieve the local community and Government of the onerous burden of trying to fund the ongoing purchase of appropriate technology.

NICS currently has 80 computers in use. Of these, 49 are in dire need of replacement (they do not meet the minimum specifications as set out by the NSW DET), and 3 have a few months of serviceability left.

- K-6 have 12 computers, with 11 needing to be replaced
 - Library has 28 computers, with 27 in need of replacement
 - Senior lab has 7 computers, all OK
 - Tech Room 2 has 14 computers, all 3 years old, but still serviceable
 - The remaining 19 computers are spread through various staffrooms, offices and classrooms. Of these, 13 are in need of replacement.
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