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EDITORIAL

By the time you receive this issue there will have been tabled in Federal Parliament an evaluation of the Aboriginal Secondary Grants Scheme.

Late in 1973 the Commonwealth Department of Education commissioned me to undertake this evaluation. I have now completed the report which is entitled "Access to Education - an Evaluation of the Aboriginal Secondary Grants Scheme", and published by the Australian Government Publishing Service.

The research was conducted with the assistance of a great many people, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, and we will report in some detail to you on our findings in the next issue of *The Aboriginal Child at School*. At this stage, I should like to draw your attention to what I regard as one of the major statements in the evaluation -

"There is a limit to what the Scheme, however well-designed and well-implemented, can hope to achieve. It seeks to overcome certain obstacles to students' success and, to the extent that it can overcome these obstacles, so it makes its contribution. The obstacles to which it addresses itself are obstacles arising from poverty, from limited access in the past to the formal educational and other institutions of the society and the resultant low expectations that permeate many Aboriginal and Islander groups. It seeks to make it more possible for Aboriginal and Islander students to stay at school; it seeks to encourage parents, through the provision of financial aid, to continue to support their children at school. It seeks also, through the provision of boarding allowances, to make secondary education available to those who live in remote areas and also, through this allowance to provide conditions more conducive to educational success for those whose home backgrounds are a major obstacle. Through the provision of school excursion funds, it seeks to make possible for students, who would otherwise frequently miss out, to participate in school excursions and so to widen their experience and their horizons. Through the provision of funds for tutorial assistance, it seeks to give some students a second chance and to help others over temporary obstacles to their learning. Finally it seeks, through the provision of the professional advice, interest, support and insights of the education officers,

to help students as individuals to discover their potentialities, to grow in self-esteem and confidence and to define more clearly for themselves a future for which the relevance of education is more clearly established.

These are the goals of the Scheme. They are goals the successful achievement of which has helped many Aboriginal and Islander students to move forward more confidently and with more success. But because its primary focus is the removal of only certain obstacles, because it is not dealing with some of the central determinants of success and failure, it can only aim at limited goals. Its success can only legitimately be judged in terms of its progress towards these goals. Certainly, it cannot be judged as if it were the sole or even the central determinant of the students' progress.

The two most central determinants of school progress are the home and the school. While the Scheme has had some impact in both these areas it is a limited impact. If we would seek to have the Scheme make maximum impact and make maximum contribution, then we ought to look to see if support under the Scheme can be more directly aimed at the school and the home.

The educational careers of Aboriginal and Islander students are broadly determined by the home and the school and by the match or degree of congruence between home and school, and by the life circumstances in which the students and their families find themselves."

My very best wishes to you and to your Aboriginal pupils.

Betty W. Sells

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