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MEDIA RELEASE

ADMISSION OF FAILURE COMES TOO LATE

Peter Chandler MLA

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The admission by the Chief Minister of a significant failure in the implementation of his 'Send Kids to School Every Day' campaign comes too late for thousands of Indigenous students in remote Territory schools.

Shadow Education Minister Peter Chandler said while Labor pushed ahead with a tepid policy response to a serious social problem, a generation of Indigenous children continued to miss out on school.

"When Paul Henderson launched that policy in October 2007, he described Indigenous school attendance as 'one of this Government's highest priorities, and one of the Territory's biggest challenges'," Mr Chandler said.

"It's almost three years to the day since the policy was launched, but Paul Henderson has finally admitted the strategy was a failure. While acknowledgement is the first step to recovery, he wasn't able to accept full responsibility for the failure. Instead, he tried to blame the Department.

"Three years on, Paul Henderson is having another try at boosting Indigenous school attendance against a backdrop of at least 2000 school age children who aren’t even enrolled for school and thousands more who do not attend for the majority of the school year.

"Part of Labor's new approach is to trumpet on the spot fines of up to $200 for parents who fail to send their children to school. Under almost 10 years of Labor, with these laws already in place, not one family has been fined for failing to send their children to school.

"It was significant that today the Education Minister, Chris Burns, refused to respond to my question asking how many parents he expected would be fined when the changes are applied next year.

"Given the Government's reluctance to penalise parents in the past, I see no reason why that inaction should change into the future.

"Mr Burns is also in denial about school attendances, maintaining turn-outs in some very remote Territory schools are at about 65%.

"This is patently untrue. According to the My School website, attendances at Maningrida School, for example are at 36.9% and at Angurugu they're 34.5%. At a number of other remote schools they're below 60%.

"This is despite the roll-out of countless other Government plans to get kids to school including No Pool, No School, Clontarf and welfare quarantining. I hope today's announcement gets some results. A generation of Territory children depend on it."

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