



## MEDIA RELEASE

Embargoed until 28 February 2024

### **First Nations community leaders take education reform to the Parliament of Australia**

On Wednesday 28 February a delegation of Elders, senior leaders and representatives from Children's Ground and Utyerre Apanpe (First Nations Educators Network) will visit Parliament House, Canberra to present the M.K. Turner Report - a plan for First Nations-led and designed education reform in Australia.

Co-designed with over 60 First Nations educators, and supported by strong local and international evidence, and the United Nations Declaration of Rights for Indigenous People (UNDRIP), the report offers six recommendations and outcomes to Australian governments:

1. Australian governments commit to the establishment of a new First Nations education system.
2. Government recognises and partners with an independent national First Nations governance body to develop and oversight the new First Nations education system.
3. Australian governments support the teaching of First Nations languages in the new system, through a new national Language of Instruction (LoI) policy.
4. Australian governments establish a comprehensive national network of First Nations Language and Literacy Centres for every Nation/language group.
5. Australian governments develop and support a First Nations education workforce.
6. Australian governments establish the M.K. Turner Institute as a national centre for First Nations knowledge, practice, research and evaluation in the new First Nations education system.

The parliamentary launch of this landmark report will be hosted by Hon. Marion Scrymgour MP. Children's Ground and Utyerre Apanpe will offer parliamentarians a roadmap that will close the gap in educational, employment, health and cultural outcomes. It will change the status quo and embrace First Nations knowledge, practice and culture.

The recently released Productivity Commission review on Closing the Gap highlighted governments need to fundamentally rethink their systems, culture and ways of working, as well as the importance of giving First Nations agency in designing and implementing solutions for their communities.

"We are committed to successful education outcomes for our children, that protect our cultures and identity while equipping our children for a global world," said William Tilmouth, Chair of Children's Ground and 2023 NAIDOC Male Elder of the Year.

"First Nations people have solutions, and evidence that our solutions lead to positive outcomes for our people. We will continue to grow this evidence. We don't want to see our kids on the streets. We want to see our kids in education, run by us for us, where they are safe and supported to succeed.

“Our children succeed when their learning environment is founded in their identity, their culture, their language and their Country.

“I invite the Australian Government to support bold reform that is backed by international evidence.

“Our Elders have been campaigning for education reform for generations. We know this is where the answer lies. These old people are passing away. We continue to champion their legacies by asking for change now for the sake of our children and before these old people and their knowledge are gone.

“Put our education back in our hands,” said Mr Tilmouth.

In February the Commonwealth Closing the Gap 2024 Implementation Plan reported that four program outcomes were worsening and not on track, including ‘Outcome 4 – First Nations children thrive in their early years’.

‘Outcome 5 - Students achieve their full learning potential’ is improving, but not on track to reach its goal by 2031.

“The M.K. Turner Report offers a real-world example of the Productivity Commission's recommendations towards Closing the Gap,” said Ms Jane Vadiveloo, CEO of Children’s Ground.

“The report speaks to local and international evidence that shows First Nations children educated in their first language and culture have improved learning outcomes, improved economic outcomes, improved health and wellbeing and increased engagement of family in their learning journey.

“This undeniable evidence base clarifies a response to the worsening or stagnant Closing the Gap program outcomes.

“In the regions that Children’s Ground operate, First Nations children are consistently falling out of mainstream schooling.

“A First Nations designed and led learning system leads to positive outcomes for the individual, their community and beyond,” said Ms Vadiveloo.

“It’s instrumental in suicide prevention, mitigating child removal and risk, and it will create critical employment for First Nations people across Australia.

“First Nations Elders and educators are presenting a roadmap for Australian governments. It’s time for governments to recognise the strength in First Nations systems, to step away from business-as-usual and embrace open-minded, pragmatic and progressive collaboration with First Nations people,” said Ms Vadiveloo.

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Dr M.K. Turner OAM was one of the most prominent leaders of the Arrernte Nation. She was a cultural Law woman, linguist, educator and author.

A founding Elder and Director at Children’s Ground, M.K. promoted excellence in education as the key foundation to the future of children and First Nations peoples and cultures.

Named in her honour, but representing the work of many First Nations educational experts, M.K. passed away two weeks before the community release of the report in 2023.

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Children's Ground will present the M.K. Turner Report at Parliament House, Canberra at 5.00pm on Wednesday 28 February 2024.

As of February 2024, the Children's Ground petition calling for the establishment of a First Nations-led education system in Australia has over 82,000 signatures.

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Children's Ground **CEO Jane Vadivelloo** is available to speak with media.

A delegation of First Nations representatives led by **Mr William Tilmouth** is available to speak with media.

- **William Tilmouth** – Children's Ground Chair and 2023 NAIDOC Male Elder of the Year
- **Veronica Turner** – Children's Ground Co-Director and Arrernte Teacher Specialist, Central Australia
- **Felicity Hayes** – Children's Ground Co-Director and Arrernte Teacher Specialist, Central Australia
- **C. Turner** – Children's Ground First Nations Language Worker, Central Australia
- **Veronica Doolan** – Children's Ground Community Researcher, Central Australia
- **Bridgette Beer** – Children's Ground Community Support Coordinator, Top End
- **Paw Paw (Pauline) Grant** – Children's Ground Learning/Health & Wellbeing Support, Top End

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### **About Children's Ground**

Children's Ground is designed and led by First Nations communities who are creating a different future for the next generation of children.

Every child born today should experience a lifetime of opportunity and grow up strong in their identity and culture, free from injustice and economic poverty.

If all children can experience this basic right, then whole communities will be happy, healthy and safe places.

**Learn more:** [childrensground.org.au](http://childrensground.org.au)