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THE PARLIAMENT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works

REPORT

relating to the proposed construction of

YIRARA RESIDENTIAL COLLEGE

for

ABORIGINAL STUDENTS

Alice Springs, Northern Territory

(FIFTH REPORT OF 1971)

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PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

YIRARA RESIDENTIAL COLLEGE
FOR ABORIGINAL STUDENTS
ALICE SPRINGS, NORTHERN TERRITORY

R E P O R T

By resolution on 19 February 1971, the House of Representatives referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works for investigation and report to the Parliament, the proposal for construction of the Yirara Residential College for Aboriginal students at Alice Springs, Northern Territory.

The Committee have the honour to report as follows:

THE REFERENCE

1. The proposal involves the construction at Alice Springs of a college, to be known as Yirara College, to provide for some 300 Aboriginal male and female residential students between the ages of 12 and 17-plus years. It will also accommodate teaching, administrative and some domestic staff.
2. The college is to have teaching and instruction facilities, an administrative and resources centre, a recreation hall, a kitchen and dining block, six student dormitories, a clinic, six staff residences and roads, parking areas, sporting facilities and associated engineering services.
3. The estimated cost of the work is \$2,900,000.

THE COMMITTEE'S INVESTIGATION

4. The Committee received written submissions and drawings from the Northern Territory Administration and the Department of Works and took evidence from their representatives at public hearings in Alice Springs. At that time, we also heard evidence from representatives of the Aborigines and Social Welfare Fund, the Cross Culture Group and from two private witnesses.

5. We inspected the proposed site at Alice Springs and on an earlier visit to Darwin, we took the opportunity to inspect Kormilda College, a similar institution to the one now planned.

EDUCATION OF ABORIGINALS IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

6. Aims The Committee were told that the Government is committed to a policy of assimilation defined in the following terms.

" The policy of assimilation seeks that all persons of Aboriginal descent will choose to attain a similar manner and standard of living to that of other Australians and live as members of a single Australian community - enjoying the same rights and privileges, accepting the same responsibilities and influenced by the same hopes and loyalties as other Australians. Any special measures taken are regarded as temporary measures, not based on race, but intended to meet their need for special care and assistance and to make the transition from one stage to another in such a way as will be favourable to their social, economic and political advancement. "

7. The Committee were told that based on this policy, the broad strategy for Aboriginal education programmes includes the following principles:

- Aboriginal children should have equality of educational opportunity with other Australian children and there should be no financial or social barrier to their full educational achievement;
- schools should be established where Aboriginal people live and work;
- the education of Aboriginal children must take cognisance of European and Aboriginal cultures and must be developed to help the Aboriginals achieve their own integration of Aboriginal and European beliefs and ways;
- the Aboriginal culture must be recognised and respected by teachers and instructors;
- curriculum content and methods of instruction should be planned and organised to ensure to the fullest extent the transfer of school learnings to village living;
- education, as an instrument of social progress, must be conceived as a continuing process and emphasis should be placed on the development of appropriate programmes for all age groups;
- education is a basic concern of all staff members. Whatever their specific field, their primary function is seen as educational, directed to the continuing development of the Aboriginal people. In this concept, education is one of the number of facets of the total programme of social change involving health services, vocational training, employment and economic development; and

- the education of Aborigines at this stage of social change is a special field and those who work in this field need special training if educational planning and action are to be fully effective.

8. Evidence was given that Aboriginal children have the same potential for educational achievement as children of other ethnic groups but that there are both social and cultural factors which must be considered in developing educational programmes.

9. In implementing these programmes, Aboriginal teaching assistants are generally used at all levels to help bridge the educational, social and cultural gaps. However, at secondary school level no distinction is made between Aboriginal children and others in providing educational services.

10. Existing Facilities In 1962, a Committee was appointed to investigate the curriculum and teaching methods used in Aboriginal schools in the Northern Territory. An important recommendation of that Committee proposed that a residential college be established for Aboriginal students preparing for secondary education and for those undertaking three-year post primary courses. Kormilda College was subsequently established in Darwin in 1967 with the prime objective of providing education and social programmes to equip young Aborigines for secondary education in community high schools or for providing various forms of vocational training preparatory to employment.

11. Apart from this development, some 57 special primary schools have been progressively established throughout the Northern Territory under the control of the Welfare Branch of the Northern Territory Administration and 5,440 Aboriginal children are now enrolled. Special syllabuses and teaching

techniques are used in these schools to meet the requirements of the children's every day life and the conditions in which they live and to ensure that teaching methods are related to their experiences and interests. These schools have developed in parallel with the community schools which are under the control of the Department of Education and Science and follow the curriculum of the South Australian Department of Education.

12. In addition, post primary schools have been established at the larger Welfare Branch settlements. Students from primary schools on the smaller settlements, missions and pastoral properties where it is neither economical nor practical to establish post primary schools have the opportunity to attend Kormilda College, which in this respect acts as a district post primary centre. Kormilda College is to continue in this role for the northern half of the Northern Territory and it is planned that Yirara College will have a similar function for the southern part, besides its other responsibilities.

RESIDENTIAL COLLEGES

13. The Role The Committee were told that wide differences exist among Aboriginal children in their stages of acculturation. Many are still very close to tribal beliefs and patterns of living, whilst a few have a greater degree of sophistication because of their longer and closer association with European culture. Together with the usual range of individual differences found in any group of children, this accentuates the need to provide special educational programmes to ensure that

- those who are academically advanced and motivated towards formal education can progress to tertiary level; and
- those who are less academically advanced will receive a meaningful education in relation to their present lives and one which will provide them with further training opportunities and employment prospects.

14. Because of the degree of acculturation, many children, particularly those in remote areas, need a longer period of primary school education to master English, to reach an adequate literacy standard and to develop their full potential. Post primary curricula are essential for extension of their basic education and to develop the necessary pre-vocational skills. Accordingly, post primary schools have been established at the larger missions and settlements to cater for the needs of the less academically advanced group. The provision of district post primary facilities at Kormilda College and the proposal for Alice Springs is an extension of this programme.

15. At the same time, due to the impact of the special schools programmes, there are children who are more academically advanced and who at the conclusion of their primary schooling are able to undertake courses offered in the community high schools. But there are factors which militate against the educational success and social adjustment of Aboriginal children if they are brought directly from their own homes into mixed hostels within the community. These include a sharp contrast in the way of life, home sickness and loneliness causing insecurity and lack of self-confidence, and the fact that their previous life and experiences can limit the children's horizons and cause poor conceptual development in a number of areas. Direct transfer from a special primary school to a community high school and hostel makes it difficult to help these children widen their understanding and provide a formal foundation for their academic work and social adjustment. Also teaching methods in special schools are governed by an understanding by the teacher of the children's background and language difficulties to an extent not necessarily encountered in community schools.

16. Because of these factors, Aboriginal children need to be assisted in the transition from the local special primary school to the urban community high school. It is the view of the Northern Territory Administration that this is best achieved by the provision of a residential college in an urban area

where by special teaching methods and educational and social programmes the children will gain security and confidence and so develop attitudes conducive to educational and social progress.

17. Kormilda College Kormilda College is a residential school situated at Berrimah, 8 miles south of Darwin. Most of the buildings used by the college were erected during World War II and later used by Qantas as a transit centre. The college opened in September 1967 and enrolments have increased from 104 students in 1968 to 173 in 1970, and 224 in 1971.

18. Education is provided in three areas - transitional, post primary and teaching assistants. The transitional classes are for academically advanced students who at the end of their grade 6 year are selected, with parental approval, to attend the college for their final primary year prior to entry into secondary schools. Their numbers have increased from 31 in 1968 to 39 in 1969 and 46 in 1970 and some 49 former students of Kormilda College are now attending community high schools.

19. Post primary students come mainly from small centres without such facilities and are generally in the 14 to 16 years age group. The three-year course allows them to explore various vocational pursuits from which they may select one and then specialise in the third year of the course. Besides the general subjects of English, mathematics and social studies, special courses are provided. For boys, these include woodwork, metalwork, mechanics, brickwork, welding, use of power tools, agriculture and pottery. For girls, cookery, sewing, laundry, homemaking, mothercraft, first aid, home nursing, child care practices, typing, health and hygiene

are offered. It is also planned, in order to increase employment opportunities, to introduce classes in business methods, office procedures, shorthand and shopkeeping. The number of students attending post primary classes has increased from 46 in 1968 to 61 in 1969, 90 in 1970 and 84 in 1971.

20. Courses for Aboriginal teaching assistants are also held at Kormilda as training facilities are not presently available elsewhere. However, we noted that it is not intended to duplicate these courses in the proposed college at Alice Springs. In 1968, 20 students attended full time courses, there were 18 in 1969, 18 in 1970 and 21 are in attendance this year. Instruction is given in English, mathematics, health, hygiene, social studies, natural science and civics. Additional courses include music, physical education, youth work, pre-school work, ceramics, art and craft, linguistics, audio-visual aids and speech training. At the end of the 1969 school year, 22 persons had qualified as Teaching Assistants Grade 3, after being trained at Kormilda College and in 1970, a second year of teacher training commenced for a selected group of teaching assistants.

21. A number of special short-term courses are also conducted e.g. induction courses for new teachers, leadership/literacy courses for Aboriginal leaders, instructional courses in ceramics and in-service courses for teachers etc. Tutorial assistance and supervised homework is also given to high school students who may live at the college until they have completed their second year of high school studies. Beyond second year, students move to accommodation in community hostels or private homes. This programme of additional educational assistance

by trained staff is considered essential in the early high school years and is more practical in the environment of a residential college.

22. The Need for Yirara College Recognising the validity of the approach adopted and the method of tackling the problem of Aboriginal education in the Northern Territory there are three basic reasons contributing to the need for Yirara College in Alice Springs. The first of them is that to provide the special education required and to enable careful consideration to be given to the needs of the individual child, it is necessary to limit the size of residential colleges. The Committee noted that experience with Kormilda College suggests that a college limited to about 300 students is of an optimum size to allow educational and social aims to be realised. Because of the increasing number of students becoming available for secondary courses and post primary education Kormilda College is expected to reach this limit in 1972.

23. It was submitted to the Committee that the considerable number of students at Kormilda College who come from the southern half of the Territory would be better placed in a college closer to their homes and in an environment and climate familiar to them. Alice Springs is ideally placed from this point of view and has a high school with capacity for students in transition to secondary education.

24. Finally, the southern part of the Territory is itself generating potential college students at a rate, the Committee were told, which is about to justify a college in that area. We noted that in 1973 an opening enrolment of 216 students at Yirara is possible comprising 54 transitional, 108 post primary, 34 first year high school and 20 second year high school students. It was noted that the departmentally forecast enrolments in subsequent years could grow to 266 in 1974 and 327 in 1975.

25. On these bases, the Committee believe that a need has clearly been established for a residential college for Aboriginal students at Alice Springs.

THE SITE

26. The site, covering some 40 acres, faces the Stuart Highway $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles south of the centre of Alice Springs. It adjoins an area for a future showground and is opposite the Arid Zone Research Institute farm. A depth of 350 feet along its frontage is reserved as parkland.

27. Its location is particularly suited for practical post primary instruction in aspects of the work of the Arid Zone Research Institute and is reasonably accessible to the town. The semi-rural setting is unlikely to be affected by large industrial or residential expansion and therefore will provide an appropriate environment for the students.

28. The Committee agree that the site selected is suitable.

DESIGN

29. Layout The college has been planned as a campus for about 300 students with buildings grouped according to functional requirements and with adjacent sporting and service facilities. Domestic accommodation is also provided for supervisory and other staff. The plan provides for separate male and female student residential communities with normal mixing in recreational, dining and instructional activities.

30. The proposed disposition of buildings allows ample room for future expansion in the event of changes in teaching methods or educational and social programmes catering for a greater number of students.

31. The Buildings The administration and resources building, recreation hall, dining and kitchen block, workshop, domestic science and

manual trades buildings, and the academic wing will be located in the southern half of the site around a paved open assembly area. A clinic and the dormitories will be to the north of these buildings and separated from the staff residences adjoining the northern boundary by sporting facilities. An oval on the western boundary will complete the complex. Except for the two-storey academic wing and the dormitories, buildings will be single-storey.

32. The administration and resources building will include offices, a reception area, a common room, two language study rooms, a language laboratory, a library, a communications room and closed circuit T.V. facilities.

33. The recreation hall will have, in addition to the main hall, a film store, a canteen and servery, and a stage. These facilities will enable it to be used for a variety of purposes ranging from gymnastics to small stage shows, film projection and assemblies.

34. The dining and kitchen block will provide facilities for up to 325 students and single staff. It will include food preparation space, storage areas, a cold room, toilets and a garbage room.

35. The workshop building will contain boilers, stores, garages, a maintenance workshop and staff change facilities.

36. Teaching and instructional facilities will be located in three buildings grouped around a courtyard. The domestic science building will include areas for needlework and other domestic crafts, an office/store room, toilets and a pantry. An outdoor cooking area adjacent to the building will also be provided. The manual trades building will have a woodwork/metalwork room, a finishing room, an office, a planning room, stores, a cleaner's room and mechanical, welding and building workshops. The two-storey academic block will contain nine general purpose classrooms, a science laboratory, a preparation room, stores, toilets and cleaners' rooms.

37. The six two-storey dormitory blocks will together contain 60 bed/study rooms for students on a four to a room basis, 26 bed/study rooms on a two student basis and 12 single bed/study rooms, providing in all accommodation for 304. Each block will have a common room and a quiet room, two self-contained flats for supervisors, toilets, drying rooms, laundries, showers and linen stores.

38. The clinic will include two examination rooms, a surgery, a waiting area and a self-contained flat for the nursing sister. Six standard residences will be provided for married academic and domestic staff.

39. Sporting facilities will comprise two tennis courts, two basketball courts and an oval. Space has been reserved for the future development of rugby and hockey fields, additional tennis and basketball courts and a swimming pool.

40. A ring road will provide vehicular access around the complex, covered ways and paths will connect buildings, and parking will be provided for 46 staff and 12 visitor cars. A turning area for buses is also provided.

CONSTRUCTION

41. Structural The administration and resources building, the clinic, the workshop and the dormitory blocks will be of concrete masonry load bearing wall construction. The recreation hall, the dining and kitchen block, the domestic science and manual trades buildings will be steel framed. The two-storey academic wing will be of reinforced concrete frame construction. Floors throughout will be concrete.

42. Materials and Finishes External walls will be of concrete masonry and doors and windows will be aluminium-framed. The roofs of the houses will be corrugated galvanised iron, supported on timber framing. All other roofs will be galvanised steel deck carried on steel purlins. The open assembly area and the covered ways will be concrete paved.

43. Internally, walls will generally be painted fair face concrete masonry. Toilet partitions will be precast terrazzo and walls ceramic tiled. The floor of the main hall and stage in the recreation hall will be timber. Toilet and kitchen floors will be ceramic tiled and those of the language laboratory, library and principal's office will be carpeted. Other floors will be vinyl tiled.

44. Windows will be insect screened except in the recreation hall and the workshop. Ceilings in the administration and resources building and the academic wing will be suspended acoustic tiles. Elsewhere they will generally be finished with fibrous plaster.

45. Mechanical Services Generally, occupied areas except toilets, showers and workshops will be evaporatively cooled. The administration and resources building, domestic science and manual trades buildings and the academic wing will be served by ducted systems whilst roof or wall mounted units will serve the other areas. The use of evaporative cooling as proposed complies with the Government's policy on the comfort treatment of buildings in hot arid areas.

46. Hot water boilers will heat the administration and resources building, the dining and kitchen block, the domestic science and manual trades buildings, the academic wing and the dormitories. Elsewhere electric heaters will be used.

47. Other mechanical services will include kitchen equipment, exhaust ventilation of kitchen and toilet areas, solar hot water systems for each dormitory and staff residence and electric hot water units for the clinic, recreation hall, administration and resources building, domestic science and manual trades buildings and the academic wing. The boilers will supply hot water to the kitchen.

48. Miscellaneous items will include refrigerated drinking water units, sanitary and garbage incinerators and L.P. gas supply.

49. Electrical Services Electricity will be supplied at 11 kV to a substation on the site and distributed by cables run below covered way roofs or underground. Lighting generally will be fluorescent. Telephones, a public address system and electric clocks will be installed and provision will be made for future television installation.
50. Hydraulic Services Water will be drawn from the main town supply. An elevated storage tank, ground level fire fighting water storage and a booster pump will be provided. Hose cocks for grounds watering will also be installed.
51. Sewage will drain to a pumping station and thence be pumped to the town treatment plant.
52. Fire Protection An automatic fire detection system with thermal detectors will be installed throughout except in the residences. Portable fire extinguishers, small bore hose reels and external fire hydrants will be provided as required.
53. Civil Works and Landscaping Roads and parking areas will be bituminous surfaced, and in the vicinity of the buildings concrete kerbs and gutters will be provided. Paths and paved areas will be concrete.
54. In the nature strip, 350 feet deep across the site's frontage, suitable indigenous flora will be retained wherever possible and be supplemented as necessary. Courtyards and other areas between the covered ways and buildings will be planted with flowering shrubs and trees to provide visual relief and shade. The area within the ring road will be grassed.
55. Committee's Conclusion The Committee recommend the construction of the work in this reference.

ESTIMATE OF COST

56. The estimated cost of the work when referred to the Committee was \$2,900,000 made up as follows:

	\$
Building works	1,875,000
Mechanical and electrical works	710,000
Hydraulic works and civil engineering	<u>315,000</u>
	<u>2,900,000</u>

PROGRAMME

57. After an approval to proceed is given, the preparation of final drawings and tender documents is expected to take six months. Construction of three dormitory blocks, the academic wing, the kitchen and dining block, the staff residences and the workshop building is planned to be completed by December 1972. Other buildings are to be completed by October 1973 and the sports facilities, site works and roads etc. by November 1973.

SWIMMING FACILITIES

58. As part of our investigation, we considered whether it might be appropriate to have swimming facilities added to the work in this reference and built now on the site provided in the master plan. We took evidence on the need for this amenity, the uses to which it might be put and the best means and cost of providing it. At this point, we have not reached a conclusion but have asked the Department of Works to further study the costs and standards of various types of swimming facilities.

59. The Department's report is not expected to be available for consideration by the Committee for another month or so. In the meantime, in view of this time lag and as we are anxious not to delay the construction of other elements of the proposal, we are therefore making this report so that the Government may approach the Parliament for an early endorsement of the work, as proposed, before the end of the current parliamentary session.

60. If, when the Committee have examined the results of the Department of Works' study, we feel swimming facilities should be recommended, the matter will be raised with the Minister for the Interior.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

61. The summary of recommendations and conclusions of the Committee is set out below. Alongside each is shown the paragraph in the report to which it refers.

		<u>Paragraph</u>
1.	A NEED HAS CLEARLY BEEN ESTABLISHED FOR A RESIDENTIAL COLLEGE FOR ABORIGINAL STUDENTS AT ALICE SPRINGS.	25
2.	THE SITE SELECTED IS SUITABLE.	28
3.	THE COMMITTEE RECOMMEND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE WORK IN THIS REFERENCE.	55
4.	THE ESTIMATED COST OF THE WORK WHEN REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE WAS \$2,900,000.	56

5. IF, WHEN THE COMMITTEE HAVE EXAMINED THE RESULTS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF WORKS' STUDY ON COSTS AND STANDARDS OF SWIMMING FACILITIES, WE FEEL THESE FACILITIES SHOULD BE RECOMMENDED, THE MATTER WILL BE RAISED WITH THE MINISTER FOR THE INTERIOR.

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(C.R. KELLY)
Chairman

Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works,
Parliament House,
CANBERRA, A.C.T.

28 April 1971.