

Dear Editor

Noel Pearson dwells in 'The Land of Make Believe', a well-populated country. His high expectations of a school based on apartheid and soft words were baseless from the start.

The problem is not bad teachers: very few teachers can truly teach if students are absent or, when present, are truculent and bloody-minded; and when no effective deterrents are available. The problem is not whether a school is owned or controlled by governments. That does not affect actual behaviour in schools.

The blunt fact is that progress in education demands regular attendance, calm classrooms and steady effort. These are usually notable by their absence in Aboriginal education, and in much mainstream education as well.

The higher the truancy rate and the worse the conduct inside the school, the more resources are poured in and the more fuss made about the rights of students who are finally reprimanded or mildly punished. You won't work in school? You tell the teacher to back off? "Right! We will send you on a holiday camp", or get a top footballer to try to visit the school.

An end should be made to the compassion that kills. Instead let's have the toughness needed to be kind. But who in Australian public life would dare to propose the changes needed to make any significant difference to life in Djarragun College, town camps in Alice Springs and many other sad places in our country?

Geoff Partington
Melbourne

14th March, 2011