



Lib MPs back truancy scheme

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Pressure is mounting on the Federal Government from within over its decision to axe a widely supported anti-truancy scheme for Aboriginals in the State's north, with WA Federal MPs Ross Lightfoot, Alan Eggleston and Barry Haase venting their anger yesterday.

The MPs said they would join Education Minister Brendan Nelson in lobbying Employment and Workplace Relations Minister Kevin Andrews to reverse a decision to end the scheme which had linked parenting payments to school attendance.

The West Australian revealed this week that the scheme was stopped after a complaint from an undisclosed person. There has been speculation the scheme could be illegal under Federal social security laws.

Mr Haase has written to Mr Andrews demanding an explanation and questioning whether he was aware of the scheme's success during

the two months it operated at Halls Creek District High School.

Senators Lightfoot and Eggleston said they would raise the matter with Mr Andrews when Parliament resumed next week.

The pilot scheme allowed the Halls Creek Centrelink office to cancel parenting payments to local Aboriginals if their children skipped school. Payments were cut only if a parent failed to attend a Centrelink meeting to discuss the issue.

Mr Haase, the Kalgoorlie MHR, could see no justification for cancelling the scheme, saying the legislation should be amended so the program could be reinstated.

"It is ludicrous that Minister Andrews would cancel a program he admits is working and does not oppose," he said. "I think this move is extremely short-sighted."

Senator Lightfoot said he was appalled and disappointed that Mr

Andrews had axed a scheme which had proved successful.

"I was staggered that someone with the acumen that Kevin Andrews has, someone who's brought the most controversial legislation (into Federal Parliament) . . . should make this mistake," he said. "I believe he will look seriously at reversing what is a misjudged decision. I think he's overloaded with IR."

Senator Eggleston said the scheme appeared to be an effective method of lowering truancy rates.

Federal shadow education minister Jenny Macklin did not support the scheme, saying it was illegal to take away people's family payments.

A spokesman for Mr Andrews said the Minister was seeking legal advice and recommendations from his departments before deciding if he should reinstate the scheme.