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## **Budget cuts hit education hard**

The Department of Education's Aboriginal Education branch has been gutted by major Barnett Government cutbacks according to the Community and Public Service Union/Civil Service Association.

In two years the branch has been trimmed from 25 staff to 15 and by February 2013 is expected to be as low as seven, which experienced staff say is having a major impact on delivering frontline services.

Professional learning workshops to regional and remote areas were approved, booked and paid for by the department in September and then cancelled in October.

CPSU/CSA Branch Secretary Toni Walkington said cancelling travel to remote and regional centres indefinitely would result in professional isolation and create a false economy by producing a short-term gain for long-term pain.

She said the small amount of money saved now would be nothing compared to the cost of not being able to lure teachers to these hard-to-staff schools in the future.

The branch aims to improve the education of Aboriginal students but Ms Walkington said the dramatic budget cutbacks had put course delivery in jeopardy and the branch's future seemed uncertain.

She said teachers were committed to making a difference to the lives of young children.

"In electing to work in our remote and isolated schools teachers do so with the understanding of receiving ongoing professional support from experienced regional and central office staff whose experience and support enables them to work in often difficult situations," Ms Walkington said.

She said these officers worked with communities that have a low socio-economic index and high needs with the Aboriginal population often being more than 50 per cent.

Ms Walkington said a lot of these schools had issues around participation and attendance and the officers worked hard with the local communities to improve student outcomes.

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She said it was a ridiculous situation to have experienced educators employed in central and regional offices that could not go and visit these regional and remote schools.

There are about 71 focus schools (only five in the metropolitan area) with the majority in remote areas such as the Kimberley, Pilbara, Midwest and Goldfields/Esperance.

Ms Walkington said it took time to establish and build effective relationships with these communities.

“You can’t build up that relationship and trust with these people on the phone and a lot of these remote locations have information technology and communication challenges.

“The staff who will be left behind will have to shoulder a massive increase in workload with some suspecting they will pick up two other jobs on top of their own.”

**FOR COMMENT:**

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