Grant for needy kids should be used as intended: Editorial

The Toronto District School Board diverted $61 million of an intended grant for at-risk children to other needs, according to a report from Social Planning Toronto. The board is a case in point of the provincial government's lack of oversight of its spending. This allows it to be widely abused. The only reason we now know what we do about how much of the grant is being diverted is that Social Planning Toronto started asking the right questions.

This flexibility is a relic of the Mike Harris years, as is the total lack of accountability in provincial funding for mandatory core services. As we've seen, the money that's supposed to support students at risk goes to support the rest of the class. It's the same story in every school board. The board's head, John Malloy, says that, if anything, the money is being used as directed — but he's not asked the right questions. He's not asking the board to justify the decisions it makes about how to spend the money.

This is a widespread tragedy — child exploitation rings led by companies that employ children as young as 10 years old were operating in Canada. The government of Ontario knew about it but did nothing. This is the same government that is diverting money that's supposed to make a difference for children from the very ones that need it.

The only way to fix this is to change the rules. This is the time to do it. There are millions more dollars of aid available for educational interventions, like breakfast programs, homework clubs and other educational interventions. The province must get its money where it needs to be, and only where it needs to be.

This kind of investment has the potential to have an enduring impact. The evidence that investments like Ontario's Learning Opportunities Grant, which is meant to fund programs that support students at risk, is working is overwhelming. The end result of the grant's diversion will be kids who are at increased risk of not graduating. This is a bigger problem than the board's systemic issues. We need to fix the system before it's too late for kids like that.