



***Australian Federation of Graduate Women Inc.***

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**[www.afgw.org.au](http://www.afgw.org.au)**

12 July 2017

Senator the Honourable Simon Birmingham  
Minister for Education and Training

Dear Senator Birmingham

The Australian Federation of Graduate Women is a non-government organisation of women graduates whose purpose is to advocate for and support the right of girls and women to access and enjoy affordable quality education up to the highest possible level of their capacity.

It is now generally acknowledged that the education of girls and women benefits not only the individuals concerned but also their immediate communities and ultimately the nation. It is also generally acknowledged that Indigenous Australians are first and foremost among those socio-economic groups for whom education is vital as the pathway to improve poor living standards.

We were dismayed therefore by the recently published report on menstruation as a cause of Indigenous girls in remote communities interrupting or even abandoning their school attendance. According to the authors of *Water, sanitation and hygiene in remote Australian communities: A scan of priorities* (a discussion paper in the series Water for Equity and Wellbeing, issued by the Global Change Institute of the University of Queensland), Indigenous girls are too embarrassed to attend school during menstruation.

Several reasons are given. One is that suitable sanitary products are difficult to obtain and too expensive for these girls to afford. Why is it not possible for schools to be subsidised to provide these?

The other – which surely can be fixed without undue effort—is that school facilities offer no privacy to menstruating girls to change and dispose of such sanitary material as they can improvise. The provision of doors on toilet cubicles and a rubbish container within each cubicle, not in a public space, would go a long way to alleviate the situation. Education

Departments should be instructed to see that this is done –if necessary by providing special funding to relevant schools.

Ensuring that these girls receive their education will pay long-term dividends. It is also a matter of gender equity.

We are used to hearing this situation reported from Third World countries. It is shameful that it should be happening to the girl-children of a country as wealthy and developed as Australia.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jane O. Baker". The signature is written in a cursive style and is centered within a light gray rectangular box.

Dr. Jane Baker President  
'Tricia Blombery Education Convener

Cc Senator the Honourable Michaelia Cash  
Minister for Women

Office of the Prime Minister

Senator the Honourable Nigel Scullion  
Minister for Indigenous Affairs

Hon. Tanya Plibersek  
Shadow Minister for Education and for Women