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Teaching job for 'Sir Tony' Abbott

Tony Koch | August 07, 2008

BEING addressed by the children as "Sir Tony" appeals to the new tutor at Coen State school in Cape York.

"They also call me Mr Tony, but being a monarchist, I like the Sir Tony," Opposition families and indigenous affairs spokesman Tony Abbott said yesterday.

Mr Abbott made the comments on his way to his holiday job as a volunteer literacy tutor for 35 students, most of whom are Aboriginal. "I thought early in the year I had visited many indigenous communities many times, but had seldom stayed even for 24 hours," he said.

"I rang my mate Noel Pearson and told him I wanted to go to a community, stay a reasonable time, and do some productive work -- not just be a glorified tourist. He said: 'You can be the tutor in the local school at Coen.' So that's what I'm doing -- spending three weeks here as the remedial tutor."

Mr Abbott is implementing a program called Multilit, which has been developed by Kevin Wheldall, head of the Australian Centre for Educational Studies at Macquarie University.

"It involves trying to get people to read by forming building blocks -- learning to construct words out of building block sounds," he said. "It helps if you have one-on-one tuition."

Mr Abbott said he was happy to spend the parliamentary break in Cape York while others were "holidaying in Beijing", and he was challenged by the willingness of the children to learn.

"It's another world," he said. "If they're going to be able to function in the wider Australian society, they need to be able to read well. The ability to read opens the world up to us."

Mr Abbott said there were three teachers and three teacher aides at the school, where, unlike in many Aboriginal communities, English is the first language.

"One of the old stockmen here has offered to take me fishing on Saturday and I might catch my first barramundi," he said.

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