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LOCAL &gt; General

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LEADER**

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## Brethren under fire over funds

IT has been alleged the Exclusive Brethren, which operates a school campus in Tamworth, has structured its educational arrangements in such a way as to maximise Federal Government funding.

Reports in the Sydney Morning Herald, a sister publication of The Leader, claimed earlier this week that by registering schools that are in some cases hundreds of kilometres apart as campuses of the Meadowbank School, the organisation was able to access a much higher rate of funding.

All of the schools, including the one in Tamworth, are operated under the umbrella of the Meadowbank Education Trust.

The Brethren's Meadowbank Education Trust (MET) Tamworth Campus recently moved to a newly-built site for its 2008 school year.

An Armidale campus is also registered with the government, along with 15 other MET campuses.

The reports claimed that although Prime Minister Kevin Rudd had described the church as a "cult" and said it broke up families, it continued to receive a high level of funding.

The NSW campuses were said to have obtained more than \$4 million last year alone. It was also reported that in 2006 the school gained \$3.3 million in federal funding and \$1.3 million from state coffers.

"The Government's commitment to maintain the current funding arrangements for the 2009-2012 funding period provides all schools with funding certainty," a spokesperson for Federal Education Minister Julia Gillard told The Leader yesterday.

"Attempting to change the existing funding model at this stage in the funding cycle would cause a delay in the funding determinations for schools in 2009.

"The Rudd Government will conduct an open, transparent review of SES funding model over the next quadrennium to see what if any improvements can be made to the model for funding arrangements beyond the 2009-2012

quadrennium.

"The review was commissioned by the previous government, conducted internally and provided to the previous minister's office. The report was classified by the previous government as cabinet in confidence, as such this government is not able to access a copy of the report."

The Leader contacted the Tamworth campus of the Meadowbank Education Trust for comment yesterday.

Spokesperson Lorraine Taber said she was unable to comment.

A phone call to the Meadowbank Campus was not returned.

The Leader is hopeful of obtaining comment from another Tamworth campus spokesman today.

Member for Tamworth, Peter Draper, Member for New England, Tony Windsor, and the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations have also been asked to comment.

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