

Aurukun teachers evacuated for six weeks after burglary attempts

Staff have been 'tipped over the edge' after a series of incidents including a carjacking, physical attacks and attempted break-ins



Queensland minister Curtis Pitt with police in Aurukun during a visit to the troubled community in 2015.

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Teachers will be evacuated from Aurukun for the second time in a fortnight and will not return for six weeks following further unrest in the troubled Cape York community.

The Queensland government announced on Wednesday teachers would be removed from the town in the next 24 hours, following a spate of incidents including attacks by children as young as six on teachers' houses in the small hours of the morning.

Kevin Bates, president of Queensland Teachers Union, said staff would be evacuated and would not return until the start of term three.

"The key concern here is people's emotional wellbeing," he said. "People can't sustain the pressure they're under at the moment."

Ian Stewart, Queensland's police commissioner, said the latest incidents early on Wednesday morning occurred near where the teachers were staying and appeared to be targeted attacks.

"There were at least two, probably three incidents that caused some concerns," Stewart said. "And they revolved around a group of young people trying to steal a motor vehicle and throwing rocks at security guards and throwing rocks at buildings." No one has been charged.

Stewart said principal Scott Fatnowna's house was either targeted or was nearby. "It is my clear understanding that the teachers fear for their personal safety and it is that reason why they have decided finally to come out on this occasion and my understanding is they are likely to stay out for several weeks," he said.

"The reality is this is a very complex environment," he said. "You have kids aged between six and 10 involved in some of these incidents."

The Queensland premier, Anastacia Palaszczuk, was expected to visit Aurukun on Friday to attend a public meeting called by the mayor, Derek Walpo.

"Number one has always been the safety of staff in Aurukun and the safety of the community," said Palaszczuk, who discussed the situation with her ministers and directors-general on Wednesday. "I've been advised that the teachers are feeling unsafe so we are going to get the teachers out."

Bates said the latest incidents – believed to be a series of attempted break-ins at the homes of teachers – were enough to "tip people over the edge in terms of their stress levels".

"We're certainly aware people were showing signs of severe anxiety," he said. "Every noise caused people to be alert and unable to sleep."

The Aurukun police citizens youth club would offer alternative programs to students while the school is closed.

Bates said it was now time for "some very hard conversations" to be had about the bigger issues facing the troubled community.

The latest evacuation comes just days after Aurukun school principal Scott Fatnowna was attacked and carjacked for a second time in two weeks.

The first incident earlier this month caused the evacuation of the school's 25 staff to Cairns and the arrest of six people.