

Rhema loses funding for French

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A local private Christian elementary school is frustrated the Ministry of Education is stripping it of a French language grant it has received for a number of years.

Ray Hendricks, principal of Rhema Elementary Christian School on County Road 4, just east of the city, said "it's not a money issue, but a principle issue."

The school used to get an \$800 French language grant, funded by Canadian Heritage and the Ministry of Education.

The grant is administered by the provincial government and was used for French materials, Hendricks said.

Patricia MacNeil, spokeswoman for the ministry, acknowledged the allocation of funding is changing for the 2008-09 school year.

Only high schools that offer the Ontario Secondary School Diploma and are inspected by the ministry will receive the grant, she said. Elementary schools will be excluded.

MacNeil also said new measures will also ensure the grant is spent properly.

The ministry still has a partnership with Canadian Heritage, but the federal ministry has decided the province can allocate the funding based on its own "needs and priorities," she said.

MacNeil said the ministry is focused on a "strong and robust, publicly funded system."

"Private school is a private business ... it's a choice. The programs that they offer are not accountable to the public and these are public dollars."

Hendricks said the school, and the Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools, is frustrated.

"We feel like we've been dealt with unjustly. This is a language grant issued by the federal government with which there was never an issue," he said.

"As soon as the provincial government got a hold of it, we lost it. And it hurts that our provincial government, on such a minor issue, would seek to withhold funding for us once again."

The alliance is urging parents and schools to contact their MP.

Peterborough MPP Jeff Leal said the provincial Liberal government's position is to spend on public and Catholic schools.

The only option would be for the federal government to bypass the province and provide the grant directly, he said.

Leal said his office hasn't been contacted about the issue.

Peterborough MP Dean Del Mastro said Canadian Heritage is going to look into the issue.

"Hopefully, it's just a misunderstanding," he said.