

Isolated Children's Parents Association Qld Inc.

Mrs Wendy Henning, Qld President

Mrs Annette Boyle, Qld Secretary

www.icpa.com.au



“Advocating for equitable education opportunities and support for rural and remote students”

SUBMISSION

Education (General Provisions) (Extension of Primary Schools in Remote Areas) Amendment Bill 2023

The Isolated Children's Parents' Association Inc. (ICPA Qld Inc.) advocates for equitable access to quality educational opportunities for children in rural and remote areas. ICPA Qld Inc. represents forty-five branches, comprising over 1200 families throughout rural Queensland.

ICPA Qld Inc. is a voluntary apolitical parent organisation and is the only community-based parent group with interests in all sectors and levels of education – state schools, independent, church, or boarding schools, early childhood and care through to tertiary education and all methods used to facilitate access to that education.

Having been provided with the wording of the Amendment Bill, and the Explanatory Notes, ICPA Qld Inc. does not support the *Education (General Provisions) (Extension of Primary Schools in Remote Areas) Amendment Bill 2023*. The reasons detailed below indicate areas of concern for ICPA Qld Inc.:

- **If the 104 schools listed in the Amendment Bill were to become P-10 schools under the proposed amendment, the current financial assistance provided by the State Government for boarding school tuition fees, known as the *Living Away From Home Allowance (LAFHAS)*, would no longer be available to families, as they would not fit the criteria.**

It is advised in the additional information regarding the Amendment Bill, that the Amendment Bill has been designed to not affect the monetary support already provided; however, in line with current rules, the passing of the Amendment Bill would change the school criteria thus affecting the monetary support. Further, it is “expected” that the schools which are expanded will be deemed “Bypass” schools (meaning they are eligible for support under the LAFHAS criteria; currently there are 19 “Bypass” schools in Queensland). There is no guarantee that this will transpire, and families would lose their LAFHAS eligibility as school classification/criteria change.

In the Explanatory Notes provided, models at Thargomindah and Julia Creek are referenced. The Thargomindah model is currently closed as there are no students accessing this Remote Secondary Learning Facility and Julia Creek model has had 21 students access it over a 9-year period. Under the proposed Amendment Bill, both schools/learning facilities would still be classified as a P-10 school and families would not be eligible for LAFHAS. In the 2023 school year, LAFHAS has been utilised by more than 1500 students. This proposed Amendment Bill seeks change that will benefit a minority of students but will adversely affect most of the member families that ICPA represents.

Whilst it is suggested the curriculum would be covered in the proposed Amendment Bill model of “remote primary school”, it is important to remember that education is much more than the school curriculum. Parents make informed choices when selecting secondary schooling options. Considerations include access to appropriate, additional opportunities such as experiencing a team sport, music, debating, art, exposure to a science lab or manual arts room and opportunities for their students to extend social skills and be part of a larger school community with many peers of their own age. If this Amendment Bill is passed, this opportunity will not be available to such a large range of children as boarding will not be an affordable option for families.

- **Resourcing in remote and rural schools, in terms both of space and staffing, will be under extreme pressure if the proposed amendments are legislated.**

Of the 104 schools listed, more than half are one-teacher schools with a teaching Principal. In many one teacher schools/teaching Principal schools the staff are already under immense pressure undertaking teaching across eight year levels plus administrative tasks. Under the proposed Amendment Bill, these schools will become a secondary school (P-10), adding another layer of complexity, priorities, policy, and staff issues to the Principal's role. Principals of P-6 schools in Queensland are not necessarily secondary schooling trained, including in subject specialties. Whilst Distance Education would support these students, the ultimate responsibility will still lie with the School Principal, adding additional stressors to an already overloaded position. The only support the Principal will receive under the Amendment Bill is a teacher aide assigned to the secondary area.

Currently, teacher aides do not need qualifications to apply for and be employed in a position of teacher aide. Further, the Department of Education is reporting a shortage across the state of suitable candidates for existing positions. ICPA Qld Inc sees that the employee who takes on this role of teacher aide will need some knowledge of secondary schooling, comprehension of policy and procedure regarding workplace health and safety, mobile phone usage, supervision during break periods and a good grasp of technical skills as lessons are delivered online and connectivity is paramount. Ensuring quality staffing for the delivery of education is, or needs to be, a priority when considering these changes.

The accommodation of extra staff in the proposed schooling areas is another consideration. The schools on the proposed list are all located in small towns or are schools in isolation, with no community surrounding them. Accommodation is at a premium in these towns with nothing available to accommodate additional staff. To attract and retain quality teacher aides

to these roles, a complete package needs to be offered, including accommodation that is just not available. Department teacher housing is not available to teacher aides.

ICPA Qld Inc. has received comments from a teacher at one of the proposed small schools stating that it “brings her out in cold sweats, the thought of having not only to manage Kindy to Year 6 students and then potentially secondary students too”. Currently at the school there are already four positions unable to be filled. As a Teaching Principal in a small school this has the potential to be a “disaster” and when you have additional adverse learners the feasibility is not only inhuman and unreasonable to all, but selfish to expect the children to have to lower their social interactions to younger years when they are trying to expand and explore with their own development.

For the proposals in the Amendment Bill to be successful, secondary students would require a quiet space to set up and carry out their lessons with the teacher aide, which may not be available in smaller schools, due to space constraints. The space referred to in the Amendment Bill suggests room that used to be occupied by Year 7; however, since the introduction of Year 7 into secondary school, Prep becoming compulsory in 2017, and in more recent years, the introduction of State Delivered Kindy in 57 of the proposed schools those classrooms have been utilised. The additional numbers of students now attending these schools has them at capacity regarding physical space. Infrastructure requirements need to be considered as part of this Amendment Bill’s proposals. Space must be a major consideration.

- **In reference to part 20D (2) “The chief executive and the local government must establish a remote secondary learning facility for years 7 – 10 in the town in which the remote primary school is located”**

Local Government’s core business is not education. As mentioned above, education is more than the delivery of curriculum. Education is a highly valued profession with rigorous parameters around equality, workplace health and safety and child safety and should be delivered by professionals, not local government. There are many stakeholders who look to the outcomes from education thus making it a priority area to parents, community, government, and industry and needing respect and delivery by professionals to ensure excellence is maintained. The Department of Education’s “Equity and Excellence, realising the potential of every student (Equity and Excellence)” education strategy has plans for a progressive, high performing education system that realises the potential of every student. “Equity and Excellence” has three key focus areas: educational achievement; wellbeing and engagement; and culture and inclusion. ICPA Qld Inc. questions if these key focus areas can be delivered to students in a “Remote Secondary Learning Facility” facilitated by Local Government. Is that fair and equitable to this cohort of students?

- **Distance Education Home Schoolroom Supervision**

Under the current Distance Education model in Distance Education Home Schoolrooms, supervision of secondary enrolled students is provided by Home Tutors, who are not employed by the Department of Education. An implication of the proposed Amendment Bill is that Home Schoolrooms for Secondary students, would need to be provided with similar supervisory conditions as those in the proposed model of P-10 Schools, in the interests of equity of access to quality education. This would be an extremely costly repercussion for the Department of Education, and as there is a shortage across the state of suitable candidates for existing positions, the situation would be exacerbated.

ICPA Qld is grateful for the opportunity to provide this submission and is opposed to the proposed *Education (General Provisions) (Extension of Primary Schools in Remote Areas) Amendment Bill 2023*. Again, this proposed Amendment Bill seeks change that will benefit a minority of students but will adversely affect most of the member families that ICPA represents.

Submitted on behalf of Isolated Children's Parents Association Qld Inc. (ICPA Qld Inc.) State Council.



Mrs Wendy Henning
ICPA Qld President
E: president@icpaqld.com.au