

9 May 2020

Dear Premier,

ICPA QLD would like to express our thanks for the consideration given to our rural and remote families during this unprecedented time of Covid-19. Your government's recent announcement of a staged return to school was gratefully received by many families with Year 11 and 12 students in particular, however it has also brought about deep concern in regard to those who attend independent schools as boarders.

Independent schools have been extremely proactive in the provision of educational resources tailored to meet the needs of rural and remote boarding families during these weeks of learning at home, and have ensured the processes have been as smooth as possible regardless of a student's location or connectivity. In looking ahead to their return to school, it would seem that any equity has been completely eroded with a lack of consideration for those students who are returning to reside at their 'home away from home'.

The guidelines created by the AHPPC have allowed a vast amount of interpretation with many schools and families being left in limbo and confusion as they try to navigate the red tape and apparent loopholes from state to state. ICPA Qld has had contact from numerous parents and schools who are frustrated and upset with the lack of clarity and the inconsistency between local health authorities and Queensland Health. Messages being received are conflicting from school to school, as well as region to region, leading to a multitude of last minute communications to families who are then having to try to make decisions about what is the best for their child. Schools are having to reinvent protocols and reconstruct advices sometimes on an hourly basis during one day to try to convey the right advice to their families. As a direct result of the inconsistencies between schools and health advices, we are hearing from families who are anxious about what a return to school will involve for their child – particularly in regard to restrictive policies and the complexity of the differences between day students and boarders – and many who will still not return until some clarity is achieved.

Our members are again feeling part of a second class population which is being disadvantaged even though boarding in their secondary years is the only choice they have for their education. Some boarders from interstate are being told they must quarantine at their own cost for 14 days before being allowed back into their 'homes', whilst other students are crossing the border on a daily basis to access their schooling. Some schools are being told they cannot offer their own boarding facilities as bases for quarantining their own students, despite these facilities being empty and the home for students for 40 weeks each year.

It is imperative that boarding schools and their families and students be prioritised and consistent messages be provided as soon as possible. Our students are being negatively impacted educationally and emotionally, and for Year 12 students who are already feeling vulnerable, this inequity is simply not good enough.

We would implore you to stand together with Dr Young in front of our state and send a joint and consistent message to all rural and remote boarding families, and boarding school staff, that they do matter. They need to hear one consistent message across the board which states the details of how they can and cannot operate. These self-interpretations of guidelines across the state are causing negativity and aggression between boarding and day families, as well as toward boarding school staff, all of which is unnecessary for all involved.

I appreciate your time and urge you to consider the wellbeing of rural and remote Queensland students and the importance of their education during this time of pandemic.

Kindest Regards,
Tammie Irons

ICPA Qld President

