



Briefing Paper

Distance Education Portfolio 2025-2026

The Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia, ICPA (Aust), is a voluntary, apolitical, national parent organisation working on behalf of our members for equity of access to appropriate education for children living outside of metropolitan areas.

Distance education is a necessity for many geographically isolated students in Australia. For approximately 1,000 families living in remote areas, access to face-to-face mainstream schooling is not possible due to their geographical isolation. As a result, these students must rely entirely on distance education to receive formal schooling. This mode of learning presents unique challenges and demands a significant level of commitment from families, who play an essential role in enabling their children's education.

SUMMARY

1. Remuneration for the Isolated Classroom Supervisor (RICS)

- Recognition of the value and necessity of the distance education supervisor in geographically isolated schoolrooms through the provision of appropriate remuneration.
- Acknowledge that families are currently responsible for providing and funding all costs associated with the supervision of students. This often requires either the employment of additional staff or the commitment of a family member, most commonly the mother.

2. Schools of the Air/Schools of Distance Education

- It is critical that Schools of the Air and Schools of Distance Education who offer education to geographically isolated students, are based in rural and regional areas to best meet their students' needs.

3. An increase to the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) – Distance Education (DE) Allowance

- A separate category for geographically isolated distance education students be established within the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Scheme to ensure that adequate support and assistance is maintained and increased for rural and remote students.

4. Appropriate Learning Resources for Distance Education Students

- Learning materials for Distance Education students need to be readily accessible and available in a variety of formats, including print.



5. Support for volunteer educator programs for geographically isolated students such as BushEd, Aussie Helpers Volunteers for Isolated Student's Education (AHVISE), and Retired Educator Volunteers for Isolated Children's Education (REVISE)

ISSUE 1 – Remuneration for the Isolated Classroom Supervisor (RICS)

Distance Education schools require a supervisor to be present with the child in the DE schoolroom as part of the enrolment criteria. This obligation is outlined in most Distance Education school enrolment policies.

The success of the DE classroom relies on the home supervisor. The supervisor is critical in delivering the day-to-day program. The supervisor spends valuable time on supporting lessons, preparing resources, behaviour management, time management and facilitating strong communications with the distance education teachers. Supervisors do not just supervise but are the primary educators, particularly in the younger year levels.

Tasks required of the distance education supervisor include:

- setting up a classroom
- keeping students engaged in the curriculum
- providing duty of care supervision of the students
- dealing with disciplinary issues
- ensuring students link in via the internet or telephone for their formal instructions and a variety of extra-curricular activities
- receiving and returning completed lessons to distance education centres and marking schoolwork before it is returned
- being able to use educational online programs

Schools of Distance Education require a supervisor to be present with the student, as outlined in their enrolment policy. This requirement presents a significant barrier for geographically isolated families, who must supply this supervisor themselves. The supervisor is expected to dedicate between six and eight hours each day to teaching and supporting students, in addition to lesson preparation and planning time. This role demands considerable commitment, often spanning many years, and requires the supervisor to be capable and confident in delivering the program to ensure that rural and remote students can achieve educational parity with their urban peers, who have face to face access to qualified teachers and classroom support.

Distance education supervisors perform duties equivalent to those of classroom teachers in mainstream schools, spending substantial time preparing lessons, delivering instruction, and evaluating student progress, yet they receive no remuneration or formal recognition for this work. The success of distance education relies entirely on the commitment of these supervisors, who serve as the face-to-face educators for geographically isolated students.

The supervisor may be employed by the family, at the family's own expense, or may be a parent, most often the mother. In these cases, the mother forgoes paid employment, community involvement, or responsibilities within the family business. Both situations place significant financial and emotional strain on the family.



These pressures are often exacerbated during periods of dry times or other rural hardship, when the demands on family members are already considerable. The family member acting as the home supervisor is unable to contribute to the day-to-day management of the family enterprise while also supervising the children's education.

Some families choose to employ a supervisor or governess, however, this option comes at a substantial cost and is often complicated by recruitment challenges, particularly in remote locations.

Over recent decades, the roles undertaken by women in family agricultural businesses have expanded significantly. The additional responsibility of acting as the distance education supervisor further compounds their workload, placing pressure on other family members and, in some cases, necessitating the hiring of additional staff to meet business needs.

To acknowledge this critical role, the ICPA (Aust) has introduced the term Remuneration for the Isolated Classroom Supervisor (RICS). This initiative aims to advocate for financial compensation for those undertaking the compulsory task of supervising students in geographically isolated classrooms. The RICS scheme seeks to formally recognise the essential contribution of supervisors in providing equitable access to education for children in remote locations. Government support for this initiative would not only address a long-standing gap in educational equity but also strengthen Australia's commitment to supporting rural and remote students in achieving fair and consistent educational outcomes.

Distance Education supervisors must be paid, legally and fairly by the Government. Their work is not voluntary.

While the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Distance Education (DE) Allowance assists distance education families with some of the incidental expenses incurred to educate their children when living in geographic isolation, this does not include covering the cost of someone to teach the children in the home schoolroom. According to the [AIC Guidelines](#), the intent of the AIC Distance Education Allowance since it was established has not been to cover costs for providing a supervisor in the distance education home classroom.

"5.4.1 Purpose

The Distance Education Allowance contributes towards incidental costs incurred by geographically isolated families whose student children are undertaking their education by distance education methods. This payment is not intended to meet the ongoing cost of provision of education (e.g. costs associated with teaching, tuition and supervision)."

The calculations below highlight the average financial loss and implications of a mother undertaking the distance education supervisor role.

Family member as geographically isolated distance education supervisor	
Average hours per day	6-8 hours per day, approx. 40 weeks per year
Average years spent as DE supervisor for one child	8 years (Kindy/preschool plus primary school)
Average total hours spent supervising one child	9600 –12,800 hours
Minimum Wage	\$24.95 per hour



Unpaid Work/Wages forgone (number of hours x Minimum wage)	\$239,520 - \$319,360
Superannuation @ 12% foregone	\$28,742- \$38,323

RECOMMENDATION

- That the Federal Government introduce financial remuneration for the individuals undertaking the role of supervising students in geographical isolated learning environments through a Distance education (DE) school

ISSUE 2 - Schools of the Air/Schools of Distance Education

ICPA (Aust) strongly believes that Schools of the Air and Schools of Distance Education who offer education to geographically isolated students should remain based in rural and regional areas so they can best meet their students' needs. ICPA (Aust) understands that decisions of this nature are principally State- based, however ICPA (Aust) wishes to raise awareness of this topic with all levels of government and the community to ensure Schools of the Air and Schools of Distance Education remain in rural and remote communities and that the resources and support provided for geographically isolated students who have no choice but to be educated via these schools is maintained.

The value and importance of these schools to rural and remote students, families and their communities need to be understood and appreciated. The tyranny of distance means that geographically isolated distance education students have limited opportunities for face-to-face interaction with their teachers and peers, learning, participation in a regular classroom, assessments, identification of any specific learning needs and other activities. Moving Schools of the Air and Schools of Distance Education to a centralised urban environment would further limit these opportunities.

RECOMMENDATION

- Schools of the Air and Schools of Distance Education which cater for geographically isolated students should remain in regional and rural locations to best serve the needs of these students.

ISSUE 3 - Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) – Distance Education (DE) Allowance

Families educating their children through distance education are required to establish and maintain a dedicated schoolroom, provide additional learning materials and resources, and print necessary documents, all of which are typically supplied to students in mainstream schools. In addition, distance education families travel long distances to attend school-based activities that provide essential opportunities for interaction and socialisation. These trips frequently involve significant travel and accommodation expenses.



The Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Distance Education (DE) Allowance provides some support to help families meet these unavoidable costs of educating children in geographically isolated areas. However, increasing the existing allowance would better reflect the rising expenses faced by these families.

Given the nature of distance education, the ICPA (Aust) also requests that a separate category for geographically isolated students be established within the AIC Scheme. This category should use the existing Geographic Isolation (GI) eligibility criteria to recognise the distinct needs of these students and ensure that adequate and appropriate assistance continues to be provided to those who cannot access daily face-to-face schooling due to distance, in keeping with the original intent of the scheme.

The needs of geographically isolated students differ considerably from those of other categories now included in the AIC Scheme, particularly in terms of remoteness, lack of local services, and additional educational expenses. It is therefore essential that the allowance sufficiently addresses the out-of-pocket costs incurred by rural and remote families whose children study via distance education. Geographically isolated distance education students represent a uniquely disadvantaged group because of where they live, and financial assistance must be maintained and increased to better reflect the true cost of their education and to ensure they can access equitable educational opportunities and outcomes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- An increase to the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) – Distance Education (DE) Allowance
- A separate category for geographically isolated distance education students be established within the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Scheme to ensure that adequate support and assistance is maintained and increased for rural and remote students.

ISSUE 4 – Appropriate Learning Resources for Distance Education Students

The ICPA (Aust) acknowledges that the provision of learning materials and resources for distance education is the responsibility of State and Territory Governments. However, ICPA (Aust) seeks the continued support of the Federal Government to ensure that appropriate and high-quality resources are consistently supplied to distance education students across Australia.

Families who educate their children via distance education must establish and maintain a dedicated schoolroom, provide additional learning materials and resources, and print necessary study materials, all of which are routinely provided to students attending mainstream schools. Furthermore, these families often travel considerable distances to participate in school-based activities that promote interaction and socialisation for their children, often at their own expense.

It is essential that Distance Education schools offer a variety of learning methods, and that delivery modes remain flexible to meet the diverse needs of geographically isolated families. For instance, students who experience difficulties accessing online programs, whether due to unreliable internet connectivity, limited bandwidth, or other barriers, would have their education significantly compromised if they were required to rely solely on digital delivery.



Distance education students engage with their daily learning through a combination of methods, depending on school requirements and the communications infrastructure available in their region. Reliable, well-maintained landline phone services and stable internet access are vital for geographically isolated students, as these are their lifelines to teachers, peers, and educational programs. Ensuring equitable access to these services is therefore critical to supporting the educational success of distance education students across rural and remote Australia.

RECOMMENDATION

- Appropriate learning resources are available and accessible for Distance Education Students in order to ensure equitable educational access, opportunities, and outcomes for these students.

ISSUE 5 - Support for Volunteer Educator Programs

ICPA (Aust)'s research indicates that approximately 85% of geographically isolated distance education supervisors across Australia are the mothers of the children undertaking distance education. These mothers receive no formal assistance, respite, or remuneration for their role, despite being required to supervise and support their children's learning on a daily basis within the home classroom. The commitment and workload associated with this role are considerable, often equating to fulltime supervision and teaching responsibilities.

Volunteer remote educational support programs, such as Bush Ed, Aussie Helpers Volunteers for Isolated Students' Education (AHVISE), and Retired Educator Volunteers for Isolated Children's Education (REVISE), play a vital role in supporting rural and remote students and their families. The REVISE program, for example, connects retired teachers with distance education families and coordinates visits of approximately six weeks during the school year.

These programs provide invaluable assistance by temporarily taking on the role of the home supervisor, delivering lessons and educational guidance to students while offering much needed respite to supervising parents, often mothers. The support provided by these volunteers enhances the educational experience for students and contributes significantly to the wellbeing of isolated families.

ICPA (Aust) is committed to ensuring that these essential volunteer programs continue to receive the recognition and support necessary to remain available and sustainable for geographically isolated families across Australia.

RECOMMENDATION

- Ensure continued support and funding for volunteer remote educational support services across Australia.