



Briefing Papers

Rural Schools Portfolio

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.

Rural schools across Australia can be disadvantaged in a variety of ways by the unique circumstance of being located in isolated areas. Conditions in rural schools often impact the whole school community, including students, staff, parents/families. These impacts also extend into the wider community such as local businesses and support services. These disadvantages need to be considered and addressed in order to ensure equitable educational opportunities are provided and educational outcomes are achieved for the geographically isolated students who access these schools.

Remote and isolated locations in Australia encounter great challenges in improving delivery of education options and pathways for children and their families. The options for educating children in these locations continue to diminish and can be attributed to many families leaving these areas.

While all Australian governments recognise the social and economic benefits of a high quality and equitable school education system, ICPA continues to devote an enormous amount of time holding relevant governments to account to address inequities in rural schools.

SUMMARY

1. Incentive programs for experienced teachers to take up long term teaching contracts in rural, remote and regional schools.
2. Implementation of the recommendation made by Professor Dr John Halsey in the 'Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education (IRRRRE) - Final Report' to "reduce the impact of administration on workloads to create more time for teaching and leading learning" (Halsey, 2018, p.37)"
3. Seek production of a booklet containing a comprehensive outline of all the information, associated with eligibility and entitlements for rural students for secondary and tertiary education, including apprenticeships and traineeships, to be provided to all rural high schools and final year primary students.



ISSUE 1 - Experienced Teacher Placement Incentives in Rural and Remote Locations

Students from rural, regional, and remote areas are at times facing constant disruptions to their education in the form of teacher shortages. Teacher retention in rural areas can be problematic and even in those schools where teachers are committed long term, their ability to access vital professional development days, long service and even sick days is limited due to the lack of relief teachers and or support staff in these areas. It is not uncommon for small schools to have only two classroom teachers across all year levels and minimal funding for additional support staff such as Education Assistants or Library Technicians. Additionally, the mental health of teachers is becoming worrisome due to their burdensome workload.

States have varying incentives to encourage teachers to take up positions in rural schools however they are at times not well publicised or restricted to graduate teachers. ICPA (Aust) urge the Federal Government to implement an incentive program, including advertising campaigns, to encourage experienced teachers to move from an urban school to a rural school with a program similar to that run by the Rural Health Outreach Fund (RHOF).

The Current RHOF program support outreach initiatives that improves access to medical specialists, general practitioners (GP's) and other allied health providers in regional, rural, and remote areas of Australia. The RHOF has several goals, one of which is to financially support health professionals who provide outreach services. A similar program to the RHOF could be set up to assist the states in making education in rural areas more equitable for our rural and remote students. More information on the RHOF can be found [here](#).

Another potential tool sits within the immigration portfolio - Australian work visas for teachers and early childcare educators from overseas. Education providers have the option to sponsor educators and teachers to work in Australia via a **Temporary Skill Shortage visa (subclass 482) or Employer Nomination Scheme (subclass 186) visa**. At present the category of Primary School Teacher (ANZSCO 241213) is on the STSOL (short term skills occupational demand list) and not eligible for application under subclass 189 (MLTSSL; Medium- and Long-Term Strategic Skill List). All primary teaching applicants must be state sponsored under the subclass 190 or 491. ICPA Aust asks the Federal Government to consider including Primary School Teacher into the MLTSSL list and also consider the option of quota with rural and remote placement conditions for all teachers.

RECOMMENDATION

A Federal Government Funding incentive program for experienced teachers to take up long term teaching contracts in rural, remote and regional schools

ISSUE 2 - Independent Review Into Regional, Rural and Remote Education (IRRRRE) – Final Report Recommendations

In small schools we have witnessed our teaching principals being bombarded with training and administration duties, taking them away from the classroom and the important task of teaching our students. Professor Doctor John Halsey noted that “in a small school in particular where principals have a



large teaching load, there is little time left for focussing on leading learning. Scaling back of the administration workload needs to happen to create more time for leading learning to be done and done well.” (Halsey, 2018, p.35)

Small school students require stability and continuity of learning just like their larger school counterparts and though we do not doubt our small school teaching principals are doing their utmost to ensure this occurs the amount of time out of the classroom is noticeable and disruptive. Time out of the classroom includes but is not limited to professional development, training and also the challenges that only a small school principal experiences such as co-ordinating trades people conducting maintenance, technical difficulties with information and communication technologies, break downs in equipment such as water pumps and important phone calls that require immediate attention. All of these responsibilities that are

usually shared by many in a large school are only shared by two in a one teacher school. Planning, teaching and assessing students is a fulltime job. How does one person realistically do all of that as well as the added workload of a teaching principal? Teaching should be the main focus and administration tasks should be minimal and easy to achieve.

ICPA (Aust) recognises this is largely a State-based issue, however we would like to see the Federal Government advocate for State/Territory Education Departments to implement this recommendation made in the ‘Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education (IRRRRE) – Final Report’.

RECOMMENDATION

That the recommendation made by Professor Dr John Halsey in the ‘Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education (IRRRRE) – Final Report’ to “reduce the impact of administration on workloads to create more time for teaching and leading learning” (Halsey, 2018, p.37)” be implemented.

ISSUE 3 - Future Pathways Information for Rural High Schools and Final Year Primary Students

Increased awareness of incentives, entitlements and eligibility criteria encourage and expedite uptake of further education and training. This leads to upskilling of individuals and enhanced capabilities of entire communities. We call on Government Departments to be more transparent with what rural students are entitled to. Many families cite financial constraints as the main barrier to higher education for youth from regional areas. A booklet provided to final year primary students and high school students in rural and regional areas containing all relevant information for future pathways would help these students and families immensely and encourage them to explore higher education or vocational training they might otherwise consider being out of their reach.

RECOMMENDATION

That a booklet containing all the information associated with eligibility and entitlements for rural students for secondary and tertiary education, including apprenticeships and traineeships, be provided to all rural high schools and final year primary students.