



# Briefing Paper

## Rural Schools 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.

### ADDRESSING EDUCATIONAL INEQUITY IN RURAL AND REMOTE SCHOOLS

Rural and remote schools across Australia face distinct challenges due to their isolation. These challenges affect students, teachers, families, and the broader community — including local businesses and support services. Addressing these disadvantages is essential to ensure equitable educational opportunities and outcomes for geographically isolated students.

While all levels of government acknowledge the social and economic benefits of equitable education, the Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia (ICPA Aust) continues to advocate for practical measures to bridge these gaps.

### SUMMARY

1. Incentive programs for experienced teachers to accept long-term placements in rural, remote and regional schools.
2. Implementation of Dr John Halsey's recommendation from the *Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education (IRRRE)* to reduce administrative burdens on teaching principals.
3. The Parliament and Civics Education Rebate (PACER) scheme accounts for remoteness and ease of access to transport options for students travel to Canberra to participate in program.

### ISSUE 1 – Incentives for Experienced Teachers

Teacher shortages and limited access to relief staff continue to disrupt learning in rural and remote schools. Small schools often rely on only one or two teachers, leaving little capacity for professional development, sick leave or workload relief. The resulting pressures contribute to burnout and high turnover.

Current incentive programs vary by state and are often targeted at graduates rather than experienced educators. ICPA (Aust) urges the Federal Government to establish a **national incentive scheme**—similar to the Rural Health Outreach Fund—to attract and retain skilled teachers in rural and remote schools through financial incentives and national promotion.



## 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 – Implementing the IRRRRE Recommendation

Teaching principals in small schools are overburdened by administrative demands, leaving limited time for classroom teaching and educational leadership. Professor John Halsey highlighted this in the *Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education*, noting the urgent need to reduce administrative workloads.

ICPA (Aust) calls on the Federal Government to **advocate for State and Territory education departments** to adopt this recommendation, enabling teaching principals to focus on their primary role: teaching and leading learning.

## RECOMMENDATION

- That governments implement Dr Halsey's recommendation to "reduce the impact of administration on workloads to create more time for teaching and leading learning" (Halsey, 2018, p.37).

## ISSUE 3 – The Parliament and Civics Education Rebate (PACER) scheme

The Parliament and Civics Education Rebate (PACER) scheme accounts for remoteness and ease of access to transport options for students travel to Canberra to participate in program.

ICPA (Aust.) recommends the PACER distance distance calculation method account for remoteness and ease of access to transport options for students travel to Canberra to participate in program. Students enrolled through Schools of the Air often live hundreds of kilometres beyond their school's administrative base and face substantial extra costs before even beginning the journey to Canberra from the school base.

Additionally, while the government's temporary loadings for very remote and disadvantaged schools have been beneficial, their uncertain status limits long-term planning and equity. Embedding these higher loadings permanently—and extending them to reflect both remoteness and socioeconomic factors—would ensure all students can access civics and citizenship learning opportunities regardless of their location.

Reforming PACER in these two areas would align the program more closely with its core intent: to make participation in national civics education genuinely accessible and affordable for all Australian students.



## RECOMMENDATION

- That the Parliament and Civics Education Rebate (PACER) be reformed to:
  1. Base rebate calculations on a student's actual place of learning or departure point rather than solely on the administrative location of their school; and
  2. Make current additional loadings for very remote and disadvantaged schools permanent, ensuring rebates accurately reflect the real costs faced by geographically isolated families.