

## **PORTFOLIO REPORTS - STATE COUNCIL**

### **RURAL AND REMOTE SCHOOLS REPORT**

**Jane Cunningham – Portfolio Leader, March 2025**

#### **REGIONAL EDUCATION REVIEW AND STRATEGY**

ICPA (WA) was thrilled with the Minister for Education's announcement at the 2024 ICPA (WA) Annual State Conference of the development of a Regional Education Strategy (RES). ICPA (WA) met with Doug Cook, Director of Education Wheatbelt and also lead on the RES in April and again in September to discuss the review. Doug and I had robust and productive discussions about regional education.

On 22 July 2024, the Minister released the RES draft for consultation. Belinda Hickman from the Countryman wrote an extensive piece for the Ripe magazine and included a lot of content from ICPA (WA) on the *Regional Education Strategy Draft* after our Publicity Officer, Chelsea Mott wrote and produced a press release. This was a great avenue to get the word out to members everywhere for people to review the strategy and make a submission. Over 110 submissions were received from across the state from parents, P & C's, school councils, government agencies, community, health, mental health and associations like us, including the YMCA and CWA.

ICPA (WA) submitted an extensive submission. Many points included in the submission were relevant to the Rural and Remote Schools, Specific Education, Student Accommodation and Travel Portfolio Policy's and motions that were previously presented at our State Conference.

ICPA (WA) was hopeful that the final RES report would be released by the end of 2024, but this was not to be. Prior to Christmas I checked in again with Doug Cook, who could report that many drafts had come and gone to the Minister. Unfortunately, it is yet to be released. We will now have to wait until after the upcoming election, and then I can assure you that ICPA (WA) will follow up with the Minister for Education, whoever it may be.

Information about the *Regional Education Strategy* can be found at the following link:

<https://www.education.wa.edu.au/regionaleducationstrategy>

#### **PATHWAYS REVIEW CONTINUES**

In 2024, following extensive consultation in 2023, the Minister for Education Hon. Dr Tony Buti released a blueprint to strengthen secondary school pathways so all students can fulfil their full potential through their post-school study, training or employment pursuits and be ready for the Western Australia of the future.

The Post-School Success Expert Panel Report: Consultation Draft reflected the extensive research and stakeholder engagement undertaken across the state by a panel of education experts, including principals and curriculum and assessment policy specialists, with support from a larger advisory committee representing key stakeholder groups.

Following the draft report release, ICPA (WA) once again made a submission and the final report was released on 11 November 2024.

This work will be completed concurrently with the refreshments to the Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE) presently being considered by the School Curriculum and Standards Authority Board.

### **ICPA (WA) ACCESS TO AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION WIN**

In late 2024, ICPA (WA) had an inquiry from a member. Her daughter had been offered a position at the WA College of Agriculture Denmark but was unable to be offered a boarding position at the College of Agriculture as they were at capacity. The family lives some distance away and the student would not be able to travel to Denmark every day, thus not able to accept this opportunity.

The student was already residing at the Albany Residential College, but they were told that it would not be possible to stay at the Albany Residential College and attend WA College of Agriculture Denmark even though there is a bus that runs each morning and afternoon for Denmark Agriculture College students to and from Albany. There were vacancies at the Residential College, and it seemed quite a logical solution for this student's access to appropriate education.

ICPA (WA) is pleased to say that after an email and a chat with Director of Agricultural Education, Doug Cook who was able to speak with relevant people at the Department of Education our member family quickly received clarification that 2025 'day' Denmark College of Agriculture students can stay at the Albany Residential College.

Many thanks to Doug Cook for quickly resolving our inquiry and continuing to assist with access to education for our RRR students.

### **WA STUDENT ASSISTANCE PAYMENT**

In June 2024, Western Australian families with school-age children were able to apply for additional financial support with cost-of-living relief payments of \$250 for each secondary student and \$150 for primary and kindergarten students available to help with the extra costs associated with school.

### **RURAL AND REMOTE SCHOOL TEACHER SHORTAGE AND DIFFICULTIES CASE STUDIES**

With many rural and remote schools experiencing teacher attraction and retention challenges, ICPA (WA) called for case studies to support their discussions with education stakeholders. The impacts of these stories on families and communities are heartbreaking. One such case study has been included in this report.

ICPA (WA) wrote to the Minister for Education and the Director General and also met regularly throughout the year to discuss these challenges.

#### **Case Study – One example of a family's experience**

*During 2023, my Son's Year 4, 5, 6 Class at \*\*\*\*\* Primary School had six different teachers during Semester 1.*

*The school year started with his regular teacher from 2022 (who was meant to be on Long Service Leave). That teacher took the class for Week 1.*

*Then the class had three separate teachers throughout the remainder of Term 1 and part of Term 2 that were from the Department of Education's Flying Squad (as it is called).*

*These teachers did a teaching stint of two to four weeks each. At the completion of the Flying Squad staff, the class then had a relief teacher for a week in Term 2. Another relief teacher came on board during the last few weeks of Term 2, who thankfully continued on as the class teacher for the remainder of the year. This teacher however did job share for two days each week with another teacher. So therefore the 4,5,6 class at \*\*\*\*\* Primary School had seven teachers taking the class throughout the 2023 school year.*

*The impact that inconsistent teaching staff has on a student, class and the school is massive. Firstly, with so many relief staff there is very little consistency occurring with the teaching of the curriculum to the*

*students, and very little learning by the students. There was also very poor communication between the teachers, school and parents. You would be communicating with one teacher about your child, and then another three weeks later you would have to communicate with a different teacher about your child and their progress within the classroom setting. There is also no routine within the classroom when you have so many relief teachers taking one class.*

*Students need a stable routine within the classroom. Having so many relief staff also lead to a lack of confidence in the school and the education system amongst parents. This can lead to students leaving the school to attend other schools that the parents feel may have more stable and consistent teaching staff, which has large ramifications on a small rural school and the level of education being provided at the school. When a student from a small rural school goes away to high school, they are already considered to be behind in their education compared to their metropolitan counterparts. This situation is exasperated when a small rural school has so many relief staff.*

ICPA (WA) was pleased to hear the following that may help to attract teachers to our often-small RRR schools.

### **TEACHERS ENTERPRISE BARGAINING AGREEMENT ANNOUNCEMENT**

On 5 July 2024 the Cook Labor Government confirmed significant investment in public education under a new Enterprise Bargaining Agreement (Agreement) that will increase wages for public school teachers, address workload issues, enhance career pathways and attract more quality teachers to regional and remote areas.

Following negotiations with the State School Teachers' Union of Western Australia (SSTUWA) and Principals' Federation of Western Australia (PFWA), teachers and school leaders will receive a 12 per cent pay rise over three years and improvements to a range of conditions associated with leave, allowances and professional learning.

Support for classroom teachers will also be strengthened with small group tuition in 350 schools focusing on literacy and numeracy, allowing students to develop these fundamental skills.

To help students facing unique challenges that require extra support, 64 new complex behaviour management coordinators will also be introduced. These experts will work alongside classroom teachers to create tailored education programs to help students with disabilities and learning challenges, so every child receives the attention and resources they need to succeed.

The Agreement also includes new district allowances to attract and retain more teachers in remote and regional areas. This includes incentive payments to develop leaders in regional areas and attract accomplished teachers to those schools with the greatest need.

### **REGIONAL TEACHER AND LEADER MOBILITY TRIAL**

ICPA (WA) welcomed the State Government announcement of workforce mobility trials.

The State Government announced the trial of two new initiatives to encourage metropolitan-based teachers and some administrators to work in regional schools across the state.

The workforce mobility trials will be available to permanent metropolitan teachers and aspiring school leaders to take a permanent position in a nominated regional school while maintaining a right to return to their city-based role after three years.

Teachers and some school administrators who aspire to be principals can apply for principal positions in nominated regional schools when no suitable applicant has been found in the selection processes.

ICPA (WA) looks forward to seeing the results of these trials and hopes to see an expansion in 2025 for 2026.

### **SMALL SCHOOLS FUNDING ANNOUNCEMENT**

Just prior to the start of the 2025 school year, it was announced that schools with fewer than 100 students (128 schools in total) would receive a funding boost.

The additional funding for small schools is part of the wider full and fair funding targets outlined in the Better Fairer Schools Agreement (BFSA), signed in 2024. Under the 10-year BFSA model, funding will be targeted to drive real improvements in the outcomes for Western Australia's public school students. BFSA is designed to support students from low socio-economic backgrounds, regional and remote students, students with disability and aboriginal students.

Schools in WA are funded via the student-centred funding model (SCFM), which includes an Enrolment-Linked Base (ELB) allocation to ensure that schools with smaller student populations can meet general operating costs. The additional injection of funds through the ELB works to ensure that schools are not disadvantaged due to their size.

From 2026, the additional investment will be doubled to an estimated \$10 million per year and provided to the schools on an ongoing basis.

### **SIDE TEACHING SUPPORT IN REGIONAL SCHOOLS**

In early 2024, after continuing ICPA (WA) advocacy, the Minister for Education Hon. Dr Tony Buti, announced a trial to support teachers to address the challenges and demands associated with developing and delivering curriculum in classes with multi-age groupings.

On 19 August 2024, small schools from across the state were invited to attend an online meeting to hear the outline of a plan to teach science and maths in Years 5 and 6 via distance education through School of Isolated and Distance Education (SIDE) in small cluster groups.

Schools invited included Cascades, Condingup, Lake King, Munglinup, Salmon Gums, Scaddan, Hyden, Kukerin, Newdegate, Nyabing, Binu, Chapman Valley, Eneabba, Leeman, Mingenew, Yuna, Useless Loop, Borden, Bremer Bay, Cranbrook, Kirup, Ongerup and Tambellup.

The trial began in Term 4, 2024 and I was excited to be teaching at Tambellup Primary School and experience Year 5/6 students attending an online science and technology lesson through SIDE. Tambellup has two classes, the senior class having Years 2 - 6 in it. This is a great workload reduction strategy for the classroom teacher, and the children I saw participating were excited, engaged and meeting learning outcomes!

The trial has been expanded in 2025 with over 20 small schools involved and having science and/or maths delivered to groups via distance education.

### **SCHOOL OF SWIMMING AND WATER SAFETY ANNOUNCEMENT**

In 2024, the Minister announced the new School of Swimming and Water Safety to further build our capability to deliver swimming and water safety programs to as many students as possible.

Peter Lilywhite has been appointed Principal, starting 3 March 2025. Peter brings more than 26 years of experience with the Department of Education across city and country schools. A former PE teacher with a passion for sport and swimming, he also brings first-hand experience as a swimming instructor and coordinator of many water safety programs.

The School of Swimming and Water Safety will provide centrally coordinated programs and support for students across Western Australia. This new initiative will build on the established VacSwim and in-term swimming programs, with a focus on improving access to students who traditionally face participation barriers.

The specialist school will improve the recruitment and employment of swimming instructors and provide additional training to strengthen workforce skills and ensure a culturally responsive learning approach for students from all backgrounds and communities. It will also place a greater focus on aligning swimming and water safety programs with the health and physical education curriculum, integrating them with classroom practices and resources.

As Principal, Peter will lead the work to establish the new specialist school which is planned to be fully operational within two years. The existing in-term and VacSwim swimming and water safety programs will continue to operate as the Department work to establish the School of Swimming and Water Safety.

More than 220,000 school students have taken part in in-term swimming lessons during the 2024 school year, with at least 40,000 more enrolled to participate in VacSwim programs during the school holidays.

ICPA (WA) held many discussions with both the Minister for Education and Directors of the Department of Education regarding VacSwim and the challenges that many rural families had accessing the program after the announcements of the free VacSwim for Summer program. ICPA (WA) State Council have arranged a further meeting for June 2025 once the statistics from the summer have been analysed.

### **RELEASE OF FOCUS 2025**

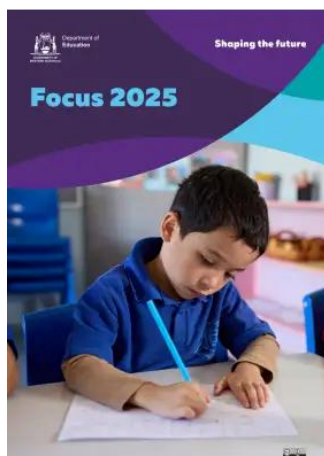
ICPA (WA) was buoyed by the release of the Focus 2025 earlier this term by the newly appointed Director General, Department of Education Jay Peckitt. The Focus 2025 outlines the support the Department of Education will provide to schools to enable *'every student to reach their full potential'*.

The key message, *'Every student in Western Australia deserves access to a high-quality education that equips them for success in an increasingly complex world'* is certainly what we expect for our rural, regional and remote students.

We are pleased to see many areas of our current advocacy included in the plan along with an increased number of statements specific to the 'regions.' Some notable mentions include:

- Find ways to increase our regional workforce.
- Work with government to review regional entitlements.
- Increase the opportunities for permanent metropolitan teachers and leaders to be seconded to regional schools.
- Implement a district allowance for regional teachers and school leaders.
- Provide targeted training for allied professionals and those in regional and central service.
- Provide every student with a pathway to a successful future by examining how we can expand opportunities for regional students.
- Explore methods and tools for parents and communities to raise and report concerns.

The following link will take you to the *Focus 2025* document: <https://www.education.wa.edu.au/strategic-directions>



### **DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AGENCY CAPABILITY REVIEW**

The Department of Education (the agency) was reviewed under the Agency Capability Review Program from February to October 2024. ICPA (WA) was consulted as part of the review.

Many of the key observations were relevant to ICPA (WA), some of which closely relate to portfolio policy and motions raised at previous conferences.

#### **Key observations:**

- The agency is operating in one of the largest geographic education jurisdictions in the world. With growing community expectations of the role of schools, the agency continues to deliver a high standard of education across the state while navigating an increasingly complex operating environment.
- Agency staff are aware of and deeply committed to the purpose of educating children and young people. However, there is no longer term strategic plan to give direction to the workforce during times of change, to position the agency itself and its employees for the future. Without a clear and long term strategic direction, the agency risks operating in a reactive, incident management mode and be ill prepared for the challenges on its horizon.
- The agency's lack of future focus is hindering its strategic policy capability and impacting its understanding of long term policy requirements and its role in developing or responding to whole of government reforms. While the agency established a Strategic Policy Unit in 2020 to build its strategic policy capability and provide advice to senior decision makers on system wide issues, the unit has yet to fulfil its mandate.
- The agency has commissioned and invested significant resources in a number of reviews in recent years to strengthen its capability and capacity. However, because it has failed to embed many of the recommendations provided, it continues to encounter the challenges that these reviews were intended to address. The agency needs to actively consider implementing recommendations from these past reviews, including the Statewide Services Form and Function Review and the Strategic Review of the WA Department of Education.
- It is critical for the agency to establish a clearer understanding of the role of central services in setting the strategic direction and supporting the system; the role of schools in providing a supportive and inclusive environment that promotes educational excellence and student wellbeing; and the role of teachers to support and provide education approaches and collaborate with others to address students holistic needs.



- The agency needs to adopt a system approach to delivering additional support to students in areas such as mental health and behaviour. Without appropriate allied professional support for students, teachers are navigating complex issues they have not been adequately trained to deal with. The lack of a system approach has resulted in schools developing their own solutions, particularly in regional WA, with services provided in an ad hoc manner in schools. A multidisciplinary approach is needed to support student learning and wellbeing to provide every student with a pathway to a successful future. This requires collaboration across agencies and with non-government service providers.
- The Independent Public Schools initiative introduced in 2009 was effective in ensuring schools had increased decision making responsibilities while remaining part of the system. However, the agency seems reluctant to make explicit its expectations of schools to the point where many believe they are autonomous from the system. There needs to be more balance between system leadership and the flexibility in decision making given to schools. This is to ensure the agency exercises its authority when required and provides greater formal direction in a targeted way to implement important strategic policy initiatives.
- Alongside greater flexibility in decision making at the local level are associated increases in administrative functions and paperwork. The agency would benefit from understanding where there are inefficiencies and duplications in functions and seek to centralise some of these processes. Backend processes around recruitment could be an early opportunity in this regard.
- The increasingly complex needs of students have expanded teacher workload and are resulting in high levels of stress and burnout, with attraction and retention affected. In the last three years, more than 5,200 teachers have left the agency. While workforce challenges are well documented, the agency has struggled to take a strategic approach to workforce planning. It needs to develop a whole of agency workforce strategy aligned to its future strategic direction. Workforce planning efforts should be informed by and help inform workforce planning occurring across the human services sector to facilitate adequate and appropriate supply pipelines.
- The particular workforce challenges faced by schools in regional WA are a longstanding problem. More effort is needed to build long term workforce capability in regional and remote WA with a priority to grow a workforce from the regions' local populations.
- Public sector agencies perceive a reluctance by the agency to engage proactively with them on significant policy matters and broader government priorities to support children and young people. The agency's reputation and achievement of outcomes are at risk if the entire system does not participate collaboratively to achieve agreed government priorities.
- School principals are requesting greater guidance, support, resources and tools to help them run their schools. There is a role for the agency to provide operational guides, templates and 'playbooks' to ensure the implementation of effective teaching strategies and efficient student services, and greater support to deliver effective business planning and leadership.

### **FAIRBRIDGE CAMP SCHOOLS**

ICPA (WA) continues to advocate for better management, maintenance and pricing at the Fairbridge managed camp schools. This topic is always on the agenda when we meet with the Minister.

### **CAMP SUBSIDIES**

On 15 December 2024, the government announced subsidies for camps.

*"More than 560 WA public schools are expected to be eligible to apply for a discount on camps run by the Department of Local Government, Sport, and Cultural Industries (DLGSC) or the Department of Education*

*(DoE), with funding to be targeted at WA public schools in areas with families who are more likely to be experiencing cost-of-living pressures.*

*Funding of \$1.5 million has been allocated to the DLGSC for the costs associated with its school camp subsidy program.*

*DLGSC manages five recreation camps, including four in greater Perth and one in Albany.*

*An additional \$896,000 will be provided for a similar fee waiver program for DoE camps. This includes the Broome Camp School, as well as the leased camp sites operated by Fairbridge Western Australia Inc. located in Point Peron, Geraldton, Dampier, Kalgoorlie, and Pemberton.*

*The discount will be applied to overnight accommodation charges and applicable program costs.*

*Eligible schools will book as normal, and the discount will be applied at the conclusion of the camp stay.*

*Schools with the lowest Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) will be eligible for the camp discount.*

*The discount will also be applied to eligible schools that have already made a booking.”*

### **GENERATIVE AI THINK TANK**

In Term 4 2024, State Councillor Sally Brindal attended a cross-sectorial Think Tank regarding the use of generative AI and digital opportunities for WA Education.

Sally found it highly informative and that the information would be valuable to share with our members. We look forward to Alex Jenkins, Director, WA Data Science Innovation Hub and Chair, Curtin AI in Research Group, presenting at the 2025 State Conference.