

PORTFOLIO REPORTS - STATE COUNCIL

STUDENT ACCOMMODATION REPORT

Jasmyn Allen – Portfolio Leader, March 2025

In Western Australia, we have boarding schools in the private sector administered through Catholic Education West Australia (CEWA) (three Schools), Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia (AISWA) (23 Schools), and a couple of programs that offer a homestay-style boarding option both for domestic and international students.

The Department of Education has nine residential colleges and five WA Colleges of Agriculture with boarding facilities for Years 10, 11 and 12. ICPA (WA) research lists 41 secondary residential boarding facilities in WA for 2025, along with two additional organisations offering homestay-style boarding arrangements. Many schools that do not have a residential facility offer a dedicated staff member to act as a boarding liaison officer for students enrolled at their chosen school and attending either a WA Department of Education Residential College, Rotary Residential College in Perth or external homestay arrangements.

Our Western Australian residential boarding facilities are in high demand, with several reaching full capacity and a waiting list for future enrolments. Australian Boarding Schools Association (ABSA) data collection tells us that 93 per cent of students enrolled in boarding facilities are from regional, rural and remote WA, however, there is a growing trend of families wishing to board their children due to FIFO work schedules and employment opportunities both overseas and in remote WA.

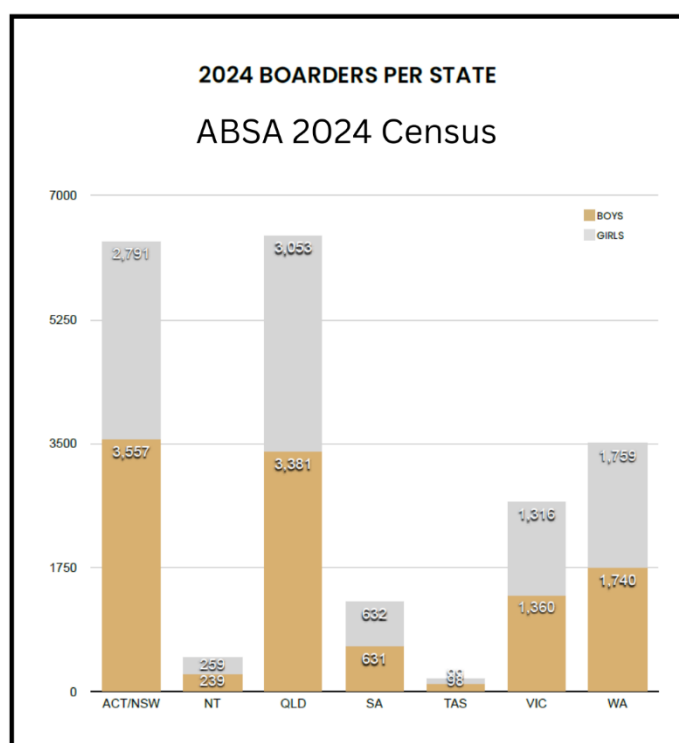
Enrolments in regionally based residential facilities are at an all-time high, with families opting to keep their children closer to home to stay connected and maintain strong family bonds.

Regional school offerings are strengthening, and this has seen an influx of families being able to have a choice of education locally. In other states across Australia, rural boarding in large centres in regional areas is very popular, with several boarding facilities per location. This may also be an emerging space in WA education as regional centres have shown significant growth in recent years.

ABSA 2024 census data tell us that WA has the third largest boarding population in Australia with 3,499 students. WA also have 702 staff working in boarding schools across our state.

Registration of a non-government (NGSR) school requires compliance with the WA Department of Education registration process and School Education Act 1999 along with other relevant policies and procedures.

Schools may be registered for between one to five years, with the length of registration based on compliance history and NGSr's risk assessment history. The NGSr standards have recently been updated as of the 1 January 2024 and can be found here: <https://www.education.wa.edu.au/ngsr-guide>



Standard 8 provides requirements for boarding facilities and also makes reference to: “The policies and procedures should be benchmarked against contemporary best practice in protecting the safety and wellbeing of students in boarding facilities, as determined by a relevant peak body, such as the Boarding Standard for Australian schools and residences (AS 5725;2015) published in July 2015 by Standards Australia.”

ICPA (WA) would like our members to feel comfortable in understanding the policies and processes that sit alongside boarding and residential facilities as part of the professional manner in which boarding houses conduct themselves.

The Boarding Standard for Australian Schools and Residences is now 10 years old, and ABSA has recently announced a review of the standards. ICPA will have a seat at the table as part of the formal review process and we encourage our members to come forward with information regarding the standards and how they work across the boarding sector in WA.

Standard 8: Boarding

- 8.1 Supervisory staff employed in school boarding accommodation are competent, fit and proper persons, qualified to manage the care, welfare and needs of all boarding students.
- 8.2 The school maintains open and effective communication with the parents and guardians of boarders.
- 8.3 The boarders receive a well-balanced and nutritious diet.
- 8.4 The boarders are consulted on all matters affecting their accommodation, recreation, support services, code of conduct, safety and wellbeing.

Definitions**Supervisory staff**

For the purpose of standard 8.1, the supervisory staff are all those whose duties include the supervision of boarders at any time.

Note that boarding supervisors, like teachers and nurses, are now mandatory reporters. A "boarding supervisor" is "a person who holds an office or position at a boarding facility the duties of which include the supervision of children living at the facility" [*Children and Community Services Act 2004*¹⁶, s.124A].

Director General's considerations**Staff**

The Director General may check that supervisory staff qualifications, including first aid qualifications, are relevant to the direct care and development of students.

As to whether staff employed to supervise boarders are fit and proper persons, the term 'fit and proper', as with governing body members, is intended to give the widest possible discretion to the decision-maker. It covers both character and competence, enabling the decision-maker to take into account matters which can be fairly seen to be relevant to the role. A person with a history such as the following would not be considered a fit and proper person in this role:

- any conviction as an adult for any offence involving children and/or violence; or
- any criminal conviction for fraud or similar, e.g. stealing as a servant; or
- any finding of negligence or serious incompetence in a similar role.

A school's boarding staff recruitment policy should at least outline the offending history considered relevant to fitness and propriety, other checks to be made, qualifications and other matters considered to be relevant.

Professional learning for all staff within boarding facilities about the school's Code of Conduct and other child-safe policies and procedures is to be conducted annually. Boarding supervisors must also receive professional learning annually in their mandatory reporting obligations.

Policies and procedures

Policies and procedures must be in place for student boarding facilities which detail how a safe, healthy and supportive boarding environment for all enrolled boarders, including those with disabilities, is being

provided and maintained at all times. Students, parents and staff must be given a clear and comprehensive statement of these policies and support their implementation.

The policies and procedures should be benchmarked against contemporary best practice in protecting the safety and wellbeing of students in boarding facilities, as determined by a relevant peak body, such as the *Boarding Standard for Australian schools and residences* [AS 5725:2015] published in July 2015.

Communication with parents or guardians

Mechanisms for regular two-way communication with parents or guardians should be developed and maintained and take account of the different communication channels accessible to parents. The school should facilitate regular, private communication between the boarders and their parents/guardians.

Diet

Catering arrangements for students should be informed by relevant dietary guidelines approved by a peak body such as the National Health and Medical Research Council.

Consultation with boarders

For the purpose of standard 8.4, a satisfactory consultation with boarders will involve:

- informing the boarders about the overall process, including who else will be consulted, and its desired outcome;
- providing information relevant to the issue, which may include the limits of what outcome is possible, in accessible language;
- offering the boarders a choice of methods to communicate their individual and collective views, including where unanimity cannot be achieved; and
- giving due consideration to the opinions expressed.

Models of consultation may vary depending on the issue to be resolved. In some cases it will be appropriate to seek the views of a representative sample of boarders or from a boarders' council, particularly where the council members have been selected by the boarders themselves.

At the 2023 State Conference Midwest Branch presented a motion concerning the complex issue of support for students with a disability residing in boarding house facilities. The motion aimed to ensure students' needs are addressed effectively through the implementation of reasonable adjustments and accommodations with a provision of funding coming from the State Government to support these students.

At the 2024 State Conference Lakes District Branch presented a motion to prioritise increased support for staff and students in Residential Colleges with a focus on often hidden disabilities including Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD), anxiety disorders and other mental health challenges.

Much of our work throughout 2024 in the Student Accommodation Portfolio has centred around ICPA State Council advocating for the needs of students in boarding facilities facing significant challenges over and beyond what is expected of a student in a secondary boarding facility. Submissions have been formally made to:

- School Education Act 1999
- Regional Education Strategy

Both of these reviews have strongly advocated for the needs of boarders in relation to the last two years of motions that have been presented to conference.

SCHOOL EDUCATION ACT REVIEW

On 4 December 2023, the Minister for Education, Hon. Dr Tony Buti MLA announced a review of the School Education Act 1999 (WA) to identify opportunities to strengthen access and inclusion for students with disability.

The consultation phase ran from 20 August to 4 October 2024 and involved:

- over 30 consultation and information sessions with over 280 people
- over 200 formal submissions – through either the online form, phone calls or emails
- public face-to-face sessions in Perth as well as regional WA.

The review is now complete. The Expert Panel and Advisory Council provided the Minister for Education with a final report in December 2024. A final report is yet to be released.

ICPA (WA), welcomed the opportunity to provide feedback on the Review of the School Education Act 1999 and to highlight the challenges that are unique to rural and remote students, to ensure effective support for these children in their education journey in Rural, Remote and Regional (RRR) Western Australia.

ICPA values align closely with Minister Buti's 'Message from the Minister':

"I believe every child and young person with a disability has the right to a quality education where they feel valued, included and supported to reach their full potential."

PRIORITY AREAS FOR ICPA (WA)

BOARDING AND RESIDENTIAL COLLEGES

Western Australia has students in both public residential colleges and in private boarding schools. For a variety of reasons, families may choose one or the other as a preferred option. In the private sector, the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia (AISWA) and Catholic Education Western Australia (CEWA) are prominent governing bodies of the majority of boarding houses attached to schools. To register their school, they need to complete registration with the WA Department of Education.

ENROLMENT

Students are still being turned away from education facilities because they have a disability, it is real, and it is happening in our state right now. The United Nations says *"Everyone has the right to education no matter who they are: regardless of race, gender or disability..."* The Disability Standards for Education 2005 (DSE) says *"The DSE seek to ensure that students with disability can access and participate in education on the same basis as students without disability."* And the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 makes it the law in Australia that children have the right to an education.

For children with a disability from our geographically isolated areas in WA, education involves School of the Air (SOTA), boarding and Residential Colleges, small rural public schools with less than 10 children in the whole school, large and small private schools, the rural school bus system as administered through the Public Transport Authority - School Bus Services (SBS) and a whole lot of support and nurture from families and carers. These systems are not consistent in how they go about enrolling a student with a disability and often the process of enrolment is tricky with huge requirements of paperwork, meetings, sourcing extra medical supportive documentation or further diagnosis.

ICPA (WA) advocates for achieving equitable access to an appropriate education for our families. School enrolments are difficult for our families with children with a diagnosis as it often involves a transition for the child due to school access (bus) or transition to high school (boarding). We represent a large demographic of families who live in very geographically remote locations; unfortunately, disability does not choose only those

with good access to town and suitably provisioned educational facilities. Our families live 100's, if not 1000's of kilometres away from schools, and when our families put in an application for enrolment to a school, especially to cater for high school and boarding, to be turned away is devastating.

One of our families was told (*on application for high school with boarding*): “Come back again in a few years, she might have grown out of her development challenges by then, we will look at your application then...”

HEALTHCARE AND DIAGNOSIS

Members from State Council attended two sessions face-to-face with the independent review panel members. Honest conversation and case studies were shared around rural and remote students in boarding with diagnosed and undiagnosed conditions such as ADHD, anxiety and other physical and mental health challenges. We highlighted the complex needs of a child with these conditions and made recommendations around:

- Care plans being implemented into boarding facilities as a standardised planning mechanism (currently there is no requirement for this).
- Specialised training for staff members in mental health care.
- Ability for students to be able to return during the day to a residential facility for time out including flexible arrangements between school health staff and facility supervisors.
- Improved communication between school/parents and boarding facilities if a child has issues during a school day that might impact their presence back in boarding inclusive of a feedback system for parents.

