



2025 School Travel Portfolio

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The Financial Burden of School Travel for Rural and Remote Families in Australia

Families living in rural and remote regions of Australia face significant challenges and financial strain when sending their children to boarding schools. Recent survey data from across New South Wales (NSW), Northern Territory (NT), Queensland (QLD), South Australia (SA), Tasmania (TAS), and Western Australia (WA) reveals that travel costs alone are one of the largest and most under-recognised expenses faced by these families.

Key Findings from Survey Data

- **Frequency and Distance of Travel:** Families reported making 8–10 round trips per year to facilitate their children's education, frequently covering distances of 700–2,000km each way.
- **Annual Travel Costs:** Typical travel expenses ranged from \$3,000 to \$15,000 per child per year, with several families enduring extreme cases reaching between \$20,000 and \$34,000 once flights, fuel, accommodation, vehicle wear, and lost wages were accounted for.
- **Cost Contributors:** The increasing prices of airfare, rising fuel costs, and the necessity for overnight accommodation have caused these expenses to continue escalating, making travel neither a luxury nor an optional expense but rather an unavoidable burden for rural families.

Variation by State:

- **NSW Example:** One family travelled over 23,000km annually, spending \$34,560 each year solely on travel for school-related purposes.
- **Lord Howe Island and Remote NT:** Families regularly faced \$6,000–\$14,000 per child in flights each year.
- **Northern Territory (NT):** Travel expenses are the highest, averaging \$10,000–\$16,000 annually; some families reported more than \$20,000 per year just on flights.
- **South Australia (SA):** Most families spend \$4,000–\$8,000, though some exceed \$12,000 per year.
- **Western Australia (WA)/Kimberley Region:** Families in the Kimberley reported annual school-related travel costs of around \$12,000, with higher figures when accommodation is required. These costs recur every term, compounding year after year.

Voices from the Regions

“Every year we travel over 23,000 kilometres just to get our children to and from school. That travel bill now sits at more than \$34,500 annually – not for tuition, not for extras, but just to cover the cost of travel. For families like ours in western NSW, this is the hidden price of education, and there’s no alternative if our children are to continue learning.”

“In the Kimberley, we spend around \$12,000 every year on school-related travel. For many families, that figure climbs even higher when accommodation is added in. These are not one-off expenses – they’re repeated every term, year after year. For us, the cost of bringing our children home for the holidays is a constant financial battle.”

The data and testimonials highlight the urgent need for travel costs to be fully recognised and addressed in federal assistance programs such as the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) scheme. Without targeted support for these necessary expenses, families in rural and remote Australia will continue to carry a disproportionate financial burden simply for giving their children access to education.

Travel costs represent a major, ongoing financial obstacle for rural and remote Australian families sending their children to boarding schools. This is not an optional or luxury expense but a core component of educational access in isolated areas. Urgent action is required to ensure that assistance programs reflect and support the real cost of education for these communities.