

BOARDING SCHOOLS AND HOSTELS

S 1. CAPRICORNIA BOTA BRANCH

Motion

“That ICPA Qld lobbies the Minister for Education and Director-General of Education to mandate that ‘Boarding Standard for Australian schools and residences’ is compulsory for all school boarding facilities in Queensland and reviewed as per the code every three years, ensuring that Geographically Isolated Children receive age-appropriate holistic development and support in safe environments.”

Explanation:

We are advocating that the ‘Boarding Standard for Australian Schools and residences’ (AS 5725:2015) be mandated in all boarding facilities in QLD and be reviewed by the code as per standard to help promote the development of consistently higher standards across all boarding facilities.

The boarding standard was approved by the Council of Standards Australia on the 8th July 2015 and was published on 23rd July 2015. The objective of the standard is to provide owners, operators, managers, and staff of boarding services with a framework of required topics that need to be addressed in order to deliver a safe, healthy and productive environment for boarders. It is a comprehensive standard, and an extensive list of stakeholders formed the committee who contributed to the development of it. This standard is mandated in other states (NSW, VIC, WA & soon to be SA). Currently, the “Boarding Standards’ are only enforced in the three QLD State Government boarding facilities located in Dalby, Mt Isa and Weipa. With approx. 75% of rural and remote children making up the enrolments at boarding facilities across QLD it seems unfathomable that the remaining non-government boarding schools in QLD operate without having a regulatory body governing them.

The implementation of governance processes for all non-government boarding schools in QLD is critical and well overdue.

Geographically Isolated families are faced with the prospect of sending children away to boarding school in Year 7 typically aged 11 or 12 which is a very vulnerable age to leave the family home environment. Some children are extremely isolated due to being hundreds or even thousands of kilometres away from the safety of their families which increases the vulnerability of this group of children. Mandating the standard would ensure that vulnerable geographically isolated children who have no other choice than to attend boarding school receive a consistently high standard of holistic and equitable care equivalent to that of other services whose primary role is caring for children.

We would like to reference the degree of legislation and governance that other framework and guidelines associated to other aspects of school age care encompass.

The National Quality Framework

That provides a national approach to regulation assessment and quality improvement for Early Childhood Education and care and outside school hour care services across Australia.

In-Home Care National Guidelines

Have been developed to provide clear and consistent guidance to IHC Support Agencies, IHC providers, IHC Services and IHC Educators in delivering care and families receiving care.

The National Framework for Managing COVID-19 in schools and Early Childhood Education and Care
Enforced to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 in schools.

This illustrates the importance that various levels of government place on protecting children. There is seemingly a huge void for the protection of an equally vulnerable group of children, our Geographically Isolated Children. Rural and Remote families fee paying families deserve to know that their children are adequately protected by legislated standards whilst attending these schools.

It is important to note that rural and remote families often have no other choice other than to send their children to boarding school whilst some choose to invest in their children's future and send them further afield in an attempt to provide a broader scope of opportunities and develop them to be contributing global citizens. These types of opportunities are often unachievable due to the lack of services in smaller rural centres and is often the reason families move away from rural areas. The future of boarding is paramount for all rural and remote families who rely upon it and can only be improved upon if the "Boarding Standards' are mandated. We don't just want our children to 'survive' boarding school we want them to 'THRIVE'.

We are aware that there are schools that meet and may even exceed the standards, that do provide quality outcomes for Geographically Isolated Children. We want to highlight the importance of improving the standards of care for all children regardless of the size and location of the school and that our boarders are given the same holistic development by means of Academic Development, Social Development, Emotional Development and Physical Development that their day school counterparts do. Additionally, it is critical for our children to be supplied with essential necessities of safe facilities, appropriately trained leaders and supervisors to ensure the health and well-being of boarders is being monitored and be provided with nutritionally sound meals so they can participate in all aspects of boarding life including academics, sporting and cultural endeavours.

Geographically isolated families experienced unprecedented considerations on where to send their children to boarding school during the height of the pandemic with many choosing boarding schools that were easily accessible from their place of residency so as to be able to collect their children in the event of an outbreak. It was also highlighted during the pandemic just how important it is for our wellbeing to be socially connected. It is important to mention that voting with your feet and walking away from the school when repeated attempts are made by boarding families to resolve issues with schools is often not the best outcome for the student or school. Many students are settled and have formed strong connections within the day school and with fellow boarders and are reluctant to leave, due to having to re-establish friendships, in case the next school is worse and the added stress of being further away from their homes, families and communities. Schools are often impacted by fluctuating enrolments and some choosing to safeguard the income by placing strict policies around supplying notification of withdrawal from boarding. Although rural and remote QLD is vast in size the community is tightly held which stands to affect schools when the most valuable marketing tool for them is word of mouth from existing boarding families.

We recognise the efforts made by ABSA in facilitating key areas of professional development to boarding schools, but the fact still remains that mandating the 'Boarding Standard' and appropriate review as per code of non-government boarding schools is vital for the protection of Geographically Isolated Children.

CARRIED