
RURAL SCHOOLS REPORT

Area Directors' appropriate support for TPI schools:

State Council has begun to organise meetings with the area directors, and this has been welcomed by Department of Education (DOE) but is yet to be instituted. Remote families in small communities with a new teacher or an issue with an existing teacher need to be able to genuinely consult with confidentiality with the director responsible for their school.

ICPA-NSW sees a need for regular visits from the director checking that the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) syllabus program is being delivered to children. This requires looking beyond the prepared program to checking student's workbooks and daily register to see that the program is being taught in an appropriate and timely manner. In some larger schools, programs are handed in every five weeks and checked thoroughly to make sure the appropriate syllabus is being taught.

In small isolated schools this is not a routine process and therefore has resulted in there being no program. ICPA-NSW believes this has not been adequately addressed for too long a period, causing inequality for TPI school students when compared to students in larger schools. If the teaching principal is experienced and with integrity, it is likely that your school will flourish. However, in many instances this is not the case.

Isolated communities, despite having been involved in the teaching principal selection process, still face a gamble when the new teacher arrives therefore ICPA-NSW recommends the following:

- On the director's regular visits, it would be beneficial if the director casually met with parents and staff giving them an opportunity to voice any concerns.

Otherwise official complaints in a school with only two staff can lead to an awkward and uncomfortable situation which not only affects staff but also affects the students. In many cases this could have been avoided if concerns were able to be aired (and dealt with diplomatically) in a casual manner, preventing what can be a tense and uncomfortable environment in the workplace.

The director should be encouraging the new principal to take part and attend community events. A principal that participates in the small community strengthens and builds resilience, this fosters an atmosphere of co-operation which will only benefit the teacher and the school. It is difficult for a person to come to an isolated community if they have no intention of participating in that community. Some of these schools are 100 kms or more away from a larger town. If the teacher does not become involved in the community it can make for a lonely existence which again reflects on the school environment.

Handover documentation for new principal from existing principal:

A decade ago, an ICPA motion requesting a 'handover' between principals, of what is now termed TP1 and TP2 schools, was carried. On the conference floor, the then Director of Western Plains spoke affirming this initiative. The motion asked for a Department of Education and Training (as it was then) policy to embed a system whereby all outgoing principals leave a five-week program, staff, student and community information, as well as all necessary information and documentation that is required in a rural and remote school, for the incoming principal. In the intervening years ICPA-NSW has had this motion resubmitted and carried; once again ICPA-NSW has enjoyed assurances from DoE staff that the handover does or will routinely be actioned. The rationale for this request is obvious. It would be of benefit to the incoming principal, students and parents. The school program could be taught from the first day of the new principal's tenure, allowing he/her to adjust to what is often an extremely new working environment. There are new administration duties required by the department for a principal who is at the same time assessing his/her students' learning, acquainting themselves with the community and families and discovering the school's resources. It has taken up to two terms for the principal to understand the complexity of teaching in a multi-stage classroom. ICPA-NSW strongly believes two terms is too long for the students not to be working at their required level.

Adequate training before commencing employment at TP1 Schools:

Teachers need some knowledge of community and geography of the place of their employment and what is required in rural, remote and very remote schools and communities. Teaching Principals need to have good communication skills and be able to relate to parents, staff and community as these bodies play a significant support role in TP1 schools.

ICPA-NSW acknowledges that there is too much time out of the classroom for conferences and meetings. In very remote schools it is at least a day either side to travel plus time for the event, this could mean the teaching principal is absent for a whole week from the classroom. For many isolated children in very remote schools this may be the only formal education they ever have practical access to, thus this primary schooling needs to be of a consistent standard which allows them to obtain thoroughly consolidated literacy and numeracy skills. Having casual teachers while the principal is away does not always allow for consistency.

Inadequate technologies in TP1 Schools:

Internet services in rural, remote satellite schools and very remote areas are not reliable or fast enough to facilitate real time connections. Some students are unable to access specialised services such as Royal Far West programs, using an online platform to deliver remote allied health services.

The new finance system is almost impossible to use some days as it relies solely on the internet resulting in inefficient usage of staff time.

Sustainable incentives for teaching principals appointed to TP1 Schools:

- A suitable vehicle provided by the DoE for the Louth Public School as a matter of urgency to help students get to extracurricular activities. Road conditions in this small isolated rural and remote school has a two hundred kilometre round trip on unsealed roads to its nearest town – a car could transport the students to activities such as team sports, sports carnivals, swimming carnivals, excursions, any cultural activities they may be invited to attend, other small school cluster days and the like. Students access and participation is a crucial part of their development. Currently, due the long distances parents are having to choose between work and other family commitments for their children to participate. Therefore, quite often attending such events is impossible. Vast distances and unsealed roads in these isolated communities where there are no essential services for example Doctors and emergency services means without an appropriate vehicle these students are even more isolated.
- negotiated financial remuneration as there are significant additional living expense costs when relocating and living remotely.
- there needs to be suitable maintained housing for the principal.
- suitable casual teacher housing, which is separate from the principal housing, this gives an opportunity for teachers to come out to these rural and very remote schools and be apart of the Departments “Rural Experience Program” and other services which is provided by the Department of Education.

Rural Experience Program

ICPA-NSW would like to congratulate the NSW Department of Education for their initiative in starting the “Rural Experience Program”. This provides an opportunity for permanent teachers to take part in a short-term placement of one to four terms in a Rural and Remote school, but still having a permanent position to go back to once placement is completed. This position is fully funded by the Department and allows the school to have a full-time extra staff member for that period. This is a “unique opportunity for teachers to experience working in a rural setting, thereby allowing their consideration of rural teaching as a longer-term option. The placements provide a quality professional development experience for preschool, primary and secondary school teachers. It is the intention of the program that the Rural experience school benefits from the differing skills the Rural experience placement teacher offers”.

“Reduce the impact of administration on workloads to create more time for teaching and learning” (Halsey, 2018, p 37)

In our small schools teaching principals are being bombarded with training and administration duties, taking them away from the classroom and the important task of teaching. Small school students require stability and continuity of learning just like their larger school counterparts but in small schools the time out of classroom for the principals includes but not limited to professional development, training and also the challenges that only a small school principal experiences such as co-ordinating trades people conducting maintenance, technical difficulties with ICT’s, break downs in equipment such as water pumps and important phone calls that require immediate attention. These responsibilities are usually shared by many in a larger school environment but are only shared by two in a one TP1 school.

Streamline the overloaded national curriculum, particularly in the primary school years, restructuring it so there is a stronger emphasis on deeper understanding of core subjects such as Mathematics and English

This review was undertaken in 2014 the Australian Government response included an admission that “we already knew that many stakeholders had been critical of the overcrowding of the Australian Curriculum and the content being excessive” (*Australian Government, 2014*) and then went on to include a recommendation for Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) to “revise the structure of the Australian Curriculum to reduce the amount of content to a narrow core required to be taught, especially in the primary years. Foundation to Year 2 should focus on literacy and numeracy” (*Australian Government, 2014*) we strongly believe that urgency in getting this process started is required.

References: Donnelly & Wiltshire, Review of the Australian Curriculum: Final Report, 2014. Australian Government, Review of the Australian Curriculum: Initial Australian Government Response, 2014.

Rural Area Relief Teachers (RAR)

Rural schools currently have access to a Rural Area Relief teacher when covering teaching staff on leave or who are attending professional development. These positions are filled on a temporary basis and at the end of each contract the position is reviewed. School principals are continually fighting for the positions to continue as casual teacher availability is extremely low in rural areas. These positions are vital in ensuring schools remain operational in the event of an unexpected illness and/or leave. TP1 and TP2 schools have a low number of staff and do not have the ability to split classes in the event of an unexpected absence. The Rural Area Relief (RAR) position should be retained in TP1 and TP2 schools so that relief teaching can be accessed when required.

Rural and Remote Parent Conference “Inspire2Innovate”

Rural and Distance Education (Department of Education) Bathurst invited ICPA-NSW along with New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc. and the P & C Association to help with the Rural and Remote Parent Conference “Inspire2Innovate” which was held on the 31st of July 2019. We had several teleconferences organising this event. At the conference several information presentations were given by the shopfronts attending: Headspace, Royal Far West, Centre for Effective Reading, NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA), School counsellors-Wellbeing Framework (Department of Education), Learning & Wellbeing and Learning & Teaching (Department of Education), Aurora College and Rural and Distance Education (Department of Education). ICPA-NSW gave a 10-minute presentation which was given by David Butler. David and I also set up a shop front with information about ICPA.

Inquiry into the measurement and outcome based-funding in New South Wales schools NSW Legislative Council’s Portfolio Committee No 3 – Education

ICPA-NSW lodged a submission into the “Inquiry into the measurement and outcome based-funding in New South Wales schools NSW Legislative Council’s Portfolio Committee No 3-Education in August 19. Our submission was published on the NSW Curriculum Review website. ICPA-NSW was invited to attend a teleconference on the 10th of October in the Macquarie Room, Parliament House, Sydney. Claire Butler and I gave evidence at the teleconference to the Portfolio Committee No 3. Committee membership included Hon Mark Latham – Pauline Hanson’s One Nation as the (Chair), Hon Matthew Mason-Cox MLC – Liberal Party (Deputy Chair), Hon Anthony D’Adam MLC – Australian Labour Party, Hon Wes Fang MLC – The Nationals, Hon Scott Farlow MLC – Liberal Party, Hon Courtney Houssos MLC – Australian Labour Party and Mr David Shoebridge MLC – The Greens.

To all my fellow NSW State councillors, thank you so much for your wonderful support and encouragement. I believe in that wonderful saying that nothing can take the place of persistence and perseverance. The slogan “press on” has solved and always will solve the problems of the human race.

Annabel Strachan
Rural Schools Convenor.

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