



# Submission

**to the**

**Better and Fairer School Bill 2024**

**from the  
Federal Council**

**of the**

**Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia Inc.**

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Kel Ostwald  
Federal Secretary, ICPA (Aust)  
"Lochnay"  
CAMP CREEK NSW 4385  
fedsecretary@icpafc.org.au  
0438 232 671

Louise Martin  
Federal President  
'Macfarlane'  
TAMBO QLD 4478  
FedPresident@icpafc.org.au  
Tel: 0427 151 234

ICPA (Aust) is a voluntary, apolitical parent body dedicated to ensuring all geographically isolated students have access to the services required for an equitable, affordable high-quality education, from early childhood through to tertiary and training. The member families of the Association reside and work in rural and remote Australia and all share a common goal of achieving access to an equitable education for their children, despite their geographic location. They often live great distances from services required to support the education of their children and therefore need specifically designed rural and remote programs that allow these children to learn, develop and thrive. These families face barriers, every day, in achieving equitable access to an education for their children. ICPA (Aust) value this opportunity to outline the dire need for the funding of a better and fairer education system to result in well-educated rural and remote Australian children.

#### **Comments on Schedule 1 - Part 1 – Paragraph 22(2)(a)(iii)**

##### **“the agreement relates to school education reform;”**

ICPA (Aust) fully supports that the school education system in Australia needs reform, but reform can't happen without adequate funding. ICPA(Aust) argues the school education system in Australia needs more than reform, more specifically it needs existing barriers to learning and achieving removed.

#### **Comment on Part 2 – 3 Preamble**

The final, proposed sentence states – “It establishes a mechanism to protect the funding shares for government schools in Australia to make sure that Commonwealth shares cannot go backwards.” ICPA (Aust) urges the Commonwealth Government of Australia to ensure that the Commonwealth funding share for government schools does not stalemate but progresses to secure the opportunities Australian children need to be skilled, creative, and fully participate in society as per the first paragraph of the preamble. ICPA (Aust) believes, to achieve the lofty aims of this preamble, the Commonwealth share for government schools must be a minimum of 25 per cent as the base amount.

#### **Comment on Section 35A**

ICPA (Aust) considers that to genuinely deliver equitable access to education for geographically isolated children, Section 35A(2)(ii) needs to read “(ii)otherwise – 25%; or”

ICPA (Aust) believes that the geographically isolated students cohort need to be explicitly defined (as per comment below on Section 6) and considered as a distinct disadvantage group in the Australian Education Act (2013) and subsequently in consideration of educational funding models.

Barriers and challenges for educating children in rural and remote locations result in these students' educational outcomes and aspirations being less than that of their urban counterparts. ~~and~~ This can contribute to many families leaving rural and remote areas to provide their children with a better and fairer education.

#### **Comment on Section 6 as relevant to above comment on Section 35A**

##### **Definition of distance education student.**

ICPA (Aust) concludes that students who have no choice but to complete their compulsory education via distance education because of the geographical isolation of their home, need to be defined as such and separately to students who choose distance education over their local school for reasons other than the physical distance of a school from their home.

**Existing, Australia-wide barriers to a better and fairer education for rural and remote Australian students which could be alleviated with 25% Commonwealth share of funding.**

1. Inequitable expectation for geographically isolated families to provide and pay for supervision of the home classroom.

For many families living in remote regions, the only access to education for their children is distance education. The provision of distance education is founded on the requirement that all children have ready access to a person able to teach the program in the geographically isolated home classroom daily. This person is the distance education tutor who must be available and able to provide the practical, day-to-day supervision and support required for the effective delivery of a distance education program. This is an extensive role which requires a high level of commitment and is the only way that geographically isolated distance education students can be successful in accessing their compulsory education. The vital role of the distance education tutor, often the mother who has vacated the workforce to supervise schooling, should be assured funded via the School Resource Standard (SRS) as acknowledgment of the essential work they perform to deliver a high standard of education to these children.

A category needs to be added to the current student-based loading to define geographically isolated DE students.

The other set of school based loadings should include a sub category of Distance Education Classroom location

By establishing these defined loading, the Commonwealth would be placing a directive to State Education departments to ensure that the Geographically Isolated classroom is adequately funded to include compulsory supervision and lesson delivery to students.

*The 4 student-based loadings are the:*

- *student with disability loading*
- *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander loading*
- *socio-educational disadvantage loading*
- *low-English proficiency loading.*

*A student may attract funding under more than one loading.*

*The 2 school-based loadings are for:*

- *School size*
- *School location.*

*The Department calculates the loadings for each school each year and ICPA(Aust) conclude that geographically isolated children should attract a student-based loading and a school based loading determined by their home location where they complete their distance education in their home classroom.*

Families who educate their children via distance education are required to establish and maintain a schoolroom setting, provide extra learning materials and resources and print necessary learning materials all of which are readily supplied to students at mainstream schools. In addition, distance education families often need to travel significant distances to participate in school activities that offer face to face learning, interaction and socialisation for their children. These requirements come at a significant expense to families for what is determined to be a free education as declared in the National Constitution

To eliminate this barrier to a better and fairer education across Australia, the costs associated with

delivering geographically isolated distance education needs to be rectified via the Better and Fairer Schools (Funding and Reform) Bill 2024 using recommendations above, namely

- Defining geographically isolated children in the Australian Education Act 2013 and
- funding these children with at least a 25% Commonwealth share of SRS.

## 2. Recognition of the unique needs of rural and remote students and schools

Rural education is interlinked with other aspects of rural communities, such as fluctuating populations, economic influences, seasonal conditions and climate. It must be recognised that attempts to address inequities in the provision of quality education in remote environments would not be effective unless broader economic and social issues are also considered. To effectively meet the needs of rural and remote students, inequity issues must be understood and addressed. Some of these children are not considered vulnerable because they are not impacted by extreme levels of poverty. Rather, due to geographic isolation from services, many rural and remote families are expected to cover significant out-of-pocket costs for the education of their children from early childhood through to tertiary education. To improve educational outcomes, options and pathways for remote students, a national approach is required which ensures a consistently high standard of educational delivery, regardless of where and how that education is accessed.

Rural and remote schools must be adequately funded and resourced to ensure that the students are given equitable educational opportunities to those in more metropolitan based schools.

Geographically isolated students also need the opportunity to attend a school that is commensurate to their needs, through pathways which provide educational parity with their urban peers. Viability of rural and remote schools is essential, and it is imperative for local families to be able to provide an education for their children while continuing to reside and work in rural and remote regions. Rural schools are often the core of their communities and ensuring that these schools are well supported, resourced, and staffed is vital to children's learning in these towns. Good schools can retain existing and attract new families to the regions, but families will quickly move away if they believe they can access a higher standard of education in more urban areas. A Commonwealth share of SRS of 25% would ensure rural schools can maintain or improve the quality of education delivered to rural and remote Australian children.

## 3. Teacher shortage and especially experienced teachers

The teacher shortage, whilst now affecting many more areas of Australia has, for a long-time, impacted teaching in a rural classroom. Teachers in rural and remote schools are often expected to teach classes or students for which they have no training or expertise which adds emotional load to already over-worked teachers. A Commonwealth share of SRS of 25% would ensure staffing of rural and remote schools can be maintained at adequate levels by funding the attraction, recruitment and retention strategies required.

Incentives for teachers to assume positions in rural and remote locations would assist in recruitment and retention.

These could include:

- Rural and remote school practical experience placements for teaching students to equip themselves with high-quality knowledge, skills and insight of these contexts.
- Support for classroom teachers who need to perform administrative duties.
- Support to live and work in a rural and remote area including assistance for travel, accommodation and living expenses for practical experience placements.
- Relocation incentives – accommodation, travel, rental assistance.

- Preparation for rural living and working in isolation from family, friends and colleagues.
- Quality induction programs that include “in classroom” programs and P&C and school board operations that are reviewed regularly.
- Access to essential services including communications.
- Competency attainment.
- Quality mentor programs with experienced, knowledgeable and skilled mentors who are supported to undertake this important role.
- Peer support networks both within and outside of the school.
- Additional support for professional development ensuring availability, accessibility and resourcing.
- Salary loading and other financial incentives .

ICPA (Aust) has appreciates the opportunity to contribute to this review to inform decisions being made on behalf of rural and remote students and families across Australia.