

## Early Childhood

### REPORT

#### 2022 Bourke

Firstly, I would like to take this chance to thank ICPA NSW State Council for having me as Early Childhood Portfolio leader. I have been so beautifully included by Claire's and now Kate's committee, despite not attending physically events. This has worked well for me, and I appreciate your patience.

An extremely warm welcome to the Partnerships and Engagement Regional, Rural and Remote Education Policy (RRREP).

This was my second note in preparing this report because ICPA NSW has enormous confidence and hope that the common sense solutions, which it can provide for some of the issues I am going to outline, are *really* being listened to. Over successive years ICPA NSW has met with both sides of NSW governments and the opposition and in by far most cases have had a receptive audience who are in complete agreement.

However, when the delegations leave the city, the two-way conversation slows and sometimes ceases as we all assume our busy lives.

ICPA NSW has benefited in a strange way from COVID as we have been able through the uptake of zoom, teams or whatever, to meet more frequently with authorities to understand how the motions are being actioned. This has led, I believe, to an immediacy which has been profitable to both parties...ICPA NSW as lobbyists and those with the authority to enact the mechanics of creating beneficial change. There is now a team mentality allowing expression of ideas both ways. An exchange which together 'nuts out' the most sustainable and sensible way to do things.

The Department of Education has established Partnerships and Engagement Regional, Rural and Remote Education Policy with Ben Ballard as Executive Director and Helen Parker as Director. Helen has invited us recently to fortnightly meetings which, from ICPA NSW's perspective, have been invaluable.

This is so much the case that in drafting this report I realise the information may have changed by the time it is tabled.

The following are some of the long-term issues in Early Childhood which ICPA NSW has taken to delegations and conferences. These, in the twelve months from last conference have not resulted in further progress. ICPA NSW continues to advocate for the following and as mentioned above ICPA NSW feels optimistic that they will be resolved soon.

Early Childhood Teacher (ECT) salary and incentives' parity. Attracting *any* teachers to the profession is topical currently. It has always been a struggle in isolated situations. The fact that Early Childhood teaching positions outweigh the amount of trained early childhood teachers compounds the difficulty of attracting staff in regional areas. ICPA NSW would like to know that in trying to attract an ECT to a

remote job, at least a salary equalling that of a four-year trained teacher is on offer. Similarly, that appropriate accommodation and any incentives which a primary of high school four-year trained teacher is entitled to, is available to an ECT.

Governance and fiscal management in Early Childhood Services are a problem in remote NSW. Complying with training of volunteer management committees is difficult as there are few training opportunities.

Practical access to preschool in remote schools is an issue close to my heart...we simply must provide a way for remote children who do not have a workable practical way of having six hundred hours of pre schooling.

How otherwise can they hope to be on an equal footing with other four-year-olds in NSW?

In 2014 ICPA NSW began the long road of explaining, chiding, and cajoling the DoE to recognise a scary gap in their delivery of education. ICPA NSW asked for the capacity to establish Distance Education preschools in remote schools where there are children without access to a supervisor who could deliver it to them.

The DoE must provide all NSW children's schooling. That is beginning at providing mandatory access to preschool to attendance in a NESA approved schooling pathway from kindergarten to the age of seventeen.

The model ICPA NSW recommended is simple and not expensive. ICPA NSW recommended a 'pop up and pop down' approach in 2014 because the student numbers are obviously exceptionally low and volatile. We welcome the adaption of distance education. Quality is assured by the four-year trained ECT DE teacher collaborating with a supervisor within the infrastructure of the school. This model is further enhanced by the fibre optic cable in some of these schools

This was to be actioned in the form of establishing small preschools in remote village schools. Minister Mitchell announced this at ICPA NSW's Mudgee State Conference in 2017.

At the recent opening of the Ivanhoe preschool Minister Mitchell reiterated her belief that

"It is important that every child in NSW has access to a quality early childhood education, no matter their background or location, Minister for Education and Early Learning" Sarah Mitchell said.

The flexible learning programs are part of the Rural and Remote Education Strategy we established to ensure that all children in rural and remote communities have access to quality early childhood education in the year before school,"

Freya Lucas- The Spectator

We thank Minister Mitchell for understanding how difficult it is for a three- or four-year-old to organise, for themselves, practical access to preschool.

Minister Mitchell has always agreed with ICPA NSW that there needs to be a pathway and now as part of the Rural and Remote Education Strategy, finally four schools do have the possibility of Distance Education or School of The Air preschool programmed by a four year trained ECT and

delivered to their school---Louth, Pooncarie, Ivanhoe and Weilmoringle (although currently Weilmoringle does not have the children).

There are several remote schools and their communities still to be informed of this possibility, staff to be found and there will be issues specific to each remote place to be worked through. ICPA NSW certainly wishes to work with RRREP to ensure the roll out happens in a timely fashion so that no child is without the access to quality early childhood education which all Australian children are guaranteed to have.

I would like to recommend every member to consider joining state council at some point in time.

I say this because we, as isolated educated families, are so very privileged. We are the ones who need to make sure that the absolute best sustainable and quality assured systems are there for all bush kids. Opportunities are afforded for wholesome communities, wherein *everyone* is privileged, through caring, thorough, positive, quality education.

Deborah Nielsen

ICPA NSW Early Childhood Convenor