



**Joint Submission
from**

Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia (**ICPA Aust**)
Isolated Children's Parents' Association Queensland (**ICPA QLD**)
Isolated Children's Parents' Association New South Wales (**ICPA NSW**)
Isolated Children's Parents' Association South Australia (**ICPA SA**)
Isolated Children's Parents' Association Western Australia (**ICPA WA**) *and*
Isolated Children's Parents' Association Northern Territory (**ICPA NT**)

on the

**Development of a National Framework for Students who attend Boarding
School across State and Territory borders**

November 2020

Contact:

(Mrs) Suzanne Wilson
Federal Secretary
ICPA (Aust)
122/8 Gardiner St
DARWIN NT 0800
FedSecretary@icpa.com.au
Phone: 0418 830 214

Contact:

(Mrs) Alana Moller
Federal President
ICPA (Aust)
Star of Hope Station, 5090 Pioneer Rd
CLERMONT QLD 4721
FedPresident@icpa.com.au
Phone: (07) 4983 5353

This submission has been jointly prepared by:

- Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia (**ICPA Aust**)
- Isolated Children's Parents' Association Queensland (**ICPA QLD**)
- Isolated Children's Parents' Association New South Wales (**ICPA NSW**)
- Isolated Children's Parents' Association South Australia (**ICPA SA**)
- Isolated Children's Parents' Association Western Australia (**ICPA WA**) *and*
- Isolated Children's Parents' Association Northern Territory (**ICPA NT**)

The Isolated Children's Parents' Association (ICPA) nationally and collectively welcomes the opportunity to provide recommendations towards the development of a National Framework for Students who attend Boarding School across State and Territory borders, especially in the context of COVID-19.

ICPA is a voluntary, apolitical parent body dedicated to advocating for equitable access to appropriate education for geographically isolated students, from early childhood through to tertiary. Our membership includes families who reside in geographically isolated areas of Australia, "rural and remote Australia" - who share the common goal of accessing and receiving education in the same way urban families can, together with the necessary services to achieve this.

Geographically isolated families must make decisions regarding access to education after many complex considerations. Therefore disruptions to enrolments, arrangements and education journeys are far-reaching and almost always to the detriment of students, their family, extended relationships and respective education providers.

'Access to appropriate education' in a geographically isolated context, for a secondary student, often involves travelling a long way to realise a choice that in an urban context, involves travelling to a neighbouring suburb. Definitions can be found in Appendix A.

The COVID-19 pandemic severely and detrimentally impacted geographically isolated families whose children attend boarding school 'across the border', in another State or Territory. For rural and remote students, lines on a map became real, tangible barriers to accessing educational opportunities interstate, irrespective of safe, fair or reasonable considerations. Border restrictions, put in place by States and Territories, were tumultuous, ad-hoc, inconsistent, confusing and in some cases, absolutely heartbreaking to all concerned.

Not only did border closures and restrictions limit the ability for rural and remote students to access education, in many cases it separated families, put children under immense stress and pressure, and forced decisions that family units and education facilities would not normally make.

Border closures and restrictions also lacked sensible responses where logical solutions were available. For students already at boarding school, this resulted in painful separation between family units; and disruption, angst and additional challenges for students who could not return to boarding school.

This issue was not only experienced by students travelling interstate but also by those travelling within their States, whereby situations arose with local government areas or particular districts being locked down and students and their families not able to traverse outside of these areas without adhering to strict restrictions.

Case studies of families and students across rural and remote Australia who were impacted by this situation, and examples of what did work well are provided throughout the submission.



ICPA, nationally, hope our evidenced based recommendations herein provide a foundation to a policy which recognises that every child should have access to education, regardless of where they live, and that families, boarding schools and the very nature of geographical isolation all play a pivotal role in keeping students, schools, communities and our country safe, when that is our shared priority.

Recommendation

'A nationally-consistent, compassionate framework is necessary to ensure rural and remote students can access education within Australia, regardless of state borders, giving specific consideration to the fact geographically isolated Australian families already face a range of barriers to accessing education; and that geographically isolated families have the unique ability to isolate in ways that urban families cannot'.

A National Framework for Boarding Students must:

Facilitate and enable access to education

- The framework and any respective guidelines must be no more prohibitive than those for mainstream education facilities – school is either a safe environment or not, for everyone.
- Students must be able to access education and return to their homes during term breaks, regardless of where they live in Australia.
- Boarding facilities must be available for students who rely on boarding to access education.

Case Study

New South Wales resident boarding in South Australia

When the hard border was first implemented, remote New South Wales children could not avoid quarantine when they returned back to boarding in South Australia. In April, children as young as 11 endured quarantine on their own in an isolated room within boarding houses, allowed outside twice a day for ten minutes a day. South Australia did not have an exemption category for boarding children and eventually in July a case by case email application process was implemented. In applying for an exemption from quarantine requirements, applicants needed to provide information on:

- Where the student has been for the 14 days prior to entry
- How they intended to enter SA and with whom (for example, by road, with a parent or other students), and any stops on the way
- Where they would reside in SA (for example, a boarding house, a homestay arrangement, another location)
- If, while exempt from quarantine, how risks may be managed in a classroom environment



Case study

A 12-year-old child from a remote sheep station in the Wentworth Shire in Far West New South Wales was refused an exemption when all other children from Far West New South Wales were granted exemptions. His situation was no different to the ones who had been granted an exemption. His mother then travelled with him and self-isolated in accommodation in SA as he had already done isolation previously in a boarding house and she was concerned that he would not have coped a second time around.

Be supportive of the emotional and physical wellbeing of student and their family

- 2020 has shown us, anecdotally, that mental health must be adequately considered in the context that rural and remote families, including youth, are already at higher risk of mental health concerns, without the stress of hard lockdown and quarantine in a boarding environment. Lockdown and self-isolation by its very nature is not supportive or nurturing to young minds, and in a boarding school environment this is exacerbated and potentially detrimental to mental health, not only for students and the boarding community, but also for the parents whom are not physically present to support and nurture their children under these circumstances.
- If self-isolation at boarding school is a requirement, parental choice prevails and the education facility must provide learning via an online platform, as an alternative.
- If students need to self-isolate, a provision needs to be made for them to do so with another family, for example one parent caring for other children.
- Families and students need clear, concise and practical knowledge of what will happen during an outbreak, both within their school environment and during the holidays, including transitioning between both (discussed further below).

Case Study

New South Wales resident boarding in Queensland

A family have recently moved to New South Wales from Queensland and their children have remained at boarding school in North Queensland. When the borders closed and continued to remain that way as the holidays approached the family put a plan in place for where the kids would go on their holidays, they needed clarity on what would be happening. When the exemption came through from the Chief Health Officer in Queensland they had to quickly scramble for a new plan. This exemption stipulated that there could only be a 24 hour turn around for collection and it had to be by road. The family had to get other family and friends and the boarding school to assist. The children got the school bus for the 5 hour drive to Central Queensland then their older child who was working in the area collected them and drove to the next town, where another family member picked them up for the next 5 hour leg and then the parent who had crossed the border had a 10 hour round trip to get them home. They were exhausted as they would normally have a 2 hour flight to the nearest regional airport and then the parents would have a 4 hour drive to collect them from there. Even though the flight is all within Queensland the exemption stipulated the travel had to be by road only, this can be very difficult to complete within the timeframe



Case Study continued ... (New South Wales resident boarding in Queensland)

During this family's time in Western Queensland prior to their move to New South Wales this family experienced 7 years of drought and then the flooding during February 2019. They are resilient, strong and work together but none of what mother-nature could throw at them caused the anxiety, unease and fear like the border closures did. The main issue was the uncertainty, a definite decision was needed so plans could be put into place whether children were coming home or not. Phone calls from the kids during this time asking if the rules had changed and would they be able to come home were gut wrenching for the parents of these children. The uncertainty, the angst and the stress that this put on families cannot continue to happen every time the border closes. There needs to be clear concise rules for children who attend school interstate that immediately come in once borders are closed. If the indecision and uncertainty continues, the mental health of the families affected will be put in serious jeopardy.

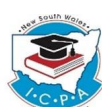
Be clear and consistently applied across jurisdictions

- Guidelines and COVID-19 Safe plans need to be clear, concise and consistent in their interpretation and application, for all schools in all jurisdictions.

Unfortunately, confusion around the interpretation of the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) guidelines, and COVID-19 Safe plans that boarding schools were asked to submit by their respective State health authorities were inconsistent, both in their interpretation and application of guidelines. This conflicting information caused angst and uncertainty for families, and the impact was far-reaching, possibly beyond what the AHPPC guidelines intended.

This was not only an issue for interstate boarders, it was also an issue within States. AHPPC risk management guidelines for boarding schools and school-based residential colleges have been cause for concern. Due to their broad nature and limited specific direction, they have been open to interpretation by jurisdictions, health districts within States and indeed individual schools, causing confusion and challenges for students who board across Australia. This inconsistency continues with boarding schools in the same town having rather different procedures and restrictions in place based on their reading of the AHPPC guidelines.

- Schools and boarding facilities have expertise in adhering to the highest standards of care for boarding students and have demonstrated throughout the pandemic to be extremely efficient in managing risk and implementing COVID-19 safe rules within the boarding environment. This is evidenced in the lack of transmission of COVID-19 within boarding schools across Australia in the past 6 months.



Direction and pre-planning procedures if there is a school outbreak with boarding facilities

- Families and students need clear, concise and practical knowledge of what will happen during an outbreak, both within their school environment and during the holidays, including transitioning between school and home.
- The Framework requires procedures giving clear direction and certainty to schools, students and their families associated with boarding facilities as to what happens should a pandemic outbreak occur within the school or boarding facility which take into consideration the nature of the schools and the students who must board in them. These procedures need to take into consideration not only the movement of interstate boarders, but indeed needs to focus on plans and logistics for managing these situations for all students who must board at these schools.

Case study

Intrastate Situation

Throughout 2020 Pandemic Exclusions Zones (or Designated Biosecurity Areas) were created within Queensland under the Federal Human Biosecurity Act to protect indigenous communities. These zones caused added stress to geographically isolated families who were faced with the logistics of quarantining both their children and themselves if they were to exit the zone to return them to boarding school. If a parent had transported their child to an airport or bus depot outside the PEZ, that parent would have had to quarantine for 14 days outside the Shire in an approved facility before being able to return, despite their isolation meaning they would rarely see another person on their travels. With no secondary schooling available within these zones, and satellite internet connectivity being notoriously unreliable, families were rightly concerned at how they were going to provide ongoing educational opportunities for their children, and indeed whether they would be able to return to their schools at all in 2020. This group of students were unable to access quality schooling and their situation was not addressed due to the lack of cross-departmental interaction, and indeed Federal and State government cooperation at the time. Should exclusion zones within states play a role in future pandemic response frameworks, consideration of families within these safety nets needs to be responded to appropriately.

Therefore, parents in these regions may well be considering not returning students in Term 3 due to a lack of clarity around the above. So, either what is being called a “tunnel” has to be developed to allow parents to drop off/pick up children even if it only to a transport hub point without having to quarantine. (one has been developed for medical/dental purposes) It may require a supervisor being located at the drop off transport point so parents can turn straight around to minimise contact with others and ensure they do not exit the vehicle. It may also require boarding schools in the two weeks prior to student’s return creating a quarantine space to allow for students to return home immediately upon arrival at transport hub etc. this would all require extensive planning, development/lodgement of plans, approval of such plans and documents to be provided to students/parents for presentation at entry checkpoints . Followed by an orchestrated rollout of same to all boarding schools to ensure no student is left disadvantaged (not all students go to closest boarding school to their home).



Be open to receiving solutions and be flexible and adaptable in response to complex problems

- During 2020, rural and remote students, together with their families and respective boarding facilities, watched many opportunities to provide solutions slip away while State and Territory governments applied their own jurisdictional regulation.

There was not one guiding agency or policy and jurisdictional borders became solid barriers to accessing education.

Unfortunately, it was also poignantly evident that government are not the only agency with solutions to complex problems, yet there was no central point where solutions could be proposed for consideration by all stakeholders.

Governments across Australia must find a way to receive solutions to complex problems and be flexible, responsive and adaptable in their single or collective responses. State and Territory borders must not become a barrier to accessing education within Australia.

- Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, some State governments put in place various short-term systems to allow for the movement of geographically isolated boarding school students across their individual State borders.

Provision must be made to allow geographically isolated students to travel the most direct route between school and home.

- Children are to travel the most direct route, instead of being required to fly through city airports when a sterile corridor of travel to the State border is the safest for both child and the community
- Exemption category or essential traveller status for boarders travelling interstate to access education worked well in some cases.
- Instead of 'border bubbles', a consistent approach might be to put a ring around postcodes that have an outbreak of COVID-19 and have pockets of 'restricted areas' (see Case Study in appendices)
- Case by case applications are not effective and highlights the need for essential traveller status / blanket exemption / permit.

Case Study

New South Wales resident boarding in Queensland:

The Queensland blanket exemptions issued in September provided interstate families with peace of mind that boarding children could come home to New South Wales for school holidays and return to Queensland without quarantining; however the border bubble complicated matters.

Case Study: A geographically isolated family in the Moree Shire who were included in the border bubble, had one child boarding in Queensland and one child boarding in Armidale NSW.

Armidale NSW was not in the border bubble and this made for an unworkable situation where, if the parents were to travel outside the border bubble and visit their child in Armidale, it jeopardised the travel and quarantine arrangements for their child boarding in Queensland.

Neither Armidale nor Moree had any cases of COVID-19 but the QLD border bubble directions immediately pitched one NSW community against another.



Summary of Effective Procedures by State

Some procedures have proven successful in solving some of the issues associated with movement, including Queensland boarder exemptions and the New South Wales permit system for Victorian students.

Further details on these can be found in Appendices B, C & D. ICPA believes that these models could be utilised to inform the national framework for boarding students. Other systems put into place have had varied success.

SYSTEM	PROCEDURE	RECOMMENDATION
Queensland Class Exemptions September 2020	Apply for Exemption online Different requirements for those in the bubble and those outside the bubble when no cases of COVID-19 in Shires See Appendix B (1-4)	No border bubble Put “ring” around postcodes instead of border bubbles
South Australia Exemptions September 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply via email • Case by Case • Two step process: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Exemption Granted, then; 2. Apply SAPOL for permit • Delays, time consuming, families wait weeks for outcome See Appendix C	Blanket Exemptions or Permit
NSW Permits October 2020	Apply via Service NSW 8B Permit <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NSW resident who is a student or parent/guardian accompanying a student at a boarding school in Victoria - must travel by the most practicable direct route to and from the boarding school - not eligible if boarding school is in a restricted area (must fly into Sydney and drive through Regional NSW to get home) See Appendix D	Permit = pragmatic solution, however those who are boarding in a restricted area of Victoria can only enter NSW via Sydney. Sydney has more cases of COVID-19 than any rural or remote area of NSW. Safest way to transport child back home to NSW is via a sterile corridor or private vehicle in a COVID-19 safe manner, most practical and direct route home to isolate on remote property.



Case Study

New South Wales resident boarding in Victoria

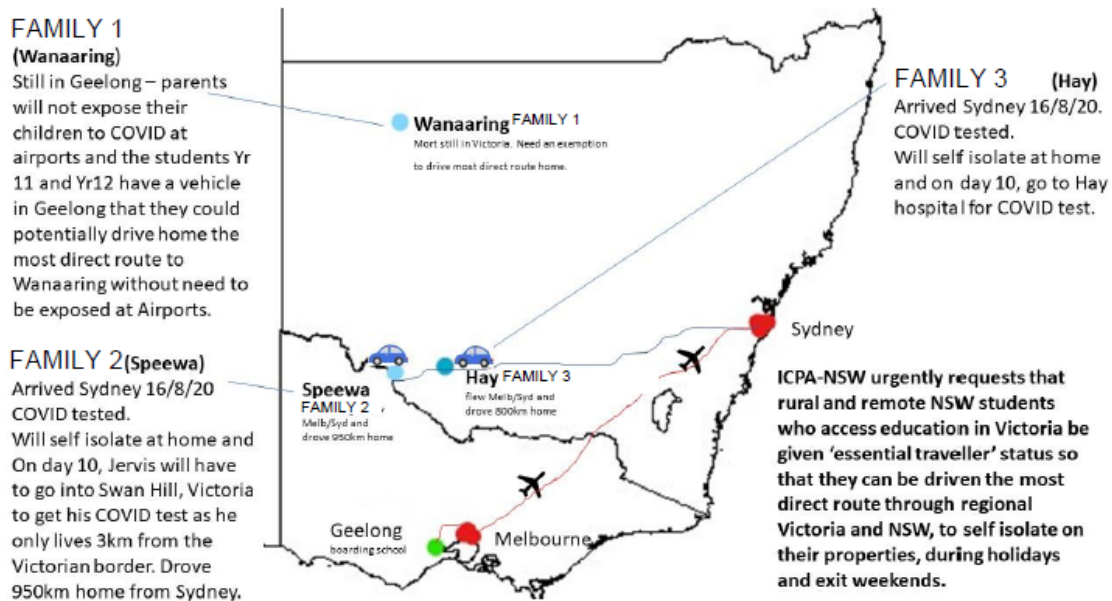
In August the only way a child could return to NSW was to fly into Sydney. At the end of September, a permit was introduced specific to boarding children in non-restricted areas of Victoria. To date, this permit system is working well as it allows parents to travel the most direct route to transport the child, however there is still a condition in the NSW Public Health Order that requires a boarder from a restricted area to fly into Sydney. Exposing children to flights at airports and then driving them across Regional NSW to isolate at home, if they happen to board in a restricted area, is a far greater risk compared to the child taking the most direct route home via a sterile corridor of travel.

Case Study

Of the 16 students granted exemptions from flying into Sydney on 12 August 2020, 4 students were not granted an exemption and therefore their only way home to rural and remote NSW was via placing them at risk of exposure to COVID-19 whilst transiting through Melbourne and Sydney Airports. Two students flew from Melbourne to Sydney on 16 August and the authorities, after testing them for COVID-19 at Sydney airport, said that they would send a community nurse to test them at home on day 10. When it was explained to the Sydney authorities that one child will be 800km from Sydney in Hay and the other 950km from Sydney in Speewa, the authorities arranged for them to have their testing at local health services nearer to home. On day 10, the child from Speewa, was required to return to the nearest health service in Victoria to have a COVID-19 test, despite his only way out of Victoria from boarding school was to fly to Sydney!

Meanwhile, the other two students from Wanaaring in Far North West NSW remained stranded in Victoria. The boys, in Year 11 and 12 had a farm ute with them and their parents were not willing to risk their health by having them travel through two international airports, be picked up by parents and driven 850km home, when all the while they could drive the most direct route home to self-isolate on their isolated property. After two weeks, the boys were finally granted an exemption to drive home.

Here is a diagram of the situation, as at 12 August 2020



Recognise the natural advantages of geographic location in quarantine requirements

Students returning to residential addresses based in rural and remote Australia naturally have a (self-) quarantine advantage, due to their geographic location, with the ability to limit contact and control visitors, and the ability to maintain this status for extended periods of time, with virtually no risk.

For this reason, and providing rural and remote students and their carers adhere to COVID-19 safe plans (including when travelling), this natural advantage negates the need for students to re-enter a quarantine phase when crossing State and Territory borders, to and from boarding facilities.

ICPA prepared templates that met current COVID-19 safe guidelines, in an effort to support students returning to interstate boarding school, who were forced to endure an additional 14 day isolation period see Appendix E (1-5). We believe this natural advantage needs to be considered more fully, and that coupled with COVID-19 safe guidelines, families (carers) are fully invested in and best placed to ensure students remain COVID-19 free during term breaks and lockdowns.

Be reviewed annually by a nominated stakeholder advisory committee

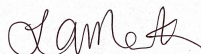
A stakeholder advisory committee might consist of representation from the Isolated Children’s Parents’ Association Federal and State Councils, the Australian Boarding Schools Association (ABSA), Independent Schools Australia and other groups who represent either boarding schools or boarding students across Australia. It is essential that representation from all States and nationally is included to ensure consideration is made across all jurisdictions.

The Isolated Children’s Parents’ Associations of Australia, Queensland, New South Wales, South Australia, Western Australia and Northern Territory appreciate the opportunity to provide these recommendations. Nationally we represent 2500 families, all who contribute to the future and strength of rural and remote Australia through industry, livelihoods and support of equity in access to education, no matter where you live.

Signed:



ICPA Australia President



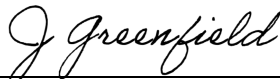
ICPA QLD President



ICPA NSW President



ICPA WA President



ICPA SA President



ICPA NT President

6th November 2020