



20th March 2019

ICPA Qld Dumbfounded by Minister Grace's LAFHAS Comments

ICPA Qld President Ms Tammie Irons is dumbfounded by the Education Minister's response to Member for Gregory, Lachlan Millar's recent Question on Notice asking, "whether the Minister would substantially increase the Living Away from Home Allowance paid to Queensland's remote families." This issue has been highlighted as urgent by ICPA Qld given the unprecedented drought and flood events affecting most of inland Queensland.

Minister Grace responded by stating the Department of Education recognised there may be a gap between the cost of tuition fees at some private schools and the tuition allowance provided by LAFHAS. Minister Grace further stated that, where a situation arises where there was a significant gap between some private schools and the tuition allowance, and a child does not have access to a local school, a family can choose to access one of the available state boarding facilities, a School of Distance Education, or access one of the numerous private schools with lower fees and sibling discounts to minimise their out of pocket expenses.

These comments have left Ms Irons in disbelief.

"The views expressed by Minister Grace are extremely out of touch and show a lack of understanding and compassion for rural and remote families. It is simply not practical for all geographically isolated students to access one of the three state run boarding schools in Queensland, nor is it ideal or a viable option for many secondary students to access their education via distance education. The irony is that it costs more for the State Government to fund a secondary SDE student than to provide LAFHAS assistance."

"It is quite simplistic to suggest that families should just choose a cheaper boarding school option. Logistics, and ensuring the school you choose is the right fit for your child who will be 'living' there for a large majority of the next 6 years, is more than just about finding the cheapest school," Ms Irons went further to say.

Feedback from members indicate extreme disappointment at this lack of understanding and one-dimensional view from the Minister at the choices that rural and remote families have.

Ms Irons also states, "The average tuition fee in Queensland boarding schools is \$12,503.00, leaving an average out of pocket expense for parents of \$7112.00. A significant increase is needed, urgently, especially given the catastrophic, ongoing weather events severely affecting the livelihoods of rural and remote Queenslanders."

ICPA Qld was advised that Minister Grace has sought a special financial assistance package from the federal government for students affected by floods and drought through additional tuition and boarding fees along with counselling support.

Ms Irons said, "Whilst ICPA Qld is extremely appreciative of Minister Grace's actions in this regard, and welcome any federal support offered for these families, we do believe a long term solution sits with a permanent and significant increase in the LAFHAS by the State Government, who has a responsibility to rural and remote students and their quality of education within their own State."

ENDS

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