

Education (General Provisions) (Extension of Primary Schools in Remote Areas) Amendment Bill 2023

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Education (General Provisions) (Extension of Primary Schools in Remote areas)
Amendment Bill 2023

Background: I am a retired P-10 school principal who worked in many rural and remote school sites and have experience in schools eg Springsure, Mitchell, Injune, Wallumbilla and Clermont which provided base school support for a number of the Rural and Remote primary schools listed.

I believe that potential disadvantages attached to this bill outweigh any identified benefits, and many of the unintended consequences of the proposed amendment have not been thoroughly identified/addressed to date (as articulated by the Member for Traeger during the Education Employment and Training Committee hearing on 27 November 2023)

Response to the Proposal:

1. A remote school is identified by information associated with Australian Bureau of Statistics. There are 6 schools located in the Maranoa Regional Council geographical area that are identified as “remote” under this definition – Begonia; Bymount East; Dunkeld; Teelba; Yuleba and Mungallala. Note- The distance from Yuleba to Toowoomba is 299 kms (approx. 3.5 hours in travel time).
2. Each of the identified schools in the Maranoa are linked to a larger geographically closely located P-10 school which provides shared specialist staffing, extracurricular opportunities and educational program access. The reality is that often these primary students transition from the “remote” school to the nearby secondary school (the distance between Bymount East School and Injune P-10 School is 26.6km with traveling time of approximately 19 minutes).
3. Historically, the parents of Year 6 students in our locality often prefer to choose to enrol their students at boarding schools that successive generations of their families have attended and for whom “old boys” and “old girls” networks are very strong and deliberately maintained.
4. The smaller schools in the Maranoa Regional Council area have fluctuating student enrolments at many of the smaller Primary contexts and their viability can be determined by the arrival or departure of one/two families with multiple children in each family. This has resulted in the closure of schools such as Yuleba Creek, Amby and Muckadilla schools (and departmental initiated community consultations about possible “moth balling”/closure of other schools such as Bymount East) in the past 10-20 years
5. Exiting year 6 students from a school such as Yuleba SS have a number of viable options already as they consider post – Primary options including:
 - (a) Travel daily by Transport and Main Roads bus to Wallumbilla State school (free of charge as part of conveyancing entitlement) to the nearest P-10 State school 20 kms away.
 - (b) Travel daily by TMR bus to Roma (free of charge as part of conveyancing entitlement) to the Catholic secondary school option in Roma (60 kms by road)

- (c) Undertake weekly boarding at the Roma Rural Student Hostel in Roma which is a Maranoa Regional Council owned facility which operates on an independent basis.
 - (d) Boarding schools in other geographical locations such as Toowoomba
6. From a practical point of view/current EQ departmental constraints, the following factors may need to be considered:
- (a) Students can only be enrolled at one educational institution (or partial enrolment over multiple schools but these arrangements mean that the total enrolment must add up to 1 FTE) and funding is then distributed to the individual schools on a pro-rata basis on the student's enrolment status (therefore this proposal will financially affect SDE adversely as per current protocols)
 - (b) The smaller primary schools operate with a teaching principal who teaches 4 days per week and is entitled to an administration day one day per week (with a relief teacher providing "backfill" for teaching duties). If an issue emerges within the proposed secondary cohort (of a minimum of 5 students as per the detail in the proposed Amendment) the teaching principal may be required to physically leave his/her class to intervene/resolve any issues, including behavior management related and subsequent learning disruption for their own students (noting that the delegated responsible officer to oversee these secondary issues would be the SDE Principal who is physically located off-campus)
 - (c) If a teacher aide were to be employed to oversee the SDE secondary learning option, a constant concern for the host school principal may be the TA being unable to attend school (due to sick or other emergent issues) and the host school principal being required to quickly source an alternative TA with very little notice to ensure continuity of student supervision. Within a school community, this can be extremely problematic and pose adverse effect on the host school's students, their staffing and operations
 - (d) The effect on the neighboring P-10/P-12 schools whose secondary departments were set up originally to provide a transitional educational opportunity for primary students who do not wish to access boarding schools (or other educational placements). The introduction of the Extension of Primary Schools in Remote Areas Amendment would undoubtedly extend an additional option for a small number of parents but may have the unintended consequence of reducing cohort at P-10/P-12 schools, possibly reducing their student numbers (and associated funding, subject offerings and staffing) and thus bringing their own continued viability into question.

In conclusion, the fact that this alternative educational "learning facility" is operating in 2 locations in Queensland is a very positive outcome in their location and bears testament to the joint efforts of community, SDE and school contexts (as well as the Local Government Councils who are willing to provide financial support to maintain this model). It could well be problematic for a model such as this to be applied across the state in other "remote primary schools" whose contexts may be different and who have already identified and

established “other” options (such as establishing a Roma Rural Student Hostel) that is popular, profitable and purposeful on a short-and-long term basis.