

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

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Queensland Parliamentary Committees

Committee Secretary
Education, Employment and Training Committee (EETC)
Parliament House
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Brisbane Qld 4000

Via Email: eetc@parliament.qld.gov.au

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

The Maranoa Regional Council wishes to make this submission to the Committee in relation to the Education (General Provisions) Amendment (Extension of Primary Schools in Remote Areas) Bill 2023 that is being proposed.

We support the primary policy objective of the *Education (General Provisions) (Extension of Primary Schools in Remote Areas) Amendment Bill 2023 (the Bill)* to address the need for increased access to designated secondary education services in remote Queensland communities.

However, we do have a number of key elements for concern, these being: -

1. The financial implications on Local Government for any expected commitment to the cost of wages for a teacher's aide as part of a remote delivery option.
2. The unintended impact on both School funding models and the Roma Rural Student Hostel located in the Maranoa.

Background

By way of background, there are six 'remote' schools (as defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)) within the Maranoa Regional Council local government area. These schools are closely linked with nearby P-10 schools, facilitating shared resources and smooth transitions for students.

Given the rural nature of our local government area, many families in our locality traditionally send their children to boarding schools. As a result, the smaller schools in the region face fluctuating enrolments annually, which can significantly impact their viability. Past closures and consultations for potential closures of schools, such as Bymount East, highlight this instability.

Currently, exiting Year 6 students have multiple viable educational paths, including free transport to nearby schools or boarding options, ensuring diverse choices post-primary education.

Challenges

Local Government Financial Sustainability

Whilst the concept of extending primary schools in remote areas has merits, as evidenced by successful implementations in locations such as Thargomindah and Julia Creek - a statewide application could encounter significant obstacles. Both Bulloo and McKinlay Councils allocate financial dollars to support these models. In Thargomindah, the Council built and manage the school infrastructure in addition to covering wages for a teacher's aide. Both support this model, so that their residents can have a choice about keeping students in the Year 7 – 10 years near home.

If a Statewide approach is taken, it is unclear about whether Councils are expected to fund the gap of essentially State curriculum delivery if local residents want an option. Whilst the amendment supports flexibility, there may be consequences for ratepayers within communities who already pay both taxes and rates. Local Governments have adopted a Financial Sustainability framework since 01 June 2023 in order to remain or achieve sustainability over the medium to long term in a dynamic and changing environment. This amendment may be perceived to be unintentional 'cost shifting' of the State to Local Government for what is essentially a State service.

School Models and Roma Rural Student Hostel

In the Maranoa, the Maranoa Regional Council also owns infrastructure and have facilitated alternative solutions like the Roma Rural Student Hostel (RRSH). The RRSH offer effective, community-supported models which meet the needs of our community.

The proposed amendment may have unintended consequences on existing school models as it may change or constrain student enrolment and funding distribution whilst creating operational challenges for teaching principals, and potential staffing issues with teacher aides.

The amendment could inadvertently affect nearby P-10/P-12 schools, potentially reducing their student numbers, funding, and viability. In addition, long standing remote options such as School of the Air could experience a reduction in teaching hours which would have a similar effect.

We believe, that in relation to Bill amendments, it is crucial to consider the unique needs and existing structures of each remote area before applying a one-size-fits-all approach.

We kindly request that you consider this submission.

Yours sincerely



Edwina Marks
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Maranoa Regional Council