

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

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



WHO IS P&CS QLD?

P&Cs Qld is the peak body supporting, advocating for and representing more than 600,000 state school parents and wider school communities throughout Queensland. We support the achievement of quality educational outcomes for students through fostering parental and community engagement in a thriving and successful education system.

Through our state-wide network of 1262 P&C Associations, School Councils and some 44,000 plus volunteers, we have the localised presence and voice to lead and enact change to achieving our objective of giving every child every chance in education and life.

P&CS POSITION

P&Cs Qld stands firmly in support of ensuring equitable access to quality school education for all students, irrespective of their geographic location. This principle aligns seamlessly with the pivotal objective of the Education (General Provisions) (Extension of Primary Schools in Remote Areas) Amendment Bill.

This Bill holds promise in addressing the educational disparities prevalent in remote regions. One of the most significant advantages of extending primary schools in remote areas is the profound impact it will have on allowing children to stay within their familial and community environments. Children benefit immensely from growing up within their familiar surroundings, which play a pivotal role in shaping their identity, values, and sense of belonging.

The economic challenges faced by numerous families in these remote areas are substantial. For many, boarding school might be an unattainable expense. This amendment offers a viable solution by bringing education to the doorsteps of these families, ensuring that financial limitations are not barriers to their children's educational prospects.

Furthermore, the proposed amendments align with the crucial insights provided by the Review of Funding for Schooling (commonly known as the Hasely Review), Independent Review into Regional, Rural, and Remote Education (Naphthine Review), Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools: Final Report (Gonski 2.0), and the guiding principles outlined in The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration. These sources collectively underscore the urgent need for equitable educational opportunities.

Beyond its immediate impact on education, this bill holds promise in fostering long-term socio-economic advancements in these regions.

PREVIOUS REPORTS, INQUIRIES AND DECLARATIONS SUPPORTING OUR POSITION

We wish to provide the following additional background information to the committee for consideration.

Hasley Review

The Halsey Review aimed to address the unique challenges faced by schools and students in regional, rural, and remote areas, aiming to improve educational outcomes and opportunities for those communities. The Halsey Review acknowledged that investing in education in remote schools isn't solely an educational concern but also a crucial economic strategy. It emphasized that quality education in these areas is instrumental in driving economic prosperity and fostering resilient, self-sustaining communities.

In the 2017 review conducted on behalf of the Department of Education and Training, Emeritus Professor John Halsey said "it is well documented that one consequence of young people becoming disengaged from education before they complete their schooling is a greater propensity for them to drift into crime and then becoming involved in the juvenile justice system. The financial costs associated with this far exceed those of providing a 'top quality' education and there are major social implications and costs as well.

Source: Emeritus Professor John Halsey, Department of Education and Training, Halsey review, January 2018, p. 24.

Naphtine Review

Australians growing up in regional and remote areas have lower educational attainment rates in school, in Year 12 and in tertiary education, compared to those living in metropolitan areas. This gap is most pronounced in remote and very remote areas and at university level.

Achievement in education in regional and remote areas has been lower than in metropolitan areas for decades, as evidenced by:

- National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) results
- two international tests of school students—the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), and
- rates of successful completion of year 12 or equivalent qualification (at the level of Certificate III or higher) by the age of 19.3

Source: Department of Education, Regional Education Expert Advisory Group, National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy, Final Report, August 2019, p. 11.

The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration

On 12 December 2019, a new national declaration of education goals was endorsed by all Council of Australian Governments (COAG) education ministers.

The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration sets out a vision for a world class education system that encourages and supports every student to be the very best they can be, no matter where they live or what kind of learning challenges they may face.

Education Ministers have agreed on a new national declaration on education goals for all Australians. Known as the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration (the Declaration), it sets out the national vision for education and the commitment of Australian Governments to improving educational outcomes.

The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration sets out two education goals for young Australians:

Goal 1: The Australian education system promotes excellence and equity.

Goal 2: All young Australians become confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners, and active and informed members of the community.

Source: Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Education Council, Alice Springs (Mparntwe), Education Declaration, December 2019, p. 4.

LAFHAS FUNDING CONCERNS

The extension of primary schools in remote areas, as outlined in this bill, stands as a beacon of hope for families who currently face the financial burden of sending their children away to boarding schools due to limited local educational options. The LAFHAS, while instrumental in assisting families in supporting their children's education away from home, often presents challenges for families already grappling with financial constraints.

It's understandable that there might be apprehensions about the impact of extending primary schools in remote areas on existing support schemes like LAFHAS. However, it's essential to highlight that the intention behind extending primary schools is not to displace or disrupt current arrangements but to enhance educational opportunities for children living in these remote regions.

By extending primary schools in remote areas, this bill directly addresses the predicament faced by families unable to afford boarding school options. It provides an opportunity for children to receive quality education closer to their homes, thereby reducing the financial strain on families reliant on schemes like LAFHAS to facilitate their children's education away from home.

CONCLUSION

This submission reflects our profound understanding of the unique challenges faced by students in remote areas and the Bill amendment signifies a bold step towards addressing these challenges. It acknowledges the importance of investing in educational infrastructure and resources that are essential for empowering students to reach their full potential.

We believe that the current deficiency relating to the provision of high school education in remote areas is a legacy issue dating back to the 1950's where access to secondary education funding was limited to children with ability. Secondary education was a privilege and not a right. Noting it was in 1961 that the Watkin Committee recommended that the leaving age be raised to 15 years. This explains the limitations of secondary school infrastructure in remote and regional areas.

P&CS QLD SUBMISSION

The proposed amendment to extend primary schools in remote areas signifies a pivotal step toward providing equal educational opportunities to all children, irrespective of their geographic location. This bill aligns seamlessly with the fundamental principle that every child deserves access to quality education, regardless of their postcode.

Submission prepared by P&Cs Qld

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