



Speech by

**Hon. ANNA BLIGH**

**MEMBER FOR SOUTH BRISBANE**

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Hansard 13 September 2001

#### **MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

##### **Isolated Children's Parents' Association State Conference**

**Hon. A. M. BLIGH** (South Brisbane—ALP) (Minister for Education) (9.50 a.m.), by leave: The Isolated Children's Parents' Association state conference is being held in Cloncurry today and tomorrow. The ICPA conference is a valuable means of staying in touch with grassroots schooling issues for families in rural and isolated Queensland. Irrespective of where a young person lives, I am sure that we would all agree that they have the right to expect access to educational services that will assure them of a positive and productive future.

I am pleased to report that a number of topics to be discussed today are all part of Education Queensland's Rural and Remote Strategy, due for completion at the end of this year. The first topic is the Mount Isa education precinct. From the beginning of 2003, Kalkadoon and Mount Isa State High Schools and the Mount Isa Institute of TAFE will join together to become one multicampus college. The college will also incorporate the state's first government-run residential facility that will target students from outlying areas who are currently at risk of not completing their year 12 or equivalent qualifications. This multicampus college represents an exciting shift in thinking that will widen the opportunities for young people in rural and remote areas. I would particularly like to acknowledge my ministerial colleague Matt Foley and his Department of Employment and Training for the strong links with TAFE that will be established with the new college. I am also aware of the strong support of the local member, Mr Tony McGrady, for this new initiative.

The second is an Intersystemic Cooperative Provisions Project to explore areas where both the state system and the Catholic system can share educational provisions so that all students benefit. A steering committee has been meeting to agree on a set of guiding principles and objectives for future investigation. There will be broader consultation to include parent groups.

A third is with regard to the state-funded Living Away From Home Allowance Scheme. I am pleased today to assure families that there will be no change to the way that Education Queensland administers this scheme. I understand parents have been concerned that students receiving a scholarship would lose the right to claim this allowance. This will not be the case. Eligible students receiving any type of scholarship will continue to be able to access the Living Away from Home Allowance Scheme as well.

Further, I have asked my department to consult on a proposal to allow a number of remote secondary departments with small enrolments to be bypassed to enable families to access the full range of financial assistance for isolated families, should they choose to send their children away to school. The department will still continue to provide secondary education in these areas. There will be no closures of these secondary departments as a result of any bypass. Schools that have been identified as possibly meeting the criteria being established by the department include Alpha, Aramac Aurukun, Bwgcolman Community School on Palm Island, Mornington Island, Tambo and Quilpie.

This variation to policy will benefit isolated families who will become eligible for the state-funded Living Away From Home Allowance Scheme as well as the Commonwealth Assistance for Isolated Children. Provided the consultation supports such a proposal—and I would like to stress that there will be extensive consultation with interested stakeholders, including local governments—this change could take effect from the beginning of next year for a trial period of two years when the impact of the policy change will be assessed.

These are just some of the topics of interest to the rural and remote areas that Education Queensland Director General, Jim Varghese, is announcing at the ICPA conference this morning. I am sure there will be many other issues raised at the conference and I want to assure the parents of isolated children that their issues are important and that this government will be listening to them. I am committed to improving the education and life chances for children in the bush and to giving young Queenslanders the best chance for the future, no matter where they live.

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