




Speech By
Dale Last

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

Record of Proceedings, 4 April 2019

PRIVATE MEMBER'S STATEMENT

Education, Boarding Schools

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (2.30 pm): What is the value of an education? What is the worth of social interaction, sporting opportunities and the cultural experiences that come with education? These are questions that will soon need to be answered by 1,200 rural and remote families in Queensland who are all part of the ICPA. These are questions they need to answer as they face another year of drought or clean-up of land that was transformed into an inland sea following the devastating monsoonal event earlier this year. Whilst the recovery gets underway, we cannot forget the future, the next generation. In Queensland, there are eight shires without a high school and three shires where schooling is only available to year 10. Families in these districts have few options other than an Australian icon, the School of the Air, or boarding school.

Education is more than what is learnt in a classroom. So many children from these remote areas frequently spend the school term a long way from home. Yes, their educational needs are met, but so are their needs for other important skills, opportunities and experiences. The average tuition fee at non-state boarding schools was just over \$12,500 in 2018—a rise of 87 per cent since 2006. It is a significant cost that families meet because they see it as a worthy investment in their child's future. The cost of a child attending boarding school when they have no physical access to a school is subsidised, and rightly so, but the out-of-pocket expenses still need to be met and they have doubled in the last 12 years—yet an important part of the subsidy scheme, the tuition allowance, has risen by just 50 per cent.

For a large number of these families, their income source is gone or severely limited through no fault of their own. Soon the decision will need to be made as to whether the child will be removed from boarding school and return home to study via distance education. That difficult decision also has implications for the state. In 2016 Queensland contributed over \$15,900 for every child who used the School of Distance Education service. Today we face the prospect of up to 1,335 students being added to that service at a total cost of \$21,238,515. The ICPA, or the Isolated Children's Parents' Association, has requested a \$4,000 increase to the remote area tuition allowance—an allowance that is paid directly to boarding schools that varies depending on individual circumstances. Not only would this provide the same opportunities for students from remote areas of Queensland but also it would save the Queensland government approximately \$11 million.

The families of remote communities are proud, hardworking people. They do not want our sympathy or our pity. What they want is for their children to have the same opportunities that every other Queensland child has. I am calling on the minister here today to fund this amount in the upcoming budget to meet the needs of our rural schoolchildren.