

**Question on Notice
No. 719
Asked on 12 May 2005**

MR I RICKUSS asked the Minister for Child Safety (MR REYNOLDS)-

QUESTION:

With reference to children in care, for each of the last two financial years and for the year to date (reported separately) -

- (1) What is the number of children that attended non-state schools and what is the total amount in school fees and associated costs that have been paid or reimbursed by the department?
- (2) What is the number of children that have travelled overseas and what is the total amount in travel and associated costs that have been paid or reimbursed by the department?

ANSWER:

I thank the Member for his question. Generally, children and young people attend state schools unless they meet one of the following criteria;

- the child or young person was attending a private school or boarding school at the time when they are taken into care;
- attendance at a private or boarding school is recommended through an Education Needs Assessment and approved as part of the child or young person's case plan;
- the young person lives in a remote community where educational facilities do not extend beyond Grade 10 and boarding schools must be accessed in order to complete Grades 11 and 12; and
- consideration may also be given for the subject child or young person if other children or young people residing in the placement attend a private school.

Individual Education Support Plans are now developed for Children and Young People in the Care of the State. These plans are the result of a partnership agreement formed between the Department of Child Safety and the Department of Education and the Arts last year.

Children in care now benefit from a more stable and consistent experience at school with thousands of individualised Education Support Plans developed over the last 18 months. The support plans were introduced to Queensland state schools last year as part of a cross-Government initiative to improve the quality of education for children in care. Non state schools are also developing individual plans for students in care.

These plans are an integral part of caring for a child or young person and ensuring their overall needs are met. Education Support Plans can also act as an early warning sign for schools and carers to identify factors that may undermine the education of a student who is in care.

The plans are a formal document that identifies the child's educational goals, the strategies and resources required to meet those goals, and who is responsible for implementing the strategies. Our aim is to improve young people's participation in learning, increase retention rates and improve educational outcomes.

Schools take a leading role in bringing together the child in care, carers, parents and child safety service centre staff to develop the plans. An Indigenous worker or representatives from other support agencies may also be involved.

The specific focus on the students' individual schooling needs and the additional support helps brings greater consistency to their education experience. This is important for children who experience more instability in life than others.

- (1) In the 2002/03 financial year, 232 children in care attended non-state schools with school fees and associated costs totalling \$155,575 funded by the former Department of Families.

In the 2003/04 financial year, 309 children in care attended non-state schools with school fees and associated costs totalling \$276,519 funded by the former Department of Families and the Department of Child Safety.

In the period 1 July 2004 to 30 April 2005, 298 children in care attended non-state schools with school fees and associated costs totalling \$276,789 funded by the Department of Child Safety.

- (2) The Department of Child Safety believes that Queensland's most vulnerable children in care should be afforded the same opportunities as other Queensland children. Many of the requests for travel overseas are based on compassionate grounds or are seen as enhancing the individual child's self development.

Children in care travel overseas for various reasons including family contact, visiting ill relatives or school excursions. The costs include transport, accommodation and other costs associated with overseas travel. In some cases the department has made a contribution to overseas travel costs of children in care but has not met the costs in full.

In the 2002/03 financial year, eight children in care travelled overseas with associated costs of \$7,350.32 met by the Department of Families.

In the 2003/04 financial year, 20 children in care and three carers accompanying children, travelled overseas with associated costs of \$26,562.17 met by the former Department of Families and the Department of Child Safety.

In the period 1 July 2004 to 30 April 2005, 42 children in care travelled overseas with associated costs of \$40,881.69 met by the Department of Child Safety.