

Question on Notice
No. 950
Asked on 12 June 2019

MR L MILLAR ASKED MINISTER FOR EDUCATION AND MINISTER FOR INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS (HON G GRACE)

QUESTION:

With reference to the continuing high level of concern expressed at the Isolated Children Parents Association Conference this month—

Will the Minister commit to a substantial increase in the Living Away from Home Allowance paid to Queensland's remote families to ensure equity of educational opportunity for Queensland's most remote students?

ANSWER:

The Palaszczuk Government prides itself on meeting its obligation to provide a quality education to all students in line with the Australian Curriculum.

Through the strategies outlined in the Advancing Rural and Remote Education Plan, the Palaszczuk Government is developing different approaches to rural and remote education to ensure all students, regardless of where they live in Queensland, have access to high quality learning opportunities within their local communities and beyond, with services such as Schools of Distance Education.

Where a situation arises, and a child does not have access to a local school due to their home being geographically isolated, and the family chooses not to access the School of Distance Education service, there are three state boarding schools available. There are also 51 non-state schools offering boarding facilities in Queensland.

The Department of Education supports eligible families that access state or non-state boarding schools through four Living Away From Home Allowance Scheme (LAFHAS) allowances:

- Remote Area Tuition Allowance—helps pay tuition fees charged by non-state boarding schools (up to a total maximum of \$3808 per year for Years 1 to 6 and \$5483 per year for Years 7 to 12);
- Remote Area Travel Allowance—helps pay a student's travel costs between home and boarding school during holidays (maximum allowance \$1756);
- Remote Area Allowance—contributes to the cost of boarding at a Queensland Australian Agricultural College campus or a state high school campus (\$2394 per student per year);
or
- Remote Area Disability Supplement—helps with additional boarding costs for students with a disability (up to a total maximum of \$7789).

In addition to the above elements, Consumer Price Index increases are applied to LAFHAS payments each year.

In response to flooding that occurred earlier in the year, the Queensland Government responded swiftly and committed to funding tuition and boarding fees for students in flood-affected communities.

In contrast, there was no such immediate action from the Australian Government.

As the majority funder of non-state schools, the Australian Government should be providing the additional financial support required in times of disaster relief.

As a result, on 18 March 2019, I wrote to the Honourable Dan Tehan MP, Federal Minister for Education, advocating for the Australian Government to fund a special financial assistance package to provide funding for tuition and boarding fees to families in flood affected areas who have children and young people attending non-state boarding schools. In addition, I spoke directly with Minister Tehan a number of times in calling for this special financial assistance package.

Following my advocacy and that of other organisations, the Australian Government announced additional support for flood-affected families in its 2019 Budget.

Families have always been able to seek support from their children's school when experiencing financial hardship in the Independent and Catholic sectors. I would encourage families to do this, as non-government schools that have waived fees for boarders or provided counselling services for their students are eligible to apply for federal funding through the Short Term Emergency Assistance Fund for this purpose if they fall within the eligible local government areas affected in the recent floods.