

Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia Inc.

"Access to Education"



Submission

to the

**Senate Select Committee on School Funding Investment - Senate Education
and Employment Legislation Committee**

on the

**Inquiry into the effect of reduced Commonwealth funding for the
state and territory provided schools**

from the

Federal Council

of the

**Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia Inc.
ICPA (Aust)**

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The Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia (ICPA Aust) is pleased to contribute to the inquiry on the effect of reduced Commonwealth funding for state and territory provided schools.

ICPA is a national, apolitical, volunteer organisation that represents families who live in rural and remote Australia. This inquiry has particular relevance, given our focus on ensuring that members have access to a continuing and appropriate, quality education.

ICPA applauds the aims of the Education Bill to enable schools to provide excellent education for all students, to ensure that Australian schooling is equitable, and to place Australian student performance within the top five globally in recognised international testing by 2025. However, much work remains for rural and remote schooling to participate in the realisation of these aims.

Given our membership base, the responses within this submission are focused on the outcomes for rural and remote students:

- a) The impact of the cuts announced in the 2014-15 Budget and confirmed in the 2015-16 Mid-year Economic and Fiscal Outlook.

Our organisation supports needs-based funding brought in by the Gonski reforms. However, the two tiered agreements required to sign up the State and Territories to the funding has left many confused about what the final funding looks like.

The need for a more consistent approach to curriculum and schooling has been talked about for many years. Both the National Curriculum and the needs-based school funding are in line with the expectations of the modern day family, who seek consistency in education and outcomes no matter where someone lives or their level of disadvantage. However, if the same agenda is not then replicated by States and Territories, it only adds to confusion around identifying which government is responsible for funding and outcomes.

Overall, ICPA would like to see the funding continue at the rate intended for a further two years. Though it would be irresponsible to continue funding schools for a further two years in the current form if the outcomes anticipated are not being delivered. Recent indications from the Department of Education and Training are that, while the funding to the States and Territories has risen, the overall outcomes for science, maths and reading have declined according to the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results.

ICPA recommends prior to governments signing up for the 2017-2021 quadrennial funding round that a review be conducted to ensure funding is producing the outcomes anticipated.

- b) The impact on schools and students in regional, rural and remote areas.

Accessing high quality education should not be determined by where you live, influenced by political gain or dependant on the wealth of your State or Territory. Typically schools located in rural and remote areas are State run schools. The inequities in the educational outcomes of rural students that report them well behind their metropolitan peers, can be found in literature dating back many years thus proving that students in rural and remote areas are disadvantaged. They mention the endemic problems facing rural and remote education, including significant studies providing guidance and directions to those formulating policy.

Reforms introduced in rural and remote areas generally do require ongoing financial support from the Commonwealth. While progress may be slow, the introduction of a number of National Partnership Agreements have been beneficial and would suggest that a similar architecture be used when considering the needs of rural and remote students. While States and Territories may be best placed to identify equity issues, the additional funding and resources are usually not available to overcome them.

ICPA recommends that commonwealth funding provided to address inequities in rural and remote areas continue to be funded as at the original agreement.

- c) The impact on students acquiring the job skills of the future, including science, technology, engineering, arts and maths; and
- d) Any related matter.

Accessing adequate quality instruction in science, technology, engineering, arts and maths in rural and remote areas where there are high schools, can be difficult due to the lack of subjects taught and qualified staff to teach them, especially where there are small numbers of students studying specific subjects. It is not always possible to provide instruction by distance education for those subjects either and this further disadvantages this cohort. Sending rural and remote students to boarding school to obtain this teaching is very expensive and support from the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) is not always available, so these families struggle to give their children the education they desire in order to ensure they acquire the knowledge required for their chosen profession.

While all Australian governments recognise the social and economic benefits of a high quality and equitable school education system, ICPA continues to devote an enormous amount of volunteer hours holding relevant governments to account to address inequities. Despite many national programs having been rolled out over recent years, the educational outcomes for rural and remote students continue to lag behind those of urban students. This can be attributed in the main to many programs not reaching locations where they are costly to administer and jurisdictions not providing additional funding to ensure these program objectives are met. For this reason ICPA (Aust) suggests the need for all levels of government to be involved.