Advancing rural and remote education in Queensland state schools

Consultation report

July 2017
Acknowledgement of Country

The Department of Education and Training acknowledges the traditional owners of the lands from across Queensland and pays respect to the Elders – past, present and emerging – for they hold the memories, traditions, the culture and hopes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across the state.

A better understanding and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures develops an enriched appreciation of Australia’s cultural heritage and can lead to reconciliation.

This is essential to the maturity of Australia as a nation and fundamental to the development of an Australian identity.
## Contents

1.0  Background ................................................................. 4

1.1 What we have achieved ............................................... 4

1.2 Consultation process .................................................. 5

2.0  What Queenslanders said ......................................... 8

2.1 Enhancing student potential ........................................ 9

2.2 Valuing our people .................................................... 9

2.3 Building positive partnerships .................................... 10

3.0  Conclusion ............................................................... 11

3.1 A plan to support every rural and remote student to succeed ........................................ 11

3.2 The next steps .......................................................... 11

Appendix ........................................................................... 12
1.0 Background

Considerable effort every school day is directed to supporting our dedicated teachers and school leaders to respond to the complexities of teaching, learning and living in rural and remote communities. Over time, we have been working to lift educational outcomes for students in rural and remote communities and we are committed to doing more.

The *Advancing rural and remote education in Queensland state schools* [Discussion guide](#) outlined the strategic direction for education in rural and remote Queensland state schools. Queenslanders were invited to join a conversation and share their views about the actions being taken now and in the future to respond to the challenges and support each of these schools to achieve excellence. Our commitment is to make sure every school day, in every state school, every child and young person is benefiting from the opportunities a quality education brings.

1.1 What we have achieved

The Department of Education and Training (the department) delivers support to rural and remote education in state schools across Queensland through a range of targeted specialist strategies. These include:

- Schools of Distance Education
- state school operated residential boarding facilities
- Remote Area Incentive Scheme (RAIS) for staff
- subsidised employee housing
- Rural and Remote Education Access Program (RREAP)
- teaching scholarships
- Take the Lead – aspiring leaders program.

More than 600 state schools in rural and remote areas

459 identified as rural

156 identified as remote

16,000 full-time equivalent staff working in rural and remote areas

115,000 students in rural and remote areas

44% of remote state school enrolments are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

21% of all state school enrolments

More than 156 students

600 full-time equivalent staff

459 identified as rural

156 identified as remote

44% of remote state school enrolments are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

21% of all state school enrolments

Considerable effort every school day is directed to supporting our dedicated teachers and school leaders to respond to the complexities of teaching, learning and living in rural and remote communities. Over time, we have been working to lift educational outcomes for students in rural and remote communities and we are committed to doing more.

The *Advancing rural and remote education in Queensland state schools* [Discussion guide](#) outlined the strategic direction for education in rural and remote Queensland state schools. Queenslanders were invited to join a conversation and share their views about the actions being taken now and in the future to respond to the challenges and support each of these schools to achieve excellence. Our commitment is to make sure every school day, in every state school, every child and young person is benefiting from the opportunities a quality education brings.

1.1 What we have achieved

The Department of Education and Training (the department) delivers support to rural and remote education in state schools across Queensland through a range of targeted specialist strategies. These include:

- Schools of Distance Education
- state school operated residential boarding facilities
- Remote Area Incentive Scheme (RAIS) for staff
- subsidised employee housing
- Rural and Remote Education Access Program (RREAP)
- teaching scholarships
- Take the Lead – aspiring leaders program.
These strategies have contributed to a range of significant improvements in outcomes for rural and remote state school students. These include a closing of the gap to less than 1% for Queensland Certification of Education (QCE) or Queensland Certificate of Individual Achievement (QCIA) attainment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, with 97% of these students achieving a QCE or QCIA in 2016.

1.2 Consultation process

In early 2017 the department invited Queenslanders, particularly those living and working in rural and remote communities, to join a discussion about our strategy for making sure every rural and remote student had the opportunity to succeed at school.

Participation in the discussion was facilitated through community forums, an online survey, focus groups and stakeholder meetings, using the Discussion guide to inform these conversations.

Community forums

In February 2017, five community forums were held throughout rural and remote Queensland at Weipa, Mt Isa, Roma, Gin Gin and Longreach. While the majority of participants (47%) were school leaders or teachers (including beginning teachers), there was significant interest from parents (16%) and other community members (9%).

Advancing rural and remote education – a plan to support every student succeeding in rural and remote state schools

152 Queenslanders consulted in 5 community forums
350 respondents to an online survey
17 focus groups with school leaders and staff
15 meetings with stakeholders
Focus groups

In addition to the community forums and online survey, 17 focus group sessions were held with school leaders, staff and parents in rural and remote state schools. These sessions were held in the same locations as the community forums, as well as St George and Lake Clarendon. A separate focus group was also held with a selection of school leaders who had recently returned from working in rural and remote communities.

Key stakeholder meetings

Meetings were held with 15 key stakeholder groups including the Isolated Children’s Parents Association (ICPA), P&Cs Qld, Principals’ Associations, the Queensland Teachers’ Union, the Department of Education and Training regions, and other government departments.

Written submissions

At the conclusion of the key stakeholder meetings, each stakeholder was given the opportunity to provide additional written feedback. The Appendix lists the stakeholders who provided feedback.

Online survey

350 completed an online survey through the DET website

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central Queensland</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Far North Queensland</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darling Downs South West</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Queensland</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East Queensland</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not identified</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

May not add to 100 per cent due to rounding
The ideas that Queenslanders who participated in our community forums or completed our online survey thought could best support every student succeeding in rural and remote state schools:

**Enhancing student potential**
- 33% Improving resourcing in rural and remote state schools
- 30% Offering an engaging curriculum
- 28% Providing access to quality teaching
- 9% Working in partnership to enhance student potential

**Valuing our people**
- 35% Providing employee benefits
- 30% Offering opportunities to develop capability
- 16% Managing the workforce
- 12% Understanding the complexity of rural and remote
- 7% Engaging with the community

**Building positive partnerships**
- 59% Working together with stakeholders
- 27% Providing quality learning opportunities
- 14% Communicating and connecting
2.0 What Queenslanders said

The focus of the consultation was to test with the community and stakeholders our strategy for supporting rural and remote students, teachers and schools. The Discussion guide grouped our approach into three themes and the outcomes of the consultation are also grouped into the identified areas:

- Enhancing student potential
- Valuing our people
- Building positive partnerships

Overall, Queenslanders responded positively during the consultation process to the strategic direction for rural and remote state schools.

The consultation confirmed the value of a stable, capable and skilled school workforce to deliver high quality education for rural and remote state school students. Stakeholders saw professional development, including coaching and mentoring, as important to developing the capabilities of staff in rural and remote state schools. Overwhelmingly, Queenslanders want rural and remote state school students to have access to a wider range of learning opportunities. Strong community and parent engagement; exploring new ways to coordinate services; and sharing information between providers were highlighted as being vital for lifting learning outcomes and ensuring the wellbeing of students in rural and remote state schools.

What Queenslanders said...

“Provide more opportunities for staff who want to progress their careers in rural and remote to develop their capability.”
– School leader, Mt Isa

“Having a mentor is really important. Feeling comfortable with someone who you can call when you have a bad day, need advice or to ask a question is very valuable.”
– School leader, North Queensland

“More involvement from parents in learning is important. So much can be reinforced or built on outside of the classroom if teachers and parents are on the same page.”
– Parent/home tutor, North Queensland

“Ensure there’s a broad range of subjects offered to high school students so they can pursue their chosen career pathway.”
– Parent, Weipa
2.1 Enhancing student potential

Making sure all students in rural and remote schools have access to high quality learning opportunities focused on their individual needs was clearly a key priority for all of those consulted. In particular, stakeholders noted the importance of ensuring appropriate support is available for students with disability to engage in learning.

Queenslanders in rural and remote locations were clear that Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), the Arts and sport, are very important for enriching the lives and learning of students enrolled in remote and rural schools. Encouraging young people to develop their entrepreneurial skills locally and aspire to further learning through accessing vocational education and training (VET) and university options was seen as essential for their future, and the future of rural and remote communities.

Ideas for exploration included considering how to use virtual learning opportunities that would extend the teaching and learning occurring in classrooms, and opportunities for broader cultural and sporting experiences. Tapping into existing opportunities such as the Code Academy, STEM Girl Power Camp and other cluster learning arrangements was seen as important to extending high-achieving students in rural and remote schools.

There was also strong support for focusing on the wellbeing of students to develop the skills needed to build positive relationships beyond their community, and also transition successfully to further education and training away from home. Community engagement was seen as essential and communities overwhelmingly supported strong connections.

Placing successful partnerships at the centre of every rural and remote school community was seen as beneficial for lifting learning outcomes. The consultation confirmed the importance of engaging with families of young children early to lay the foundations to successfully transition through the early years to school, establishing active partnerships with local business, industry and universities, and creating opportunities for students to work with industry experts.

2.2 Valuing our people

Queenslanders agreed with our focus on attracting, retaining and developing the professional expertise of our teachers and school leaders to improve the quality of learning in our rural and remote state schools.

Our existing Remote Area Incentive Scheme (RAIS) was seen as important in attracting teachers and school leaders with the right skills to remote and rural schools. The consultation confirmed that the additional payment for rural and remote teachers, payment for travel costs and other incentives were on the right track. Stakeholders did advise that the scheme needed to keep pace with the changing needs of communities, as well as teachers and school leaders, by considering new ways to provide incentives, and to consult with rural and remote teachers more often to identify what works for them.

Building the capabilities of teachers and school leaders in rural and remote communities was seen as important to improve learning outcomes for all students.
During the consultation, Queenslanders affirmed the importance of existing strategies, such as:

- the work of the professional learning hubs in rural and remote areas
- coaching and mentoring of teachers and school leaders by Assistant Regional Directors and specialist regional coaches
- accessing services to support student wellbeing and engagement with learning.

Stakeholders highlighted the importance of supporting beginning teachers, offering professional learning opportunities, and providing support to parents and home tutors in their roles.

Improving pathways into teaching in rural and remote communities was viewed favourably. Feedback included strengthening partnerships with universities to encourage greater take up of quality professional experiences for preservice teachers in rural and remote communities, and offering university scholarships to attract and retain the best talent in our classrooms to work in their community. Queenslanders also responded positively to creating environments that promote the health, safety and wellbeing of our teachers and school leaders in rural and remote communities. Their feedback included recognising and supporting teaching Principals to succeed in their roles, improving teacher housing, and improving technology infrastructure to ensure staff remain connected.

2.3 Building positive partnerships

Queenslanders affirmed the importance of improving learning outcomes for rural and remote students by working closely with families, the community and Indigenous Elders to build positive school communities.

Stakeholders did suggest that rural and remote schools continue to engage in active partnerships with local business, industry, universities, and vocational education and training providers to connect teachers and students beyond the classroom, and support students to successfully transition to post-school training and employment. Linking with other schools across the state to share teaching and learning resources and offer exchange programs; providing student scholarships to support further learning; and creating flexible learning options to reconnect disengaged or at-risk students, supported by coordinated “wrap around” services, were also discussed.

It was also acknowledged that each community plays an important role in promoting teaching in the local region and welcoming and encouraging all staff and their families to become involved in the community.
3.0 Conclusion

3.1 A plan to support every rural and remote student to succeed

The majority of stakeholders consulted affirmed our strategy to advance rural and remote education in state schools across Queensland. They agree that supporting our skilled and capable teachers and school leaders to deliver a wide range of quality learning opportunities focused on student needs, and creating positive partnerships between schools and their communities, will make a difference to the learning outcomes of our rural and remote children and young people.

3.2 The next steps

The feedback received on the Discussion guide will be used to inform the final development of an Advancing rural and remote education action plan.

Appendix

Stakeholders who provided additional written feedback following the key stakeholder meetings:

- Queensland Association of State School Principals (QASSP)
- Queensland Secondary Principals’ Association (QSPA)
- IMPACT Centre – Mr Glen Watt
- Isolated Children’s Parents’ Association (ICPA) – Blackall Branch, Central Queensland