

## Recipient Details

Name of organisation or individual: [O] Rural, Regional and Remote Women's Network Western Australia Inc

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## Responses

### Curriculum and assessment

The rebalancing of the Australian Curriculum has been reasonably well received, although for students living in remote Aboriginal communities, questions still remain as to applicability and relevance.

The kindergarten and pre-primary programs have been viewed, by some RRR parents as too complex with too many expectations of younger children. However, with many children coming to school now with speech difficulties there should be an increased focus on oral language and speech programs - as well as timely support from speech pathologists

The concept of 'learning for leaving' being embedded in the Australian curriculum is a critical point raised by the discussion paper. As a multi cultural country with a population living in diverse and varied geographical settings, there is a real challenge in terms of the role of education is building capacity in regional rural remote areas.

There is a need for the Australian curriculum to be utilised in flexible ways, connected where possible with the community in which schools are located. A focus on skills development rather than content can meet the needs of community engagement , entrepreneurship development and a demonstration of what it means to live and work in the local community

Our membership suggests there is a need for an improvement in clarity of assessment expectations. This could be achieved through the use of the school website; showing more samples of assessment and more opportunities for peer conversations on assessment. Perhaps also a need to explore whether these assessment processes fit with the cultural mind set for remote students.

Rating: 0

### Teachers and teaching

The attraction of quality teachers to regional, rural and remote schools has to be considered as part of a broader strategic commitment by governments of all levels to decentralisation. This is particularly true in Western Australia. Also a broader issue is the status of teachers in Australian society and the social recognition and financial remuneration they receive for the vital work they do..

The Rural Regional Remote (RRR) Women's Network of Western Australia supports the provision of allowances, relocation, meeting housing expenses and additional leave in Western Australia to encourage teachers to move to, and work in regional, rural and remote areas. Consideration should be given to using a similar strategy to attract teachers as is used for the attraction of GPs to regional communities. It requires a whole of community approach to bringing in the teacher and their family

The RRR Women's Network feels the WA Independent Public School System has created a barrier and disincentive for the attraction of teachers to regional schools. There is no perceived advantage to take up a position in a small wheatbelt school, with no possibility of then transferring to a larger school.

We also feel there is a need to improve the teacher training placement opportunities for practice students including the assessment of ATP supervising teachers to stamp out a culture of bullying.

The retention of teachers in regional, rural and remote areas could be improved by; access to ongoing professional development and more support in classrooms for behavioural and special needs students,

Rural, regional and remote teachers also needed opportunities to explore innovative teaching approaches, particularly in the area of STEM teaching. Professional development in this area could include opportunities to connect with environmental and science communities.

The RRR Women's Network is aware of the effectiveness of having graduate advocates for new graduates being placed in remote areas. Graduate advocates can be recruited from qualified teachers resident in the community. These advocates provide support to new graduates not just in terms of their role as a teacher but also as a new member of the community.

Rating: 7

#### Leaders and leadership

The Rural Regional Remote (RRR) Women's Network of Western Australia supports incentives to attract quality school leaders to RRR schools. As well as these incentives the RRR Women's Network believes that collegiate support for school principals can be found within the broader community. Formalised programs, to develop collegiate leadership arrangements, could assist to break down the isolation that principals may experience.

Rating: 7

#### School and Community

The Rural Regional Remote (RRR) Women's Network is aware of school programs that are community based. For example; in the south west of Western Australia the use of Nature Play connects schools to communities, Hands up 4 Kids is a volunteer reading program in local schools that is reported as being very useful to support literacy objectives community based mentors for children with social and behavioural difficulties have been reported as very valuable, Bright Path writing program, local school children engaged in the collection of environmental data for a major south west infrastructure project ( Transforming Bunbury's waterfront).

Further connection to the to the agricultural sector is an untapped priority, particularly given the jobs in this sector, apart from farming, for example agribusiness, agronomy, sales etc).

The role that the philanthropic sector could play includes funding for early childhood community based programs and targeted school programs such as the Clontarf Girls Academy etc

Rating: 7

#### Information and Communication Technology

Digital technology offers both opportunities and threats for the provision of RRR education

The prevalence of on-line education, increases educational choices for students at all levels of education. However on-line education can reduce the commitment to providing locally based infrastructure and personnel. The opportunity offered by on on-line learning is dependent on reliable and high quality digital connectivity. Virtual learning environments and experiences are dependent on the quality of bandwidth and availability of on-line teaching resources. This level of ICT performance is still to be achieved in most regional, rural and remote environments.

Connectivity is a huge issue for regional schools and their communities , with individual schools attempting to introduce innovative programs being beset with numerous IT issues. For example, a teacher using an Apple TV and iPad can lose valuable teaching time when the system regularly goes down. It is not enough that NBN is giving extra attention for distance education students- ALL regional schools need the same attention. It is also difficult for parents to support their child's homework efforts when their IT suffers similar systems failure with inadequate and unreliable internet speeds.

ICT is a major driver in improving educational outcomes, although it needs to be supported in schools with further teacher training and local IT support

Rating: 7

Entrepreneurship and schools

The Rural Regional Remote (RRR) Women's Network supports a focus on entrepreneurship development in schools as a way for preparing students with the skills necessary to value add to their communities.

Over 20 years of stories in The Rural Regional Remote Women's Network magazines show that entrepreneurship has been essential in the growth of RRR communities and in some instances ensuring the sustainability of the community

Rating: 5

Improving access – enrolments, clusters, distance education and boarding

Changes in Educational policy can sometimes have disadvantageous consequences for RRR students and families. For example the change to year 7 inclusion in high school in WA has meant young people from RRR areas having to move away to a boarding school at an earlier age and increased expense to families.

There is a need for increased boarding opportunities, particularly hostel accommodation, to made available for RRR students that need to move to metropolitan areas. Tutoring programs offered within hostel accommodation can go some way to addressing educational disadvantage experienced by students in this situation.

The Rural Regional Remote Women's Network feels there is a need for investment in high quality online educational programs. This investment would embrace the opportunity digital technology provides for RRR students – at the moment distance education is still a hybrid of educational approaches.

RRR parents engaged in home schooling through School of the Air feel that there should be more support for the home tutors, particularly more opportunities to be connected as a group

Rating for enrolments: 4

Rating for clusters: 5

Rating for distance education: 7

Rating for boarding: 5

#### Diversity

The diversity of students needs is not always able to be addressed by teachers, a multi-disciplinary approach is more effective in addressing individual and diverse needs. In RRR areas the multiplicity of services is not available and innovative ways of addressing this deficit need to be taken.

Rating: 7

#### Transitioning beyond school

The transition between further study is often disrupted by the practice of taking a 'gap year' directly after school. A greater percentage of regionally based students take a gap year than their metropolitan counterparts, this is due in part to the need for students to establish independence status to receive full support from Austudy. Often students do not return to tertiary education after the 'gap year', this was particularly true during the years the mining boom Western Australia. The employment opportunities available during this time lured school leavers to well-paid opportunities in the north of the State. Unfortunately those unskilled and semiskilled employment opportunities were not enduring.

In Western Australia there are very few regionally based University campuses and no Regional Universities. Low populations in RRR areas, in WA makes it unlikely that Universities will build more campuses and in fact the trend is for WA Universities to reduce their commitment to regionally based infrastructure and teaching. On-line learning provides RRR students the opportunity to learn where they live - the development of educational hubs can provide an opportunity for social interaction and support for on-line students.

Rating: 7

#### Additional Comments

The Rural Regional Remote Women's Network would like to raise the issue of the empowerment of small remote schools. Small communities value their schools and local people often invest significant time, effort and financial support to ensure the viability of small locally based schools. However communities find that educational policy and bureaucratic government departments, overwhelm and overlook community views, needs and investment. Small communities would like to be seen as a partner with government to ensure viability of small local RRR schools. The Rural Regional Remote Women's Network would like to suggest an advocacy provision for small RRR schools.