

## Recipient Details

Name of organisation or individual: [O] Society for the Provision of Education in Rural Australia (SPERA)

Reference Type: Education association

State or territory: Qld

Serial Identification Number: 478561

## Responses

### Curriculum and assessment

The Australian Curriculum is open ended enough and provides educators with the flexibility to differentiate to cater for the individual learning needs of students.

However the ability of the Australian curriculum to be flexible in this way depends on the context of the school, the continuity and commitment of the teachers and school leaders and the commitment of the school community.

Schools need to maintain autonomy and not have a system narrow the focus to ensure that the one form is implemented across all schools regardless of context.

Rating: 7

### Teachers and teaching

A rural education subject and a rural placement should be incorporated into teacher preparation education programs.

Paid internships and rural scholarships would be ideal ways of attracting students to the teaching profession and a means of recruiting staff for rural schools.

Once top quality staff have been recruited it is important to retain them and this can be done through two major ways:

- a) Providing quality professional development locally. The high costs of accommodation and transport; the time spent travelling and therefore time spent away from school; and the costs and difficulty in obtaining relief teachers make sending a number of teachers to quality professional development prohibitive. If the PD was conducted in the local area then more staff can attend and receive the benefits.
- b) Mentoring. This can be done in-school or externally with an on-line profile mentoring system in which the mentee could select a mentor from the on-line profile. The mentoring program should be on going and establish a positive relationship which transcends the day to day classroom activities.
- c) Establish an online support network of teachers who teach in regional, rural and remote locations.

This can be a forum to share ideas and to support each other. This is something which SPERA can drive and would be happy to provide this service.

Rating: 7

## Leaders and leadership

Research by Salfi, Otero and West-Burnham have mapped the strong correlation between a school's leadership with the school's performance. It is therefore important to ensure that the principals of regional, rural and remote schools are high performing, experienced and well prepared. Appropriate high classification banding which reflects the complexities and challenges will attract experienced and quality applicants for these schools.

It is also necessary that the complexities, banding and achievements of the principals are respected and acknowledged as there is a perception that rural principals are overlooked when they have applied for relocation or promotion as the enrolment size of the school is considered instead of the other complexities with which he / she has had to contend.

It is also recommended that principals' associations conduct principal mentoring programs to assist newly appointed colleagues and those experienced ones who may encounter new and difficult situations.

The school leaders need to be constantly on the lookout and to be proactive regarding developing new opportunities for students.

Rating: 7

## School and Community

In rural and remote communities the school is often the hub of the community. This can have huge benefits for the school in terms of the relationship with the community, community members' involvement in education and the provision of school-based traineeships and apprenticeships. It is important that the community feels valued and respected, along with the history and culture of the school and community.

The close relationship means that the community takes ownership of the school, students and staff. The school is an important part of the community.

Rating: 7

## Information and Communication Technology

ICTs are an important part of the present and future of the students as it is playing an increasingly significant role in employment and everyday life. ICTs also can break down the barriers and inequities caused by the tyranny of distance in terms of access to resources and access to online subjects. The online certificate courses such as Childcare and fitness (Personal Trainers) and the tertiary subjects such as CQU's Start Uni Now (SUN) program provide students in regional, rural and remote schools with opportunities which otherwise they would be denied.

However there can be issues with bandwidth, internet access and access to IT technicians.

A recommendation is that rural and remote schools should be provided with an IT technician as part of their staffing mix. This person could be shared between clusters of schools.

Rating: 7

## Entrepreneurship and schools

Research has demonstrated that one of the greatest assets of Australian education is that it develops students' entrepreneurial and creative skills.

Example of schools' programs to develop students' entrepreneurial skills are: a) trade training Centres which are aligned with or have close relationships with organisations such as the Master Builders' association; b) dairy facilities; c) beef cattle production d) market garden; e) catering and hospitality.

Rating: 6

Improving access – enrolments, clusters, distance education and boarding  
Small regional, rural and remote schools often do not have the staff or the specialist expertise to provide the breadth of the curriculum to cater for all students' interest or the necessary prerequisites for further training (physics for an electrical apprenticeship) or further study at university (science for primary teaching; chemistry for pharmacy).

For many students the only way in which they can access these subjects is through Distance Education. However it has been reported by some principals from Western Australia that students are having to pay quite high fees to access the distance education subjects which is inequitable. Enrolments actually drive staffing.

One possible strategy regarding the lack of specialist teaching staff to run particular subjects when schools do not have the necessary enrolments and demand for that subject would be to share the teacher between a cluster of schools. This was done by a couple of P-10 schools in western Queensland where they shared a Manual Arts teacher and a Hospitality van (kitchen) with a qualified chef.

Rating for enrolments: 5

Rating for clusters: 7

Rating for distance education: 6

Rating for boarding: 5

Diversity

Diversity is an important aspect of education. Schools prepare students to participate in society and exposure to and interaction with a diverse range of students who are representative of Australian society is a necessary component of this. It is through this process that students can develop empathy, respect and tolerance.

Rating: 6

Transitioning beyond school

A school's responsibility for a student is not limited to instruction in the classroom for the present and the achievement of current results. Schools prepare students for life and for future employment. One Queensland P-12 school had as its slogan "From crayons to careers" and this effectively summarises the school's role in preparing the students for life beyond school. Vocational certificate courses, tertiary courses (eg SUN), career expos, university experiences (eg Aspire UWA) are ideal ways in which schools can prepare students to transition to training or further study. The publication of the narratives of past students, highlighting different career choices (often ones the students may never have considered) and providing advice to present students regarding work ethic and subject choices.

Rating: 6

Additional Comments