

## Recipient Details

Name of organisation or individual: [O] Isolated Children's Parents' Association of SA

Reference Type: Parent association

State or territory: SA

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## Responses

### Curriculum and assessment

In South Australia, the curriculum is delivered almost entirely online to geographically isolated School of the Air students. This has meant that the workload for parents and supervisors is ever-increasing as they are expected to print and prepare lessons and develop more engaging activities to keep their child motivated and active in the online environment.

Curriculum needs to be designed for the SOTA context rather than the Open Access College clientele.

Hard copy printed materials are required to support students and supervisors when technology fails, and teachers with planning lessons in an online environment (instead of reinventing the wheel each year). SOTA has a high staff turnover and teachers are often struggling to meet planning and curriculum requirements while learning the online platforms. Funding for course writers is needed to support the introduction of hard copy materials and online content (as per Access Media ten years ago).

Support is urgently needed for the significant and unfair burden taken on by parents as home supervisors, who are increasingly required to prepare resources downloaded from the internet rather than have materials supplied. Dedicated SSO support would help, as would a return to printed materials. Early screening for learning difficulties and disabilities, keeping in mind that these children have little or no access to early intervention and are not regularly “seen” by professional educators. Teachers should provide written feedback in paper copy. We are moving towards the age of not being able to report to a child without using a computer. Junior Primary students especially, need to be able to hold and tangibly read feedback.

Rating: 7

### Teachers and teaching

Attracting and retaining teachers in rural and remote settings is an ongoing issue. Universities could play a part in raising the status of teaching remote and via Distance Education by introducing topics into teaching degrees that focus on rural and remote schools and their needs, encouraging more student teachers to experience rural and remote schools for their practicum placements, and funding for SOTA schools, additional FTE, to support teachers that implement university placements.

Distance Education teaching seen as a specialist area and teachers should have at least three years of classroom experience as well as transitioned to full registration before being appointed to SOTA.

Another issue in small schools in SA is teaching positions being left ‘open’ while covering a teaching role in another school. Also permanent positions are saved for teachers on extended leave, such as maternity leave, for many years, to the detriment of the school.

It is felt that the current system within SOTA supports the teachers rather than the students and their home tutors.

Student visits to School of the Air in Port Augusta should be encouraged and parents should be able to leave their children at the school if they are in town for appointments or business.

Rating: 7

Leaders and leadership

Rating: 7

School and Community

Consider SA SOTA being a standalone school, so it can govern its own direction and not get lost in a large organisation. School of the Air is a unique community and the school needs to specifically cater for their needs and value community input into the education of their students. This is especially relevant in a distance education setting where the parent is often the teacher. SA School of the Air needs to be able to make decisions in the best interests of its remote students and be properly resourced as a distance education school and not an Eastern Suburbs school. School of the Air is a wonderful resource that seems to get 'lost' in a larger parent school.

All Distance Education/SOTA schools around Australia would benefit from regular meetings (roundtables) to get a conversation going about what is and isn't working for them and to share experiences with new technologies and systems. The current online platform in SA is Webex, while in the NT they have REACH. REACH was developed specifically for the Distance Education environment, while SA has wasted money on something that was developed for a boardroom. All schools are funded differently, but surely there would be economies of scale that would allow all SOTA students to benefit.

Rating: 7

Information and Communication Technology

Having a 'fall back' when technology isn't working with Distance Education students. More hands on material being able to be accessed by students and their teachers/supervisors. We have gone full swing by having all Distance Education materials on paper to everything being online. This causes great angst when internet connections are slow or non-existent. Teachers need to be adequately trained to work with teaching materials that are delivered online.

Software and online platforms need to be designed with the Distance Education setting in mind. For example, REACT, as is currently used in the NT schools of distance education. The technology allows for much greater engagement between the teacher and students.

Rating: 7

Entrepreneurship and schools

Rating:

Improving access – enrolments, clusters, distance education and boarding

Boarding must be an accessible option for those that do not have daily access to secondary schooling due to living in remote locations. The current federal and state support for these families falls well short of the significant costs involved in educating their children through high school. A wide range of options should be available and supported by government to accommodate the specific needs of children, as not all are able to be sent to boarding school. This includes supporting

families who set up a second home and encouraging the development and maintenance of seven day boarding facilities in rural towns and regional centres. As an example, Orroroo Area School had their proposal rejected despite strong community interest and Caritas College in Port Augusta used to have a facility but after only offering 5 day a week boarding, was closed down. Currently a boarding facility in Port Pirie is also limited to five days a week. This is not an option for families who are many hundreds of kilometres from the school. Families often have no choice but to choose expensive private boarding schools located in major cities.

Rating for enrolments: 7

Rating for clusters: 7

Rating for distance education: 7

Rating for boarding: 7

#### Diversity

Children with learning difficulties and disabilities are not specifically catered for in the distance education setting and many parents are under considerable stress trying to support their child in the home schoolroom. Parents have reported having to spend hours adapting curriculum for their child, unsupportive teachers and learning needs being unidentified. In the unique setting of distance education, where early intervention is so often unavailable, a special needs educator to support students, teachers and parents should be mandatory.

The early phonics screening test being introduced into SA schools is a positive step but needs to be backed up with intervention for identified students.

Rating: 7

#### Transitioning beyond school

Agriculture as a promising career option for rural and remote students completing school rather than be looked upon as a lower class option. Many city schools (which are where the majority of boarding schools are) are not encouraging the Agriculture industry as an opportunity to find employment or study in. This needs to be addressed as the Agriculture industry is thriving and we need the next generation to keep it moving ahead. Everyone needs food on their tables!

To ensure geographically remote students access further education, they should automatically receive the relocation allowance (Youth Allowance). This is a considerable barrier to further education. We're not talking students living at Roseworthy or Clare, but those that are geographically isolated and previously met criteria for Assistance for Isolated Children.

Currently our rural and remote students are almost forced into a 'gap year' as a means of attending university, in order to meet the criteria for independent Youth Allowance. Many students who have a gap year do not go on to complete university as they enjoy earning money and sway off the path.

The criteria for Youth Allowance must differentiate between geographically isolated students and rural students. While both are deserving of help, geographically isolated students face many more and greater barriers to education than those classed as rural.

Rating: 7

Additional Comments