

Recipient Details

Name of organisation or individual: [I] Peart, Catherine

Reference Type: Parent - School

State or territory: NSW

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Responses

Curriculum and assessment

I believe that effective assessment is essential to evaluating whether the curriculum is being taught effectively in small schools. My concern is that these assessments are often manipulated by substandard teachers, to ensure that the results do not reflect poorly on them. I have been aware of many instances where children have reported being given extra time, and prompting in Naplan. If the department of education wishes to use this form of assessment as a way of evaluating whether teaching is effective in schools, then their needs to be some independant present during testing in small schools especially. This could be an independant community monitor, or a member of the P and C association.

I would like to see the introduction of an online education program for Yr 6 students from P5 and P6 schools to assist in preparing them for high schools. This would be taught by a specialist Yr 6 teacher, and would assist in identifying any gaps in the education of these students from small schools prior to transition to high school. It would also alllow them to have exposure to subjeccts such as science, music, ethics etc, that the local teacher may not feel equiped to provide.

Rating: 6

Teachers and teaching

Attracting quality teachers to small schools can be difficult due to the isolation. Having sat on the interview panel many times, a lack of applicants to make a selection from is always a challenge. The result can be that a substandard applicant is appointed to a position such as teacher principal of a small school. This applicant then has no onsite supervision and review of their performance. To make this worse, this teacher may teach one child for up 7 years in the case of one teacher schools.

I believe strongly that all teaching principals should be appointed for a maximum of 3 years. At this time, they need to reapply. This gives the school community and education department an opportunity to move on underperforming Teacher Principals.

Rating: 7

Leaders and leadership

I Have seen both the positive and negative effect of poor leadership in small schools and the communities.

As discussed in a previous point, I believe that principals in P5 and P6 schools should be on a maximum 3 year contract. They could of course apply again for the position at that time.

This provides a protection for the children of small schools, against substandard teacher principals being in one school for indefinite time. This is so important in these schools as there is often no onsite teaching supervision of these teachers.

Rating: 6

School and Community

Our family has had 3 children enrolled in the local P5/P6 school. I have watched this school grow from enrollment of 19 to 38 (under a motivated and dynamic principal) and then drop from 38 to 12 under a underperforming principal who lost the support of the community. This has had a devastating effect on the wider community. Nearly all this loss of students has not been from families leaving the district, but by families driving long distances to access education in towns further afield. It has been devastating to watch a school decline, and to have very little timely action from the department of education.

On the positive, I have seen our small school benefit greatly through partnerships fostered with the CWA, Lions club, tennis club and show committee. These were however driven by the community in an attempt to strengthen the school, not driven by the school leadership.

Rating: 5

Information and Communication Technology

Although many small rural schools are well equipped with technology on a per student basis, I do not believe that these are utilised sufficiently to broaden the students educational experiences.

As discussed previously, I believe that there should be an online program for yr 6 students from P5 and P6 schools to assist them in their transition towards high school. This program could occur for say 9-12 each day focusing on english maths and science, leaving the local school to continue with subjects such as PDHPE, HSIE, Library, music etc

In a P6 school, a student may have had the same teacher for up to 7 years. This teacher has not only been teaching them, but also assessing them. This can lead to the situation where there may be significant gaps in the students learning, which don't get noticed by anyone else until high school and this is too late!

An online extension program (modeled on the opportunity class program) should also be available for yr 5/6 students from remote schools, but I think a program tailored for all yr 6 students would be more important. This online teacher could then provide feedback to the local teacher about support they feel that a child requires.

Rating: 6

Entrepreneurship and schools

As my experience so far is in the area of primary schools, this is not an area that I feel is as important at this level.

Core education should be the focus of primary schools, but I do believe that this is an area that high schools must focus. I will leave it to others to focus on

Rating: 3

Improving access – enrolments, clusters, distance education and boarding

Bus runs should be able to adapt more flexibly to local community needs

Families who bypass local busses to attend private/catholic schools should not receive private vehicle conveyancing funds. They are being paid to bypass their local public school and this has a negative impact on local public schooling.

More use of online programs for opportunity classes or yr5/6 transition to high school programs

Clusters of schools should look at the benefit to the schools of these groupings, not just looking along direct geographical lines.

Attendance at training for principals, and attendance at cluster meetings should be enabled through Video Conferencing to decrease the absence from schools of teaching staff. This has a major impact on budget. I would think that principal training could be between 3-5pm on video conferencing, thus not impacting on school staffing.

Single sex public school boarding is available for boys, but not for girls. This seems to be very unequitable.

Out of pocket boarding school fee costs should be tax deductible for students from remote areas.

Rating for enrolments: 4

Rating for clusters: 3

Rating for distance education: 6

Rating for boarding: 6

Diversity

As my experience is with a small remote school, this is not an area I have experience with. We would love to support any enrollments from all backgrounds.

Rating: 5

Transitioning beyond school

This is not an area I have sufficient experience in to comment on

Rating: 6

Additional Comments

I think that it is a national disgrace that it is well known that children from rural and remote backgrounds are expected to be academically behind those of their metropolitan counterparts.

High quality teaching that is responsive to the varied teaching environments of rural and remote schools is vital. Equally important is the abilities for local school communities to seek removal of under performing teachers and principals. The devastating impact to individual students and the wider community, caused by poor teaching and then subsequent decreasing school enrolments, can not be underestimated.

Thank you for reviewing this area.

I look forward to the day when all students can reach their full potential no matter what their postcode is.