



# Rural and Remote Education

A blueprint for action



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# Minister's introduction

**A**s a country Member of Parliament I understand very well the challenges we face in closing the education divide between rural and urban students.

Students in rural and remote areas of NSW underperform, on average, when compared to students in metropolitan locations on all educational indicators.

Our schools do fantastic work, but we need to better support them to improve these results, because Australia will not be able to compete internationally if we leave our rural students behind.

We need to step in and stop this decline. This is not just an issue of equity. Skills are a vital part of the economic future of our regions. Helping children to transition effectively to school, and young people to stay in school so they can go on to attain higher level qualifications, will support economic development in regional and remote areas.

One of my first acts upon being sworn in as NSW Education Minister was to successfully negotiate an agreement in April 2011 between State, Territory and Commonwealth Education Ministers to make the issue a key priority of the Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood (SCSEEC).

I am determined to keep the focus on lifting educational achievement in regional NSW.

This year, I have met with academics from leading regional universities and principals and student leaders from across NSW, to find out what more we can do to improve the outcomes for students in rural and remote schools in NSW.

I asked the Department to undertake a consultation process with key stakeholders to look at the way rural and remote schools operate, and to find out what would need to change or be done differently so the state-wide education system can better support them.

I also commissioned the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation to review the evidence for reasons to explain the different outcomes of rural students, and the ways other systems in Australia and around the world have responded to the challenges of rural education.

The reforms and practical actions outlined in *Rural and Remote Education: A blueprint for action* are based on this consultation and evidence to specifically address the unique needs of students, teachers, school leaders, parents and carers living in rural and remote NSW.

The Rural and Remote Education blueprint also builds on the broad reform agenda already commenced under this Government with initiatives such as: *Local Schools, Local Decisions; Great Teaching, Inspired Learning; Every Student, Every School; the Literacy and Numeracy Action Plan* and *Connected Communities*.

I would like to thank everyone I have spoken to for their insights and ideas for improving rural and remote education in this State.

I can assure you that I remain committed to seeing the actions in this blueprint implemented to ensure we close the gap for students in regional NSW.



**Adrian Piccoli MP**  
Minister for Education

# A case for action

Children and young people need access to inspiring and quality preschool, school and post-school education that equips them to live in, and contribute to, our complex and globalised society. This is true for all children and young people regardless of where they live.

The NSW Government's commitment to improving the learning outcomes for all students is underpinned by a broad reform agenda comprising a number of evidence-based initiatives:

- *Universal access* – providing all children with access to quality early childhood education in the year before school, including improved support to early childhood education services in rural and remote areas.
- *Every Student, Every School* - providing better learning and support for students with disability, learning difficulties or behaviour support needs through a strong focus on professional learning and support for teachers and other staff.
- *Literacy and Numeracy Action Plan* – a plan to turn around the performance of the lowest achieving schools by focusing on quality instructional leadership, combined with an emphasis on the needs of individual students and early intervention.
- *Local Schools, Local Decisions* – giving public schools more authority to make local decisions about how best to meet the needs of their students, including giving them greater capacity to make decisions about how to use the money spent on public education.
- *Great Teaching, Inspired Learning* - a whole of career reform plan to improve initial teacher education, provide better support for beginning teachers, align career progression with professional teaching standards and support the ongoing professional development of teachers and school leaders.

- *Connected Communities* – targeting 15 schools in 11 selected communities in rural and regional NSW. The strategy aims to use stronger partnerships between schools, the local community and government agencies so that schools can become community hubs driving better educational outcomes for all students.
- *Needs-based funding* – community preschools and public schools to receive government funding based on more equitable, transparent and needs-based funding models.

While these initiatives will help to improve the quality of education for children and young people in rural and remote schools, evidence shows that more needs to be done.

Note that for the purpose of this document, rural and remote schools are those schools in provincial, remote and very remote locations as defined by the **MCEETYA Geographical Location Classification**<sup>1</sup>.



## Evidence for action

### Impact on student performance

The 'remoteness gap' is not unique to NSW or to Australia. Students from rural areas underperform in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) reading test in almost every country in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). However the gap is larger in Australia than the average of other OECD nations, and it is larger in NSW than almost any other state or territory in Australia.

The disadvantage experienced by students in rural and remote communities begins in early childhood. In their first year of formal full-time schooling, children in very remote Australia are almost three times more likely to be developmentally vulnerable on two or more domains of the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) than children in major cities.

This disadvantage flows through to school outcomes. NSW Year 7 students from remote areas have lower National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) results than Year 5 metropolitan and rural students.

### Impact on quality teaching

Supporting students in rural and remote schools means supporting teachers and school leaders. The evidence suggests that:

- Regional schools find it harder to recruit qualified teachers in key subject areas. Schools in regional NSW report a higher level of difficulty in filling secondary science and mathematics positions than schools in metropolitan areas. The situation is much worse for remote and very remote schools.
- Schools in regional NSW often have a very large proportion of inexperienced, first year teachers and teachers who are in their first three years of teaching.
- Small and isolated schools do not always have the specialist teachers needed to deliver some aspects of the curriculum.
- The opportunity for teachers and school leaders to access professional learning, work collaboratively and learn from each other is limited by distance and isolation.
- Regional universities enrol a higher number and, in many cases, a larger proportion of Year 12 graduates with lower Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR) scores than metropolitan universities.

Details of the evidence for action and evidence of what works can be found in the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation publication, *Rural and remote education: Literature review*<sup>2</sup>.

## Evidence of what works

The actions in this blueprint are based on national and international evidence of 'what works' in rural and remote schools. While research into what works with particular reference to rural and remote schools is scarce, it is clear that students in rural and remote communities will benefit from being exposed to the same opportunities and teaching practices as their metropolitan peers.

This means focusing on areas such as:

- **Access to quality early childhood education.** Research shows that experiences in the early years have a significant impact on children's cognitive, social, emotional and academic development. Access to quality early childhood education helps children be better prepared for the transition to school, by laying down a solid foundation for children's learning. All children benefit from quality early education experiences, but these experiences are especially beneficial for children from vulnerable and disadvantaged backgrounds.
- **Providing students with quality teaching.** This will require giving teachers the skills to teach multi-grade classes, which are much more common in rural and remote schools. This means focussing on individual student learning needs through the effective use of student assessment data, monitoring and feedback, adopting explicit teaching techniques and equipping teachers with strong subject knowledge. Quality teaching also means focussing on literacy and numeracy, particularly in the early years of school.
- **Providing students with access to a broad and rigorous curriculum.** Students in rural and remote areas should have the same access to a broad and rigorous curriculum as their metropolitan peers. This should include access to a wide range of subject choices, extension opportunities and vocational education and training (VET) options.
- **Raising student expectations and pathways into further study.** Evidence suggests that the best way to raise student expectations is to raise awareness of career options, use innovative technologies to engage students, and provide appropriate role models and mentoring for rural students. Ultimately, for most rural and remote students to take a tertiary pathway they must not just aspire to further study, they must also achieve the academic results that will enable them to go on to further training, study or employment.
- **Effective use of technology to support quality teaching and learning.** Technology can provide new ways to deliver curriculum breadth and options, as well as professional learning for staff. While technology by itself will not transform student outcomes, it can be a powerful tool for stimulating student engagement and motivation, and for providing students and teachers in rural and remote communities with access to information and resources.

- **Transforming teacher training to equip teachers to teach effectively in rural and remote areas.**

Evidence suggests that providing student teachers with practicum placements in rural schools has a positive impact on their attitudes toward living in rural communities. Strategies that encourage students to train in rural areas may improve recruitment and retention of quality teachers in these areas.

- **Encouraging great teachers to stay in rural areas.**

While there is limited evidence on the effectiveness of incentive schemes, encouraging and retaining the right teachers in rural schools would clearly benefit rural students.

- **Providing rural teachers with appropriate professional learning.**

Evidence suggests that the need for professional learning increases with distance from metropolitan areas. At the same time, access to effective professional learning decreases. Online professional learning activities and cluster approaches across schools are options for increasing access to professional learning for rural teachers.

- **Providing quality school leadership.**

Evidence confirms that quality school leadership is critical in improving teacher practice and student outcomes. Attracting and retaining great school principals, and providing them with professional learning and support, are critical to maximising student outcomes.

- **Establishing strong relationships with community.**

Evidence suggests that effective leaders in rural schools know how to leverage resources to overcome limitations associated with geographic isolation. Providing rural schools with the resources to establish relationships with their community, including local early childhood services, is one effective way of lifting rural school performance.

## **Implementation of the Rural and Remote Education blueprint will be independently evaluated.**

The actions outlined in this blueprint are based on what current evidence suggests can close the gap between rural and metropolitan students. However, the literature review conducted by the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation shows that there are many gaps in our knowledge about what works. Few programs are evaluated and, where evaluations are carried out, they tend to be of poor quality.

It is therefore critical that the actions carried out in response to this blueprint are independently evaluated. Additional funding of \$1 million has been committed over the next four years as part of a 10 year evaluation horizon. This will enable the evaluation to address the long-term nature of some actions in the blueprint, and fit within a broader strategic evaluation across all key Government reforms.

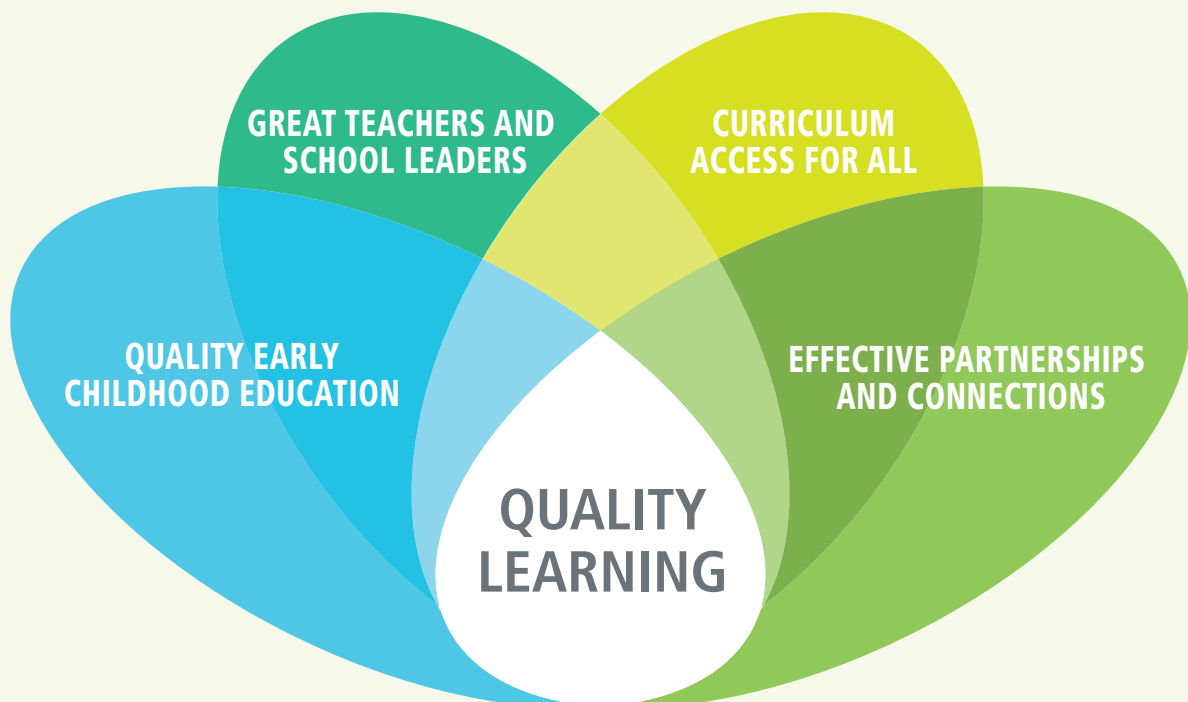
## **A Rural and Remote Education Advisory Group will be established to bring key stakeholders together to guide implementation of the blueprint.**

A new Rural and Remote Education Advisory Group (RREAG) will guide and advise on the implementation of the Rural and Remote Education blueprint. The Group will provide a rural perspective and voice on rural education and related issues, from early childhood education through to school and post-school transitions.

# Quality learning for every community

At the centre of the Rural and Remote Education blueprint is the goal of quality learning for all rural and remote school communities. To make this a reality, action is required in four key areas:

- **Quality early childhood education**
- **Great teachers and school leaders**
- **Curriculum access for all**
- **Effective partnerships and connections.**



**HIGH EXPECTATIONS • LOCAL SOLUTIONS**

Students in rural and remote communities have hopes, aspirations and learning needs as diverse as the communities in which they live. Rural and remote schools face unique challenges in delivering a broad curriculum, attracting and retaining quality teachers and meeting the learning needs of their students.

*Rural and Remote Education: A blueprint for action* sets out a range of actions designed to ensure that children and young people in rural and remote communities:

- can access quality early childhood education in at least the year before school
- are taught by great teachers and school leaders
- have access to a broad range of curriculum opportunities and experiences from preschool to Year 12
- receive effective support through coordinated services and partnerships and increased collaboration across schools.

Specific actions to meet these objectives are presented in the following four chapters. Each action recognises the need for high expectations and local solutions.

## Future State

Government funding will be allocated to community preschools and schools based on more equitable, transparent and needs-based funding models.

Rural and remote schools will be supported to collaborate in the development of an education strategy that best meets the needs of their school communities.

## Current State

Government funding for community preschools has not been targeted to children who need it most.

Funding to schools has not been transparent, nor responsive to changing school and student needs.

Ways of providing equity funding to schools have been complex, short-term and not based on individual student needs.

Schools in some communities work in isolation from other schools.

There are 571 small primary schools in rural and remote areas with teaching principals, 472 primary schools with fewer than 100 students and 127 primary schools with fewer than 20 students.

The Department's state-wide 'one size fits all' approach to all policies and processes restricts locally developed solutions.

## Outcomes and actions

### 1. Government funding will be allocated to community preschools and schools based on more equitable, transparent and needs-based funding models.

#### 1.1 A more equitable, needs-based funding model will be implemented for community preschools to support the achievement of universal access.

From 2014, a more equitable, needs-based funding model<sup>3</sup> for community preschools will be introduced to more closely align funding with community circumstances.

The new funding model, based on the recommendations by Professor Deborah Brennan in her review of funding<sup>4</sup>, will build on the commitment to keeping fees as low as possible for parents and carers to ensure greater access. Professor Brennan's review found that children from disadvantaged communities are not participating to the same extent as children from more advantaged communities.

The new community preschool funding model will deliver the highest subsidies for children enrolled at preschools in the most disadvantaged areas. This includes increases of more than 40 per cent in average per-child base funding rates for preschools in remote and very remote areas. Remote preschools will receive an almost 50 per cent increase in service loadings to better recognise the needs of services operating in remote communities.

#### 1.2 Increased funding will be allocated to rural and remote schools through a new, fairer Resource Allocation Model to reflect the different needs of their students and the nature and location of their schools.

Under *Local Schools, Local Decisions*<sup>5</sup>, schools in rural and remote communities will have a greater share of the public school education budget, and principals will have more authority to decide how best to use the resources to meet their students' learning needs. On full implementation, schools will manage over 70 per cent of the public school education budget, up from the current level of 10 per cent.

To enable this shift of resources to the school level, a new Resource Allocation Model (RAM)<sup>6</sup> has been developed to deliver a simpler, fairer and more transparent distribution of government school funding and transform the way resources are managed across the public school system.

The RAM takes into account the fact that students and school communities are not all the same; they have different needs and will need different levels of support.

There are three components that make up the RAM; targeted (individual student) funding, equity loadings and a base school allocation. The base school allocation will have a site loading to reflect the additional costs associated with remoteness and isolation.



There are also equity loadings within the RAM that reflect both the number and percentage of Aboriginal students in schools and the socio-economic background of parents. These loadings will provide additional funding to support schools in rural and remote areas of NSW.

Phased implementation of the RAM will commence in 2014 with all schools receiving their targeted (individual student) funding and equity loadings. Approximately 126,000 students representing 32 per cent of all students in NSW public schools in quarter 1 and quarter 2 of the Department's Family Occupation and Education Index (FOEI)<sup>7</sup> are enrolled in rural and remote schools. Fifty-five per cent of the Aboriginal students in NSW public schools also reside in a provincial, remote or very remote location.

In 2014, a total of \$112.5 million will be available to the 916 rural and remote schools through the RAM for the equity loadings related to socioeconomic background and Aboriginal students. This represents an increase of \$42.3 million compared to previous equity funding, an increase of over 60 per cent. It also means that for the first time all Aboriginal students in every public school will attract funding support.

## 2. Rural and remote schools will be supported to collaborate in the development of an education strategy that best meets the needs of their school communities.

### 2.1 From 2014, education networks will be established in some rural and remote communities.

The *Local Schools, Local Decisions* reform recognises that the 'one size fits all' approach does not work. In rural communities, particularly those in remote areas, schools in partnership with their communities need to develop local solutions to meet the learning needs of all their students.

This Rural and Remote Education blueprint provides the stimulus and authority for rural and remote schools to work together in a planned and consistent way. Over the next four years, all schools in rural and remote areas will be supported to collaborate and consult with their communities, and each other, to plan an overall strategy for education that best meets their needs.

As part of this planning, a community may decide to establish an education network to bring together the resources of the whole community to support quality learning. The type of network established will depend on local needs and local decisions and need not be limited by geographical boundaries.

Some schools are already discussing with their community how best to develop an education network to meet local needs. From 2014, Directors Public Schools NSW and Directors Educational Services will work with principals and communities wanting to establish networks.

Education networks will draw on effective models and programs including the Access schools program, the

*Connected Communities* strategy and resource sharing under *Every Student, Every School*.

Examples of where education networks can support rural and remote education include:

- strategies that bring together early childhood services, preschools and schools to support effective transition to school programs
- sharing of curriculum and teachers across a group of schools
- providing an integrated primary and secondary curriculum across a group of schools
- sharing of school, TAFE NSW and non-government expertise, resources and facilities
- strategies that connect teachers from different schools to wider opportunities for professional learning
- combining resources and sharing staff across primary and secondary schools to ensure transition programs have a strong curriculum and student wellbeing focus.

In some education networks, communities may agree, through local consultation, to have all schools operating with one principal based at a coordinating school. This model would include a coordinating school that manages the combined resources of the education network, while individual schools would still retain their local identity. The education network would operate with one school plan, one budget and staff working across all schools. Schools in the network would have a management agreement that summarises how resources will be shared, where teachers and school executive are located and how decisions will be made.

Schools will be given support to undertake planning for the network approach. The support will include a one-off funding grant, assistance to facilitate community meetings and access to a broad range of school and community data that will form the basis of discussion and planning.

Additional funding of over \$1 million has been allocated over the next four years to assist with the initial establishment and coordination of the education networks. Schools will also be able to access expertise to support them as they establish their education network.

This support could include:

- administrative support to organise consultations and provide ongoing community feedback
- teacher release to coordinate planning and initial implementation across schools
- expertise in early childhood education for those networks wanting to include better transition to school programs
- advice about the most suitable technologies to share curriculum

- curriculum expertise to plan curriculum sharing across schools
- expertise in wrap-around services for those networks wanting to include other agencies and services
- access to a traineeship where the network schools decide to employ a student support officer
- VET expertise for networks sharing VET provisions.

Schools will also be able to draw on the expertise of the Department's Educational Services teams in planning and establishing education networks. As part of the new model of support for schools, Educational Services teams made up of expert, non school-based staff with recent school-based experience are being established across the State. These teams will support rural and remote schools as they implement the actions in the Rural and Remote Education blueprint.

# Quality early childhood education



## Future State

More children in rural and remote communities gain the benefits of quality early childhood education in at least the year before school.

Early childhood education services are responsive to the needs of families in rural and remote communities.

Children in rural and remote communities enter kindergarten as confident learners.

## Current State

One in four children in remote and very remote areas may not be accessing early childhood education in the year before school.

National data from the AEDI<sup>8</sup> show that when starting school, about one in three children in remote and very remote communities are developmentally vulnerable on one or more domains, compared with one in five children from metropolitan areas.

*Best Start*<sup>9</sup> results show that almost 90 per cent of children who have attended early childhood education are more confident with language and literacy – a rate 20 per cent higher than children with no early childhood education.

Many parents living in rural communities find it difficult to access or pay for early childhood education for their children.

A lack of facilities often limits participation in early childhood education for children living in rural communities.

Rural and remote early childhood education services can find it difficult to attract and retain qualified early childhood teachers.

Standalone early childhood education services in rural and remote communities can struggle with the large administrative workload and professional isolation.

## Outcomes and actions

### 3. More children in rural and remote communities gain the benefits of quality early childhood education in at least the year before school.

#### 3.1 Vulnerable and disadvantaged children will have access to high quality and more affordable early childhood education.

The new funding model for community preschools more closely aligns funding with community circumstances, providing the highest subsidies for children in the most disadvantaged areas. The model targets funding for children in their year before school and provides increased average base rates and loadings for remote preschools.

Aboriginal children and those from families with low incomes will have access to two years of subsidised preschool. This is consistent with what the research tells us about when early learning can have the greatest impact.

#### 3.2 Departmental preschool services will better target areas of greatest need.

In accordance with the recommendation of the Brennan Review, the Department will undertake an analysis of the cost of provision in departmental preschools and consider focusing its efforts on meeting needs in the most disadvantaged communities, including rural and remote communities.

Currently, parents and carers can only apply to enrol their child in the Department's Distance Education preschool classes if they intend to enrol the child in Distance Education for Kindergarten. The Department's Distance Education Guidelines will be changed from 2014, to consider all children in very remote areas irrespective of where they will be enrolled for

Kindergarten. This will ensure more children in very remote areas are eligible for preschool education.

#### **4. Early childhood education services are responsive to the needs of families in rural and remote communities.**

##### **4.1 Specific strategies are in place to enable greater participation in early childhood education in rural and remote communities.**

\$7 million in capital works funding has been allocated to rural and regional areas where children are missing out on preschool because of a lack of facilities, and where the market cannot respond effectively to demand because of local economic conditions. This includes \$2 million to complete capital projects under the *Preschool Investment and Reform Plan*, and \$5 million in 2013-14 for new projects in rural and remote areas identified as having a high level of need for more preschool places.

Additional funding will be provided to enable rural and remote preschools to improve engagement and access for 'hard to reach' children through outreach initiatives. This may involve funding to enable preschool services to provide transportation to children who would otherwise be unable to attend or to set up a regular breakfast program. Targeted support will also be available to expand the availability and reach of mobile community preschools in those communities where no alternative preschool provision is available. Together an additional \$1 million will be allocated each year for this extra support. Consultation will occur to ensure the initiatives funded meet the specific needs and circumstances of each community.

##### **4.2 Scholarships will be provided to build the capabilities of early childhood teachers.**

The skills and capabilities of early childhood teachers are our most important resource for building quality early childhood education. The early childhood education sector is being supported to build a sustainable workforce, especially in rural and remote areas, through the provision of scholarships, worth \$10,000 per recipient, to assist early childhood educators to upgrade their qualifications to bachelor degree level.

Of the 32 scholarships awarded to date, 16 have been made to educators from rural and remote areas. In 2014, a further 70 scholarships will be made available, and the program will include a specific focus on encouraging applications from rural and remote areas where there are known shortages of early childhood qualified teachers.

##### **4.3 Support will be provided to encourage sustainable and flexible delivery of preschool services.**

Most community preschools are managed by local volunteer committees which have to deal with the complex regulatory and legislative requirements of running a preschool service. To support the sustainability of local community preschools, a cluster management trial will be implemented in 2014, which includes a focus on rural services.

Preschools involved in the trial will be supported by a cluster manager who will take on responsibility for a range of administrative functions, enabling parent-run committees to focus on educational outcomes for children.

Many children in rural and remote NSW access early childhood education through a mobile preschool, enabling children to participate in early learning programs regardless of where they live. The new funding system for community preschools will provide specific funding arrangements for mobile service providers to ensure that they are viable and continue to deliver effective and flexible services based on community need.

To further support the provision of early childhood education in rural and remote areas and to make the best use of existing infrastructure, the Brennan Review recommended greater use of schools as service hubs. In 2013-14, funding will be allocated to those *Connected Communities* locations without departmental preschools to work with local early childhood education providers to meet the specific needs of their communities. This will include funding for the upgrade and refurbishment of preschool facilities to ensure appropriate service delivery.

#### **5. Children in rural and remote communities enter kindergarten as confident learners.**

##### **5.1 Transition to school statements will be introduced to strengthen information sharing between parents, early childhood educators and schools.**

A transition to school statement based on the *Early Years Learning Framework* will be trialled in 2013-14 for a wider roll out to early childhood education services and schools in 2014-15. The statement will address the early childhood development domains such as language and cognitive skills, social and emotional development and physical wellbeing.

The statement will provide a template for early childhood educators to complete, with input from families, which summarises each child's strengths, interests and approaches to learning, and suggests ways these can be supported. The statement will ensure important information is shared with teachers and schools to support each child as they move into formal schooling.

From the start of 2014, new transition to school initiatives will be developed to bring together early childhood services and local schools. The initiatives will include parents, staff from early childhood services, kindergarten teachers and school principals from the local communities.

##### **5.2 New initiatives will provide support for the Department's current distance education preschool.**

In 2014, a specialist centre will be established for preschool children and families accessing the Department's distance education provision. The centre will showcase quality early learning and provide professional learning and mentoring for departmental preschool teachers, principals, preschool supervisors and parents in rural and remote locations.

# Great teachers and school leaders



## Future State

*Great Teaching, Inspired Learning* reforms build the capacity of teachers and leaders in rural and remote schools.

Rural and remote schools have greater capacity to attract and retain quality teachers and leaders.

Distance and time are not a barrier to working and learning together.

## Current State

Rural and remote schools find it difficult to attract and retain teachers and leaders. Some schools are unable to fill executive positions despite multiple merit selection processes.

Teachers and principals in metropolitan schools have on average more experience than teachers and principals in rural and remote schools.

Rural and remote schools may have only one suitably qualified teacher in some curriculum areas and, in some schools, teachers may be asked to teach courses for which they have little or no formal training.

Head teachers in central and small secondary schools have curriculum responsibilities for areas in which they may have little or no expertise.

Geographic isolation and school size limits the opportunities for teachers and school leaders to work together, and collaborate and learn from those with expertise in learning and support.

Sometimes, teachers are not sure that a move to a rural and remote location will work for them.

Principal classifications are based on student numbers and do not reflect school complexity.

Newly arrived students and refugee students in rural and remote areas have limited access to intensive English literacy support, and their teachers do not have the same access to this expertise as teachers in metropolitan areas.

Teachers and leaders in rural and remote schools have limited experience with NAPLAN and HSC marking. This affects their understanding of the performance standards expected of their students in these types of assessments.

There are limited professional development opportunities for administrative and support staff in rural and remote areas.

## Outcomes and actions

### 6. *Great Teaching, Inspired Learning*<sup>10</sup> reforms build the capacity of teachers and leaders in rural and remote schools.

#### 6.1 Graduates from NSW teacher education programs will have the skills and personal attributes for teaching in rural and remote schools.

In 2014, the Department will broker partnership agreements between schools and initial teacher education providers to improve the quality of the professional experience teachers receive. Partnership agreements will be based on the new professional experience framework being developed by the NSW Institute of Teachers (the Institute)<sup>11</sup>. Under these partnership agreements, the Department will identify up to 15 schools to be showcase schools for quality professional experience.



These schools will be required to demonstrate a whole school commitment to quality professional experience, support other schools and work closely with their university.

The Department will work with the Institute and initial teacher education providers to ensure the new framework and partnership agreements better support professional experience placements in rural and remote schools including placements for early childhood teachers.

This will include:

- the provision of incentives for teacher education students willing to undertake a professional experience placement in a rural and remote school
- strengthening the Department's personal suitability interview process to explicitly address suitability for teaching in rural and remote schools
- identifying and supporting a small number of rural and remote schools to be the showcase schools for quality professional experience.

The Institute will work with initial teacher education providers to support them to include specific content relating to teaching in rural and remote schools in teacher education courses.

The Institute will also make available registered professional learning courses to support those teachers who will take on the role of mentoring and supervising teacher education students in rural and remote schools.

## **6.2 Incentives will be targeted to attract more of the best and brightest into teaching in rural and remote schools.**

New *teach.Rural* scholarships will be offered to talented prospective teachers prepared to teach in rural and remote schools. The first 20 *teach.Rural* scholarships are being offered in 2013, to start in 2014. Fifty scholarships will be offered in subsequent years.

New cadetship and internship programs are being introduced in 2013, in areas of workforce need, including in rural and remote locations. The new cadetship program will target high achieving final year school students. The students will be employed part-time as paraprofessionals and placed in a school from the time they commence their initial teacher education program. The first 10 cadetships will be offered in 2014, increasing to an intake of 30 in 2017.

The new internship program will target high achieving final year teacher education students. Students will be employed part-time as educational paraprofessionals in schools while completing their final year of study. The first 10 interns will commence in 2014, increasing to an intake of 30 in 2017.

## **6.3 Beginning teachers will receive quality induction, reduced teaching loads and mentor support.**

From the start of 2014, new guidelines and support resources will be available to ensure beginning teachers receive quality induction into both the profession of teaching generally and the context of the school and its community. Rural and remote schools will tailor induction programs to help teachers understand and adjust to the local community.

From 2014, all permanent beginning teachers (those on their first permanent appointment with the Department) will be provided with:

- the equivalent of two hours per week release in their first year (to support probation)
- the equivalent of one hour per week release in their second year (when they are finalising accreditation at the Proficient level).

Schools will also be provided with:

- the equivalent of one hour per week release to allow an experienced teacher to provide mentor support during the beginning teacher's first year of teaching.

In addition, eight teacher mentor positions will be allocated across up to 40 schools with significant numbers of beginning temporary teachers. The teacher mentors will work with beginning temporary teachers across up to five identified schools. Four of these teacher mentor positions will be allocated to support schools with significant numbers of beginning temporary teachers in rural and remote locations.

The Department will also review the requirement for casual and temporary teachers in remote locations to have a block of continuous teaching of one term or its equivalent over five school terms before they can be accredited at the Proficient level.

## **6.4 Teachers will be better supported by strategies and processes that allow for professional collaboration and conversations about their teaching practice.**

Teachers and schools in rural and remote areas will be able to share and showcase their practice through the making of classroom documentaries. Teachers will also be supported to share and analyse their practice, and schools to build collaborative teaching cultures, through 'Quality Teaching Rounds'.

Both of these initiatives will be resourced to ensure teachers in rural and remote locations can participate using technologies that allow groups of teachers across multiple schools to watch and discuss lessons.

## 7. Rural and remote schools have greater capacity to attract and retain quality teachers and leaders.

### 7.1 The benefits of teaching in rural and remote locations will be actively promoted.

The Department through *teach.NSW* will develop a new campaign to promote the career and personal benefits of teaching in rural and remote schools. This campaign will begin at the end of 2013 and use social media and mobile technology to target universities, school leavers, those yet to decide on a career or interested in a career change, as well as existing teachers and leaders.

Principals will be provided with communication support to help them actively promote and market their school and community to new and experienced teachers and school leaders.

The Department will also introduce a Rural Teacher Exchange Program to provide an opportunity for teachers in rural and remote schools to exchange with teachers in other schools for one year at a time, returning to their substantive school at the end of the year. This will allow rural and remote teachers to experience a different teaching environment and for other teachers to consider whether teaching in a rural and remote school is a longer term option for them.

### 7.2 A new range of incentives will be offered to attract and retain teachers and school leaders.

From 2013, the principal positions in the *Connected Communities* schools have been upgraded to Executive Principals to attract outstanding school leaders for these schools. The employment package for these Executive Principals also includes an incentive to reward those principals who succeed and remain in the position beyond three years.

Over the next four years, over \$30 million in additional funding will be available for a range of new incentives to attract experienced teachers and leaders to rural and remote schools and encourage them to stay.

These incentives will include:

- in rural and remote six-point and eight-point incentive schools, principals will have the option of having a suitable temporary teacher, who has worked continuously for at least two years in the school directly appointed into a permanent vacant position in their school. In eight-point incentive schools, principals will also have the option of permanently appointing those teachers above establishment, if there is no vacant position at the school
- principals in rural and remote eight-point incentive schools will be able to recommend that following two continuous years successfully relieving or acting in an executive role, a teacher is assessed for direct appointment into the role
- newly appointed teachers and school leaders in rural and remote schools may be offered a 10 week trial before their permanent appointment is confirmed

- in rural and remote eight-point incentive schools, a recruitment benefit of \$10,000 may be used to attract suitable applicants, if two consecutive selection processes have not filled a vacancy
- the payment of a 50 per cent rental subsidy to teachers in rural and remote four-point incentive schools
- the payment of the NSW Institute of Teachers' submission fee for accreditation as Highly Accomplished or Lead teacher for teachers and leaders in rural and remote schools.

Currently principal classification and salary are linked to student enrolments and this does not reflect the complexity of each school or the principal's workload. The *Local Schools, Local Decisions* reform and the introduction of the RAM provide both an opportunity and a mechanism for designing salary arrangements that reflect and respond to changing school complexity. The Department proposes to discuss future options to address this as part of negotiations with the NSW Teachers Federation on a new School Teachers Award.

### 7.3 More options will be available to develop the leadership skills of current and aspiring school leaders in rural and remote schools.

In 2014, the Department will develop and publish resources and guidelines to better support succession planning for school leaders and teachers aspiring to be principals. Around \$8 million in additional funding will be allocated over the next four years to provide specific support to newly appointed school leaders in rural and remote schools including:

- a rural and remote mentoring program to link newly appointed leaders with experienced school leaders. This will include the option of short-term shadowing opportunities for newly appointed school leaders in rural and remote schools, to work alongside experienced leaders in high performing schools
- a range of coaching and mentoring programs for principals of rural and remote schools to assist them to develop further their leadership capabilities.

## 8. Distance and time are not a barrier to working and learning together.

### 8.1 Teachers, school leaders and administrative and support staff in rural and remote schools will have access to quality professional learning, mentoring and coaching programs.

Teachers, school leaders and administrative and support staff will have access to a range of professional learning and training options to fit their local circumstances, including online courses, online sharing and face-to-face opportunities. For example:

- the online professional learning program, *The Classroom Teacher Program*, will be enhanced during 2014 and additional, registered professional learning courses developed that align to each career stage of the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*

- induction support for early career teachers will also be provided online and teachers will be able to access mentor support through virtual and online technologies. Teacher mentors for early career teachers in rural and remote locations, will be provided with assistance to work in virtual environments
- new and experienced teachers in small schools will be supported through virtual Key Learning Area (KLA) networks using online mentoring and coaching and interactive technologies
- online professional learning modules will be developed which will allow administrative staff to pursue individual development pathways. They will include support for leadership development, contemporary school management, communication and administration practices, as well as other specific role-related activities.

The Department will also identify opportunities to share professional learning across school sectors by working with local Catholic and Independent school colleagues.

## 8.2 Teachers will have increased opportunity to experience real or simulated NAPLAN and HSC marking.

From 2014, the Department and the Board of Studies NSW (the Board)<sup>11</sup> will provide access to support and analysis for teachers in rural and remote schools in relation to NAPLAN, the Record of School Achievement (RoSA) and the HSC.

HSC teachers will have increased opportunity to experience real HSC marking, particularly in subjects marked online, as well as access to simulated HSC marking through both face-to-face and online presentations. Rural and remote teachers in their first three years of teaching will be particularly targeted and provided with opportunities to participate in NAPLAN and HSC simulation marking.

The Board will also make HSC Showcase events, such as ARTEXPRESS, Encore and OnStage, available in electronic form and annotated with markers comments. The Board will also rearrange the HSC Showcase calendar to cluster as many events as possible in the one place to increase access for rural and remote students and teachers.

These experiences will provide teachers in rural and remote schools with increased access to support related to NAPLAN, the RoSA and HSC marking within their subject areas. This support can help teachers and students gain a better understanding of expected standards and requirements for high achievement.

## 8.3 Virtual faculties will be established for Learning and Support and ESL teachers linking them to experienced head teachers, assistant principals and other expertise.

Learning and Support teachers have an important role in providing professional learning and expert advice, particularly in areas where specialist services are limited.

Newly arrived students with English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) require intensive English support. The support of other agencies may also be needed to help students deal with trauma.

Current models of virtual faculties that already link teachers in rural and remote schools to subject expertise will be expanded from 2014 to include virtual faculties for:

- teachers providing personalised learning and support and those working with students with additional needs
- ESL and other teachers of newly arrived students.

# Curriculum access for all



## Future State

Rural and remote students have improved access to a broad and quality curriculum.

Gifted and talented rural and remote students have the same curriculum opportunities as students in metropolitan areas.

Rural and remote students have access to quality transition pathways from secondary school to further education, training or employment.

## Current State

Teachers and students sometimes find it hard to share curriculum resources and collaborate with each other because of distance, as well as technological and school organisational limitations.

Students in rural and remote areas have fewer opportunities to participate in transition activities due to geographical barriers.

Students in rural and remote areas have less opportunity to participate in curriculum enrichment, career related learning, cultural and sporting programs because of distance and the cost of travel.

Academically gifted students and those who require curriculum adjustments have limited subject choice and learning experiences because the right types of resources and support are not always available in small rural and remote schools.

Students in rural and remote areas have fewer opportunities to be exposed to a broad range of career options and may have fewer career role models.

Students in rural and remote areas are less likely than students in metropolitan areas to go on to further study.

Less than 50 per cent of Aboriginal students in rural NSW complete Year 12 or equivalent.

Rural and remote teachers find it hard to develop links with universities and to provide their students with enrichment activities that build student engagement in science, mathematics and agriculture.

Rural and remote schools find it difficult to offer a broad range of VET courses linked to quality work placements. Local employers want VET courses to meet local employment needs.

## Outcomes and actions

### 9. Rural and remote students have improved access to a broad and quality curriculum.

#### 9.1 A virtual secondary school will be established, delivering quality curriculum to rural and remote students across the state.

The Department will establish a virtual secondary school to allow Years 7-12 students in rural and remote schools to study specialist subjects they cannot access in their home school. It will also be partially selective, offering selective classes for gifted and talented students in some secondary subjects. Teachers and students will use the most up to date technology to create engaging learning environments, building on what we have learnt from current programs such as Access, e2 and Xsel, as well as international evidence about how best to deliver curriculum in rural and remote areas.

Secondary students across rural and remote NSW will be able to study a 'blended' curriculum, with selected courses provided



through the virtual school and the remainder through their local school. The virtual school will specialise in providing selective classes and curriculum extension for those stage 5 and 6 courses small schools find difficult to consistently offer because of size and isolation. This will include courses in mathematics, science, engineering studies and economics.

The virtual school will provide opportunities for students in small schools to work with other students at similar academic levels. Students will have targeted support from teachers in their own school to assist them to work effectively in a virtual learning environment.

The virtual school will complement existing distance education provisions available to students in rural and remote NSW and be coordinated from a central location such as the existing Distance Education Centre at Dubbo.

Priority for enrolment in stage 5 and 6 courses will be given to those in the most remote locations. Students in the selective classes will apply through the current Departmental processes for selective schools.

The Department will allocate over \$8 million over the next four years to establish and operate the virtual school. The first students will enrol in 2015.

### **9.2 Electronic curriculum documents and syllabus support materials will be developed to meet the needs of rural and remote teachers.**

The Board of Studies will factor into its processes specific advice on the implications for rural and remote schools of new materials developed to support the NSW curriculum. The Board will consult with rural and remote teachers and principals, as materials are developed, on their perspectives as to the usefulness of any new materials. The Board will consider this advice as part of the curriculum endorsement process and will include it with all curriculum recommendations to the Minister.

### **9.3 Teachers, students and school leaders will be able to collaborate and share curriculum resources.**

To overcome the barriers of very small student numbers, distance and travel time, curriculum will be delivered across a number of schools and by teachers who are not in the student's school. Teachers and students will also have access to teaching and learning resources, regardless of geographic location.

From 2014, school leaders, teachers and students will be able to access a range of online communication and collaboration technologies, including video conferencing, the *Microsoft* and *Adobe* suites of software, *Google Apps* and *NSW Scootle* for access to all national digital learning resources, collaboration and assessment tools.

These technologies will assist in the flexible delivery of classroom learning, the development and sharing of resources and access to specialist expertise. They will also allow teachers and students to build local and global communities and to connect with other interested students and experts worldwide.

## **9.4 Processes will be strengthened to ensure smooth curriculum transition from primary to secondary school.**

Students will be provided with more opportunities to participate in Year 6 to Year 7 transition activities. Educational Services teams will coordinate professional learning for staff in rural and remote areas to help them better plan for students as they transition from primary to high school.

Online professional networks will support staff to develop early and middle years learning experiences targeted at rural and remote students. These programs will include a focus on curriculum continuity through the use of the interactive K-10 Literacy and Numeracy Continuums.

From 2014, primary schools will be assisted to work together on strategies to broaden the career aspirations of primary students. Primary and secondary teachers will be able to access professional learning that will support them to collaborate and coordinate career-related learning as students transition from Year 6 to Year 7.

## **10. Gifted and talented rural and remote students have the same curriculum opportunities as students in metropolitan areas.**

### **10.1 New approaches will be developed to address the impact of isolation, distance and small peer groups on gifted and talented students.**

The Department will investigate the establishment of additional opportunity classes in rural and remote primary schools to provide for gifted and talented Years 5 and 6 students. The Department's new virtual secondary school will be partially selective providing curriculum extension for gifted and talented Years 7-12 students.

During 2014, additional support will become available to specifically assist rural and remote teachers to address the unique needs of gifted and talented students in their classes. Teachers will be able to access professional learning, assistance to provide extension and enrichment activities, flexible models of curriculum delivery, virtual learning, distance education and opportunities for acceleration of their students.

### **10.2 New programs will be developed to give students access to and engage them in science, mathematics and agriculture courses<sup>12</sup>.**

New approaches will be developed, such as sharing of curriculum across schools, mentoring for students with experts and online 'masterclass' experiences led by experts during and out of school hours. This will give gifted and talented students access to these courses, provide them with the links needed for genuine enrichment and help them to better understand related careers.

To ensure rural and remote students are able to visit universities and have virtual access to HSC preparation seminars and curriculum enrichment programs, the Department will work with principals and universities to develop new ways of delivering these programs.



### **10.3 More options will be provided for rural and remote students to participate in State arts and sports programs and other enrichment opportunities.**

In 2014, the current local school sports programs offered to students in rural and remote NSW will be expanded. A number of new initiatives, including online programs, will also be developed to support teachers. One of these new initiatives will be the development of a Physically Active Schools Portal that will provide teachers with exemplars of school sport programs and community sporting partnerships.

New strategies will be developed to expand and strengthen the opportunities for rural and remote students to access a wide range of high quality arts performances, exhibitions, camps, workshops, programs and events. The Department will also expand access to online and virtual rehearsals and auditions to support teacher professional learning and increase student participation in performances for State arts activities.

In circumstances of extreme hardship resulting from distance or family circumstances, financial support will be provided to students to ensure they can participate in these State programs.

## **11. Rural and remote students have access to quality transition pathways from secondary school into further education, training or employment.<sup>13</sup>**

### **11.1 New partnerships will be developed between schools, TAFE NSW, universities, employers.**

Schools and Educational Services teams will work in partnership with TAFE NSW, local businesses and Chambers of Commerce to link VET courses to local employment needs. Assistance will be provided for groups of schools to work together, including options for working with TAFE NSW and local non-government schools to share resources and facilities, to better meet the needs of all students in a local area.

Online student mentoring programs, linking students with experts in and beyond their community, will be developed for students in rural and remote areas. In 2014, the Department will work with the Australian Business and Community Network and their participating companies to extend their current school programs to rural and remote schools and to use e-mentoring in combination with face-to-face sessions.

In addition, the Department will better tailor and promote existing careers and mentoring programs to rural and remote schools.

### **11.2 Aboriginal students will be provided with additional support through personalised learning to achieve their aspirations as they move into further training and/or work.**

A number of strategies from the Government's plan for Aboriginal education, employment and accountability – *Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility, Empowerment* (OCHRE)<sup>14</sup> – will underpin personalised learning and support to enable Aboriginal students in rural and remote communities to gain skills and build confidence and resilience.

Under the OCHRE plan, Aboriginal communities across NSW will have the opportunity to rejuvenate, revitalize and maintain Aboriginal language and culture through Language and Culture Nests. Opportunity Hubs will also be established to give Aboriginal young people pathways to real jobs by coordinating employment and training opportunities between schools, local businesses and the community.

In the 15 *Connected Communities*<sup>15</sup> schools, Aboriginal students will have personalised learning plans to ensure teaching and learning is targeted to their individual needs.

In addition, each school will have a local School Reference Group, which will work collaboratively with the Executive Principal in the development, planning and shared decision-making of each school's *Connected Communities* strategy. This will ensure that the *Connected Communities* schools have a broader influence within the local community to better deliver key services to support children and young people from birth through school into further training, study and employment.

# Effective partnerships and connections



## Future State

Teachers and school leaders have access to professional learning and expert advice so they can meet the learning and support needs of every student.

Schools are able to access specialist assistance for students whose needs are challenging or complex.

State borders do not prevent students from obtaining the support they need.

## Current State

Access to allied health services in rural and remote communities may be limited or non-existent. Schools have difficulty accessing and linking students and their families to these services even when they exist.

School staff and leaders have varying skills and expertise in facilitating support for students with additional learning needs.

State boundaries can limit teachers' opportunities to work with nearby colleagues and build professional networks.

Some students and families travel long distances to access services in their own state when the closest service is available in the neighbouring state or territory.

Schools located near state boundaries find it frustrating that there is limited coordination of education and support services across state borders.

## Outcomes and actions

**12. Teachers and school leaders have access to professional learning and expert advice so they can meet the learning and support needs of every student.**

**12.1 Professional learning will build the capabilities of school leaders and staff in creating and sustaining safe and supportive school communities.**

From the start of 2014, schools will have access to teams of expert staff, who are part of Educational Services teams, to assist them to meet the diverse needs of their students, including those requiring additional learning and support. These teams will have a strong focus on providing and facilitating professional learning targeted to school needs. Examples include expanded access to:

- tutor-supported online courses that extend teacher knowledge and skills in supporting students with autism, behaviour support needs, dyslexia, hearing impairment and significant difficulties in reading, communication and motor coordination
- the *Connecting to Country* program, whereby school leaders and staff gain the knowledge, confidence and understanding to teach all students about Aboriginal culture and history, and implement culturally responsive teaching and learning practices for Aboriginal students
- advice and assistance about positive behaviour practices that schools might adopt and opportunities to network with schools already implementing these programs.

**12.2 Teachers will be supported with tools to assist them to personalise learning and support.**

Through the *Every Student, Every School*<sup>16</sup> strategy, tools will be developed to assist teachers to personalise learning and support for students with additional needs. These tools will help schools to:

- collaborate with students, parents, carers and community
- identify the specific needs of individual students
- identify, implement and assess the impact of support.

While these tools will be available to all schools from 2014, they are particularly important in rural and remote schools where specialist support services and expertise may be harder to access.

Approximately 70% of schools currently participating in the *Early Action for Success*<sup>17</sup> initiative are in rural and remote areas of NSW, including *Connected Communities* schools. From 2014, the number of schools in rural and remote areas with Instructional Leaders will be increased. Instructional Leaders will coordinate the identification of the literacy and numeracy achievement of all Kindergarten to Year 2 students, and strategically plan personalised learning and interventions for students. They will work with the school executive to determine the professional learning needs of staff to differentiate instruction, and lead the professional learning of teachers in effective literacy and numeracy teaching practices.

### **12.3 Student Support Officer traineeships will be offered to engage youth workers in schools.**

Based on the Student Support Officer initiative in secondary schools, traineeships will be offered for schools to engage young people as youth workers to help schools respond to the needs of their students. Traineeships will provide opportunities for young people from the community to train and work locally with professional supervision and support from specialist staff.

The first traineeships will be offered in 2014 to groups of schools in rural and remote areas forming an education network.

## **13. Schools are able to access specialist assistance for students whose needs are challenging or complex.**

### **13.1 Specialist centres will be established to bring together expertise and specialist staff.**

From 2014, schools will progressively access a state-wide network of specialist assistance through a single local point of contact. Specialist centres will bring together coordinated inter-agency health and wellbeing services through the expertise of specialist departmental staff working in collaboration with other government and non-government agencies. These services will be in addition to what is already available in schools<sup>18</sup>.

Specialist centres will build on what we have learned from existing programs and strategies such as virtual faculties, the Student Support Officer initiative, and the NSW Centre for Effective Reading. Specialist centres will have a key role through their Senior Psychologists, Education in supporting schools to address and manage complex cases where students may be at risk of disengaging from education because of issues related to learning, health and/or wellbeing.

Specialist centres already existing in Dubbo and Wagga Wagga will be extended in 2014 to provide additional expertise in areas such as education psychology, school attendance and student health and wellbeing. New centres will be established in Broken Hill and Tamworth.

From 2015, more specialist centres will be established and by the end of 2016, 15 of 20 specialist centres will be operating in rural and regional NSW.

Each specialist centre will reflect local student wellbeing needs. The centres will provide advice and assistance, as well as direct assessment and support for schools, students and their families. As schools progressively access specialist centres, school counsellors will be better supported in delivering their psychology expertise in schools. Some centres will also provide opportunities for families, early childhood educators and schools to work together to achieve seamless transition to school for young children.

The Department has begun discussions with the NSW Ministry of Health and other agencies over how it will staff centres to reflect local student wellbeing needs. Over the next four years, over \$15 million in additional funding will be provided for operational support and to enhance expertise in areas such as youth, social and welfare work, speech, language and health care across the State's network of specialist centres.

In 2014, departmental staff appointed to the centres will be able to access ten new post graduate scholarships so that they have the expertise to support their work with schools, students and their families. In 2014-15, four early childhood scholarships will also be provided to early childhood educators working in Wagga Wagga, Tamworth, Dubbo and Broken Hill centres. This will enable them to upgrade their qualifications specifically in relation to working with young children with special needs

### **13.2 There will be more coordinated case management and planning for students with significant behavioural issues who are enrolled in distance education.**

From the start of the 2014 school year, the guidelines for enrolment in distance education will be amended so there is stronger case management of, and support for, those students with complex needs. Currently, more than half of the students enrolled in distance education are not able to attend their local school because of their very challenging behaviour. While distance education is an effective intervention, these students and their families need other options for re-engaging with further education, training or employment.

## **14. State borders do not prevent students from obtaining the support they need.**

### **14.1 The Department will simplify bureaucratic processes to make it easier for schools to work across state borders.**

Teachers and school leaders find departmental processes frustrating when they try to work across a state border. The Rural and Remote Education Advisory Group will be asked to identify examples where schools wanting to work across state borders encounter difficulty, and the Department will look to review those processes. For example, the Department will review and simplify processes for approving excursions and professional learning held in another state or territory.

### **14.2 The Minister for Education will seek support from the Cross Border Commissioner and the Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood (SCSEEC) for schools operating near borders to be able to share education services.**

The Cross Border Commissioner will be asked to investigate and make recommendations about:

- strategies that will enable children and students to enrol in preschools and specialist support classes in another state when these are the closest service to them
- ways education resources can be shared between states and territories
- solutions to issues impacting on students' education in border communities.

The Minister will also seek the support of other State and Territory Ministers for schools operating near borders to share resources and facilitate staff professional learning and networking.

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For more information go to:

[www.dec.nsw.gov.au/about-the-department/  
our-reforms/rural-and-remote-education](http://www.dec.nsw.gov.au/about-the-department/our-reforms/rural-and-remote-education)

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