

Education (General Provisions) (Prescribed State Schools) Amendment Regulation 2016

Explanatory notes for SL 2016 No. 213

made under the *Education (General Provisions) Act 2006*

General Outline

Short title

Education (General Provisions) (Prescribed State Schools) Amendment Regulation 2016

Authorising law

Section 419A and 434 of the *Education (General Provisions) Act 2006*

Policy objectives and the reasons for them

Under the National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education 2016-2017 (NP UAECE), the Queensland Government is committed to ensuring all children have the opportunity to access kindergarten in the year before school. While more than 95% of Queensland children attend kindergarten, access for children in remote communities remains a challenge.

Many rural and remote communities cannot sustain a viable kindergarten service. This is due to fluctuating cohorts of four year olds and challenges attracting and retaining early childhood teachers. The Government has introduced a number of initiatives to respond to these issues in rural and remote communities.

In 2007, a pre-preparatory learning program titled *Bound for Success* was established in 35 discrete Indigenous communities. In 2013, a distance education kindergarten program called 'eKindy' was established to provide a kindergarten program to families who live more than 16 kilometres from an early childhood education and care service. While eKindy has proven to be a popular choice for families in rural and remote areas, stakeholders including the Isolated Children's Parents Association have reported that it is not a solution for all families. The eKindy program requires parental input of 14 hours a week; relies on access to broadband internet technology, which can be unreliable; and does not provide an opportunity for children to learn social skills through interaction with their peers.

In response to these concerns, a trial of kindergarten delivered from 11 prescribed state schools in remote communities commenced in Term 2 of 2016 with 35 enrolments. The Remote Kindergarten Pilot Program is considered by participating communities as a great advance on eKindy as it provides children with an opportunity for socialisation, prepares

them for a smooth transition to Prep and meets the needs of working and rural and remote families.

Government approved the expansion of the pilot in 2017 to allow a larger sample of schools to deliver the program and provide access for more families to a kindergarten program. A focus for the pilot will be on quality delivery of the program. The impact of the pilot will continue to be monitored across the larger cohort group.

Section 419A of the *Education (General Provisions) Act 2006* provides that the Minister may approve a program focused on literacy and numeracy, for preparing a child for education in Prep, to be a preparatory learning program for a prescribed state school or a prescribed non-state school. Amendments are required to the *Education (General Provisions) Regulation 2006* to support the extension of the Remote Kindergarten Pilot Program by prescribing the additional 25 state schools participating in the 2017 pilot. This will take the total number of schools participating in the pilot in 2017 to 36.

Achievement of policy objectives

The Regulation achieves its policy objectives by prescribing an additional 25 state schools in rural and very remote areas as prescribed state schools. These schools can then participate in the Remote Kindergarten Pilot Program in 2017.

Consistency with policy objectives of authorising law

The Regulation is consistent with the objectives of the Act.

Inconsistency with policy objectives of other legislation

The Regulation is consistent with the policy objectives of other legislation.

Benefits and costs of implementation

It is estimated that the cost of the Remote Kindergarten Pilot Program over 2016 and 2017 will be to approximately \$5.8 million. Pilot schools will receive extra resources including extra teacher-aide time and training and professional support for principals, teachers and teacher aides at the pilot schools for the duration of the pilot. This funding also includes facility upgrades at some schools participating in the pilot.

Expanding delivery of kindergarten programs in remote and very remote communities will contribute to the Queensland Government's commitment under the NP UAECE to ensure all kindergarten-age children have access to a quality early childhood education program.

This proposal will also deliver on the Advancing Education action plan for Queensland, which commits the Government to providing innovative options for quality early childhood programs in rural and remote communities.

Consistency with fundamental legislative principles

The Regulation is consistent with fundamental legislative principles.

Consultation

Consultation has occurred with the Isolated Children's Parents Association, which supports the expansion of the pilot. The Queensland Association for State School Principals, Queensland Teachers Union and the United Voice are also supportive of the pilot and its expansion.

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