

# Education (General Provisions) Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2016

Explanatory notes for SL 2016 No. 22

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

## General Outline

### Short title

*Education (General Provisions) Amendment Regulation (No.1) 2016*

### Authorising law

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

### Policy objectives and the reasons for them

The policy objective of the *Education (General Provisions) Amendment Regulation (No.1) 2016* (Amendment Regulation) is to prescribe certain state schools at which a pre-preparatory learning program focused on literacy and numeracy (i.e. a kindergarten program) can be provided.

Many rural and remote communities in Queensland cannot sustain a viable kindergarten service due to fluctuating numbers of four year olds in the area and challenges attracting and retaining early childhood teachers. It is proposed to trial the provision of a kindergarten program in certain rural and remote state schools to address these challenges.

In 2007, a pre-preparatory learning program (Bound for Success) was established for 35 discrete Indigenous communities. In 2009, sections 419A – 419D were inserted into the *Education (General Provisions) Act 2006* (EGPA) to provide a legislative basis for this program and to allow a mechanism to expand the program if required.

In 2012, amendments were made to the EGPA to introduce the provision of a pre-preparatory learning program through distance education ('eKindy') to eligible children. The eKindy program is a 15 hour per week program delivered one hour per week by a distance education teacher on-line. The remainder of the program is delivered by parents/guardians with support from the teacher. The program runs for 40 weeks of the year (school terms only), which is equivalent to a centre-based kindergarten program.

While the demand for eKindy is growing, advice from many families and the Isolated Children's Parents Association is that eKindy is not a solution for every family for a number of reasons including:

- it is based on a distance education model which offers only one hour per week contact time with a teacher and requires substantial time commitment from families and carers to deliver the remaining 14 hours per week;
- children do not have the opportunity to socialise with their peers and other adults, which are important parts of the kindergarten program; and
- it requires access to reliable broadband internet technology.

To address these issues, a number of rural and remote communities have established ‘clusters’ which allow small numbers of children, enrolled in eKindy, to undertake the program in a group setting hosted at the local state school (‘eKindy clusters’). The program is usually facilitated by a volunteer or community member and funded by various sources. In 2015, 19 eKindy clusters operated in rural and remote communities providing a service to approximately 75 children.

eKindy clusters are not regulated or monitored by the Department of Education and Training under the EGPA or the *Education and Care Services National Law (Queensland) 2011* (National Law).

Schools and parents have sought a more permanent arrangement for access to kindergarten in rural and remote areas so that the quality of the program can be monitored and improved, and participating schools can be supported through formal arrangements.

It is proposed to conduct a pilot program commencing in Term 2 of 2016 (i.e. 11 April 2016) to offer a kindergarten program in certain rural and remote state schools. A child will be eligible to participate in the pilot program if they have turned 4 years by 30 June 2016 and live, in the child’s principal place of residence, at least 16 kilometres by the most direct route by road from the nearest centre-based early childhood education and care service catering to pre-Preparatory aged children.

Conducting a pilot program will allow the Government to determine whether this is a viable option to support greater access to kindergarten programs in remote and very remote communities.

In accordance with section 419A of the EGPA, the Minister will need to approve the kindergarten program to be delivered at the pilot state schools.

The pilot will allow the Department of Education and Training to evaluate the concept of delivering kindergarten in rural and remote schools and value for money. It will also allow the Department to explore implementation issues such as professional development and support for participating teachers and provide families, living in selected rural and remote areas, the opportunity to access a quality kindergarten program and benefit from improved educational and social outcomes. It is proposed to evaluate the pilot program including the impact for kindergarten and school age children.

## **Achievement of policy objectives**

The Regulation achieves its policy objectives by prescribing 11 state schools in rural and very remote areas to be potential sites for the 2016 kindergarten in state schools pilot program.

## **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 pilot will cost the State Government up to approximately \$500,000 for three terms in 2016. The cost of the pilot includes extra resources for the schools, primarily extra teacher-aide time and training and support for teachers at the schools for the duration of the pilot.

Expanding delivery of kindergarten programs in remote and very remote communities will contribute to the Queensland Government's commitment under the National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education 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, Queensland Teachers' Union and United Voice. The Isolated Children's Parents Association, Queensland Teachers' Union and United Voice are supportive of the proposed pilot.

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