

COUNTRY EDUCATION STRATEGY

2023 Progress Report



Government of South Australia
Department for Education

A MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

I am pleased to share with you the progress we made in 2023 under South Australia's first Country Education Strategy.

Our investment of over \$10.3 million in the first 3 years has focussed on working with country teachers and leaders to address some of the most pressing issues affecting country schools and students.

We trialled a series of targeted supports to attract early career teachers to our country workforce. Through these supports pre-service teachers were given the opportunity to experience the benefits of teaching in the country and to immerse themselves in the lifestyle our regions can provide. We launched our Teach First in Country program to attract high-quality graduates to start their teaching careers in the country. We've also sought to improve access to housing for all teachers in country locations, which we know is critical to attracting and retaining our workforce in regional areas.

Additionally, we made good progress improving the supports available to our country sites. We have made speech pathology and psychology services more accessible for country regions where local services were previously limited. We also completed our program of upgrading ICT infrastructure in country sites to improve site connectivity and enable more engaging digital learning experiences.

As we come to the end of the first 3 years of the strategy, we have taken the opportunity to assess what has worked well and where we need to focus

in the future. An external evaluation of the strategy by the South Australian Centre for Economic Studies found that the strategy was effectively designed, offered opportunities for learning and adjustment during implementation, had efficient governance structures, and has attained identifiable outcomes for each initiative, with stakeholders across the system recognising its impact. This progress report shares some of those reflections.

This review, combined with discussions with country teachers, leaders and students, has helped to highlight where we now need to focus.

Access to qualified and dedicated teachers who understand the specific needs of country students is important. South Australia shares the nationwide challenge of attracting and retaining teachers in country areas. The strategy will continue to focus on overcoming these obstacles to provide country students with equitable access to engaging learning opportunities that keep their future options open. Efforts will continue to improve access to teachers, improve access to educational experiences, and improve understanding of and access to further education and employment.

The department remains committed to working with country teachers, leaders, children and young people around our shared aspiration of ensuring all children and young people are learning and thriving in every community across our state.



Professor Martin Westwell
Chief Executive

OUR GOALS



1

COUNTRY WORKFORCE

Quality leadership and expert teaching in every school and every preschool

2

SITE SUPPORT

Country schools and preschools have access to the systems and support they need to be effective

3

LEARNING AND PATHWAYS

Country children and young people have access to quality learning and pathways opportunities

EMBEDDING A COUNTRY FOCUS



Since November 2022 we have:

- Re-designed how country education is represented on our external website, including our dedicated 'country education microsite', to better promote opportunities and awareness to students, families, educators and sites.
- Further embedded the influence of the Country Education Reference Group by giving country educators and leaders more opportunities to contribute to the shaping of our strategy, our policy and to improve outcomes for country children and young people.
- Increased our investment in the South Australian Rural Youth Ambassadors program from \$30,000 in 2020 to 2022 to \$70,000 in 2023 and 2024 to support country students to develop their learning, leadership and advocacy skills.

Key outcomes and impact:



A refresh of the Country Education website has improved the way we promote the benefits and opportunities of working in the country. The site now provides better access to information on offers, programs and pathways for our country students, families, educators and sites. This will help us to attract graduates and educators considering teaching in the country.



The Country Education Reference Group is helping to strengthen strategy initiatives and future education policy and reforms. This includes active contribution of knowledge and expertise to design the Teach First in Country Program, our housing pilot, and the future direction for the strategy.



Our Rural Youth Ambassador program connected 21 students representing 8 regions with senior leaders including Ministers and members of parliament, the Chief Executive and other Department for Education executives, the Country Education Reference Group, and deans of universities to share ideas on how to improve country education.



[Find out more about the incentives, support and opportunities to teach in country](#)



The Rural Youth Ambassador program has had a very positive impact on my schooling. Before the program I felt as if I was idling through school, never fully applying myself due to my fixed mindset. After my experience in the program, I feel my schooling has become a much higher priority in my life which has increased my engagement and therefore positively impacted my results.

**Rural Youth Ambassador,
2023 cohort.**



In reflecting on their experience being part of the **Country Education Reference Group**, members commented that the group and model has been more effective than any other forum they have been part of for several years and has provided them the opportunity to be advocates for country education at the system level through genuine consultation and collaboration.

GOAL 1: COUNTRY WORKFORCE

Quality leadership and expert teaching in every school and every preschool

Since November 2022 we have:

- Provided financial and other support for pre-service teachers to undertake a professional experience placement at a country site, which helped them better understand the opportunities available for future employment in the country.
- Designed and implemented a new approach called 'Teach First in Country' which aims to attract high-quality early career teachers into country regions. This program offers graduate teachers financial, onboarding and mentoring incentives to give them a supported start in the country.
- Delivered a range of promotional activities to increase awareness of employment pathways and opportunities to attract more teachers to country. This included a marketing campaign showcasing country regions and teacher stories and taking pre-service teachers on country tours to connect with sites and the regions.
- Continued to address challenges filling temporary relief teaching through our country relief and capacity program, which supports metropolitan teachers to undertake short-term deployment to country areas.

Key outcomes and impact:

36



36 pre-service teachers undertook our professional experience placement program in 2023. We have expanded the program in 2024 with all 59 places filled.

22



The Teach First in Country program launched with 22 pre-service teachers securing positions, where they are supported with professional learning and other activities connecting them with their country site to support them to have a great start in the classroom for 2024.

2100



Over 2100 relief teaching days were covered between November 2022 and November 2023 supporting country sites to meet their staffing needs.



[Hear from our country teachers on why they made the move](#)

John Pirie Secondary School was experiencing challenges filling a middle school teaching position. A pre-service teacher that hadn't ever considered teaching in the country took one of our funded country professional experience placements at this site in 2023. They enjoyed the experience so much that they applied for the Teach First in Country program and won an ongoing (permanent) position at John Pirie Secondary School starting in 2024.



The country relief and capacity program provided extensive fly in fly out teacher support to Coober Pedy Area School. In addition to ensuring the effective operation of the school, these teachers have contributed to improved educational outcomes including supporting students through SACE and NAPLAN. The program has ensured continuity of learning for our students as well as provided a stable staffing position for our school.

Maurice Saah,
Principal, Coober Pedy Area School



GOAL 2: SITE SUPPORT

Country schools and preschools have access to the systems and support they need to be effective

Since November 2022 we have:

- Completed our program of work to improve ICT infrastructure in country schools.
- Continued our work using central business improvement expertise to help country sites identify and address administrative burden relating to policy, process or systems. Country sites were consulted to understand their administrative problem areas, identify and implement 'quick wins' wherever possible, and reach agreement regarding longer term solutions to more significant issues.
- Expanded a tele-practice service for psychology, established a tele-practice service for speech pathology, finalised an external providers panel available to country sites and increased specialist resources to support the expansion.
- Provided additional investment to improve the supply of and access to government employee housing, and supported the process of relocating educators and leaders to Ceduna, Moonta and surrounding areas. This program included offering an employee concierge service and additional incentives consisting of increased rental concession and a digital support package.

Key outcomes and impact:

100%



100% of the 68 country schools with agreed investment plans received their ICT infrastructure improvements to support digital technologies in teaching, learning and operations.

45



Consulted with 45 country sites to identify opportunities to reduce administrative burden through process, policy or system reform. Several 'quick win' improvements have been made with further opportunities being explored in 2024.

311



Improved accessibility to psychology and speech pathology services in country areas with 311 students receiving services through local providers and 65 students receiving tele-practice assessments.

18



The initial country housing pilot program in 2023 supported 18 educators relocate to 5 sites in areas with severe housing shortages by working with both the government employee housing service and private rental providers. The program has now been expanded to further test the impact of the service statewide in 2024.



[Learn more about what telepractice is and the advantages for children and young people](#)



Accessing tele-practice appointments has been crucial for our semi-rural site, reducing psychologists' travel time from distant regional or city offices and allowing more time for serving schools and students.

Palmer Primary School.



Frances Primary School had been using staff mobile phones to address connectivity issues across the site. The ICT investment means the school now has reliable phone and internet services for the benefit of students and staff. The school receives ongoing ICT support both at the school and remotely to ensure issues are dealt with quickly and the improved systems and hardware are maintained.

GOAL 3: LEARNING AND PATHWAYS

Country children and young people have access to quality learning and pathway opportunities

Since November 2022 we have:

- Completed a review of the Eyre Peninsula Alliance local delivery model where participating schools in the region share specialist teachers to deliver blended online and face-to-face curriculum. The review identified several ways in which the model can be further refined across staffing, funding, governance, ICT and evaluation.
- Facilitated consultations between our country stakeholders and Open Access College to identify potential opportunities that will provide an improved learning experience for students in country schools who access subjects online.

Key outcomes and impact:

100



Contributed towards providing the Eyre Peninsula Alliance with leadership staff to support its local delivery program in 2024, which is anticipated to take on more than 100 SACE-level students (the largest cohort since the model's inception).

The review of the **Eyre Peninsula Alliance** local delivery model identified the core components that make it an effective way to maintain and extend curriculum choice for country students. Success of the model was attributed to it being locally owned and led by educators and leaders who are familiar with students and the context in which they learn, high levels of engagement from both students and educators, the effective use of digital technology, the focused effort on core SACE subjects, and a collective approach to financial and other support between participating sites. Local delivery also helps to retain specialist educators as they get to teach in areas of their passion, and it helps students stay in their school community by providing access to subjects that are essential to their future pathways.



A **Central Yorke School** teacher required short term accommodation during term 1 2023 due to a lack of available housing. The employee concierge service team supported these arrangements on their behalf, while working to secure a property suitable to their needs. The educator was highly complementary of the role played by the concierge team in finding accommodation to call home.

