Access to Education for Rural Students

Tabled 3 April 2014
Background

Rural students:

• 30 per cent of the school student population
• more likely to come from a disadvantaged background
• are less likely to:
  • complete Year 12
  • study at higher levels
  • attend university.

Socio-economic disadvantage in metropolitan and rural Victoria, 2006

Metropolitan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socio-economic disadvantage</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 – Most disadvantage</td>
<td>41.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 – Least disadvantage</td>
<td>12.9</td>
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Rural

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socio-economic disadvantage</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 – Most disadvantage</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>26.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>28.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>24.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 – Least disadvantage</td>
<td>6.1</td>
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Recent reviews identify common barriers to rural students’ greater participation in further education. These include:

- distance
- cost
- socio-cultural factors such as:
  - lower educational aspirations
  - different family influences.
Audit objective and scope

To assess the effectiveness of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development’s (the department) activities to ensure that Victorians in rural areas have access to a high-quality education.

We sought to determine whether:

• the department understands the barriers facing rural students
• the department has adopted a comprehensive approach to providing education in rural areas
• rural students have access to a high-quality education, and their educational outcomes are improving.
Audit objective and scope – continued

Public Transport Victoria manages the School Bus Program in partnership with the department. It is responsible for service contracts, route planning and monitoring operations.

Photo courtesy of DEECD.
Conclusions

• The department has not provided access to high-quality education for all students.

• The gap in performance between rural and metropolitan students in Victoria has persisted.

• The department has a limited understanding of the impact of:
  • its activities in rural education
  • recent training reforms on rural training provision.

• The department’s plan to address gaps in rural student performance is behind schedule.
Findings – Outcomes for rural students

School attendance of students in Years 7–10 (per cent)
Findings – Outcomes for rural students – continued

Senior secondary school completion rates for 19 year-olds (per cent)
Findings – Outcomes for rural students – continued

Destinations of students who completed Year 12 by location, 2013 (per cent)

Note: NILFET stands for 'not in the labour force, education or training'.
Findings – Outcomes for rural students – continued

Number of government-subsidised vocational education and training (VET) enrolments by location, 2008–12
Findings – Addressing the barriers to accessing a high-quality education

• The department has commissioned research.
• Victorian and Commonwealth funding is provided to address disadvantage.
• The department implements dedicated programs.
  • Most significant is the School Bus Program.
• Schools were critical of the School Bus Program.
• Steps are being taken to improve it.

Photo courtesy of DEECD.
Findings – Addressing the barriers to accessing a high-quality education – continued

• Significant VET reforms since 2009 have increased the share of private providers.
• Difficult to predict how providers will respond to subsidy changes.
• The department does not know how changes will impact on rural provision of training in future.
Findings – Addressing the barriers to accessing a high-quality education – continued

• The department is developing a Rural and Regional Plan.
• The plan needs to be:
  • based on research and comprehensive engagement
  • targeted with activities to achieve outcomes
  • measureable and contain periodic reviews.
• Currently the plan lacks specific actions and is behind schedule.
### Summary of recommendations

<table>
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<th>Accept</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1. comprehensively evaluates the impact of its current activities to support rural students</td>
<td>✔</td>
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<td>2. completes its Rural and Regional Plan</td>
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<td>3. develops and implements a method to systematically monitor performance of rural schools</td>
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<td>4. provides more targeted information on pathways into further education</td>
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<td>5. continues to closely monitor changes in the rural VET market.</td>
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Related audits

Future audits

• The Annual Plan will set out future audit topics in June 2014.

Previous audits

• Student Completion Rates, November 2012
• Science and Maths Participation Rates and Initiatives, June 2012
• Casual Relief Teacher Arrangements, April 2012
For further information on this presentation please contact:

Victorian Auditor-General’s Office
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