



Senator the Hon Bridget McKenzie

Minister for Emergency Management and National Recovery and Resilience
Minister for Regionalisation, Regional Communications and Regional Education
Leader of the Nationals in the Senate
Senator for Victoria

Ref: MB22-000110

Mr Michael Brennan
Chair
Productivity Commission
GPO Box 1428
Canberra City ACT 2601

Dear Mr Brennan

Michael,

I look forward to the Productivity Commission's assessment and review of the National School Reform Agreement 2019-2023 (the agreement). I welcome any options you might develop through your assessment that would maximise our ability to achieve nationwide, quality education for all students. This includes accessing appropriate data to measure our progress towards the outcomes of the agreement.

Regional and remote students require more support than those in metropolitan areas. Students' NAPLAN scores continue to be lower in regional and remote areas. Regional and remote locations also have lower school attendance rates, with 2021 school attendance data showing that attendance rates are declining faster in regional and remote areas. People in regional and remote areas are less than half as likely as their metropolitan counterparts to obtain a bachelor's degree or higher by the age of 35, and are 40 per cent less likely to have a Certificate IV or higher.

Teachers in these settings are also subject to unique and complex issues. For example, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership's spotlight report on Professional Learning for Rural, Regional and Remote Teachers (2019) highlights challenges with finding and accessing high quality professional learning, and with collaborating between schools.

Regional and remote students are a priority equity cohort in the agreement. As such, I ask you to carefully consider their education needs in your assessment of the effectiveness and appropriateness of the National Policy Initiatives and of the agreement as a whole. For example, regional and remote schools often have difficulty attracting high quality teachers and leaders and keeping them for the long term. Many schools also have challenges in getting access to reliable, affordable ICT solutions. Regional and remote areas are diverse and have varying needs, so one solution may not be appropriate for all regions. It is important that the National Policy Initiatives be examined with this diversity in mind.

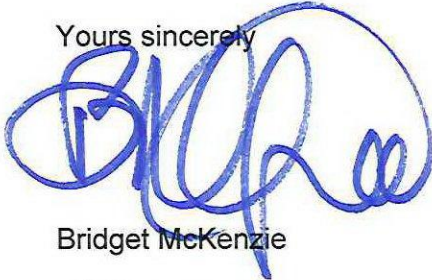
I also encourage you to focus on regional and remote students when you assess the appropriateness of the National Measurement Framework for Schooling in Australia. It is vitally important that we are able to monitor the participation, achievement and attainment of our school students – and that the monitoring is accurate and equitable.

Data is a key part of ensuring that we provide support to the right areas and provide the best possible education for all Australian students, and it is important that the data we gather.

The wellbeing of all students has remained front of mind for the Australian Government during the agreement, including the critical importance of supporting and facilitating the educational achievement of priority equity cohorts such as students living in regional and remote locations. The review should consider how current initiatives under the agreement are meeting the needs of this cohort.

Thank you again for undertaking this work.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Bridget McKenzie', is written over the typed name.

Bridget McKenzie

07 APR 2022