



# Rural and Remote Education

## Effective partnerships and connections

### Current State

- Access to allied health services in rural and remote communities may be limited or non-existent.
- School staff and leaders have varying skills and expertise in facilitating support for students with additional learning needs.
- State boundaries can limit teachers' opportunities to work with nearby colleagues and build professional networks.
- Some students and families travel long distances to access services in their own state when the closest service is available in the neighbouring state or territory.

### Future State

- Specialist centres coordinate and provide rural and remote schools with access to the expertise and assistance they require from allied health services.
- Teachers and school leaders have access to professional learning and expert advice so they can meet the learning and support needs of every student.
- Teachers are able to work across borders to access professional networks and expertise.
- Students and their families have access to cross border facilities and services.

### 2014

### 2015

### 2016

### 2017

Professional learning and tools available to assist teachers to meet the learning and support needs of every student.

Existing specialist centres in Dubbo and Wagga Wagga extended to provide additional expertise in student health and wellbeing.

New specialist centres established in Broken Hill and Tamworth.

More specialist centres established in rural and remote locations.

All 15 specialist centres operating in rural and remote NSW to provide expert and coordinated advice and support services to schools.

Ten postgraduate scholarships available for staff working in the specialist centres at Wagga Wagga, Tamworth, Dubbo and Broken Hill.

Four Early Childhood Scholarships for early childhood educators working in Wagga Wagga, Tamworth, Dubbo and Broken Hill Centres.

Youth Worker traineeships available to schools or education networks employing a Youth Worker.

Additional Youth Worker traineeships available.

## Specialist centres in action

NSW public schools provide schooling for a very diverse population of children and young people. Most children and young people thrive throughout childhood, during their teenage years and into adulthood. The support of their parents, carers and their schools is critical to their successful growth into adults.

Some children and young people, regrettably, have difficult home, social and community experiences, which at school combine into a mix of challenges that impact on their learning, friendships and behaviour. Through no fault of their own, their experiences with school are likely to be challenging and disruptive, and many of these young people become chronic school non-attenders and disengage from school.

Left unsupported, they are more likely to be at risk of having poorer educational outcomes and, in their adult life, experience unemployment, mental health and/or drug addiction problems.

Things need to be done differently to better support these children and young people, their families and the schools they attend.

The Department's network of specialist centres will assist schools as they identify and put in place the critical "wrap around" supports for children and young people they determine to be most at risk. This will be done by using departmental expertise and directly linking schools and families with government and non-government specialist services across health and community services.

### Case Study 1:

A 9 year old Aboriginal boy is enrolled in a small primary school in rural NSW. It is in a small isolated town. There are five teachers in the school and the boy's teacher has just started teaching. He has a hearing loss because of his otitis media and significant language delay requiring intensive speech pathology. He has to travel 50 kms to attend speech therapy as it is not available in his local community. The teacher does not know how to develop his language in the classroom or how to support his hearing loss.

In the future the specialist centre based in Wagga Wagga will assist the school with expertise for speech assessment and support the boy's parents and his teacher to develop specific language interventions to use in the classroom and at home. The speech pathologist will be able to provide professional learning for his teacher so that she can assist in further developing his speech and language through her daily teaching program. In turn this will help her address the needs of other students who may have similar speech and language problems in the future. The specialist centre will also be able to arrange for NSW Health to put the school community through its preventative health promotion program on otitis media.

### Case Study 2:

A secondary school in rural NSW has a total of 40 staff who live in the local community. Most staff are young and early career teachers. The school's counsellor is also new. The identification of students with a wide range of mental health issues has been increasing and staff do not feel they have the skills and expertise to support these students.

In the future the specialist centre in Tamworth will be the school's contact point to support these teachers with access to expertise from a senior psychologist and allied health professionals. These staff will be able provide and arrange mental health assessments and provide guidance on strategies for managing students with mental health issues. Staff will be able to access targeted professional learning focussing on understanding and supporting students with mental health problems through the school's programs.

### Case Study 3:

A central school in rural NSW has a school enrolment of 130 students K-12. The isolated town has limited access to health and wellbeing services. A 14 year old girl who is in out of home care is about to enrol in the school. She has siblings living in out of home care in another town. The girl has been subjected to abuse and neglect in her paternal home and has post-traumatic stress disorder. The school does not know how they can best support her complex needs or where staff can draw on expert professional advice.

In the future the specialist centre in Dubbo will be able to support the school's case management of the student by arranging professional learning for staff in supporting the student's post-traumatic stress. The centre will also have capacity to streamline the provision of health and specialist counselling services, as well as assist the girl in maintaining her contact with her siblings and engaging her in social support services outside of school hours.

# Rural and Remote Education

## FAQ: Effective partnerships and connections

### Q1 What is a specialist centre?

Specialist centres are a state-wide network of specialist assistance accessed through a single local point of contact. Specialist centres will bring together coordinated inter-agency health and wellbeing services through the expertise of specialist departmental staff working in collaboration with other government and non-government agencies. These services will be in addition to what is already available in schools.

Specialist services are not always readily available throughout rural NSW and many families are required to travel long distances to access a range of health and wellbeing services. The specialist centres will ensure that, when required, rural and remote school communities can access the appropriate, specialised educational support and services they need for their students and teachers.

### Q2 How many specialist centres will there be and where will they be located?

Specialist centres already existing in Dubbo and Wagga Wagga will be extended in 2014 to provide additional expertise in areas such as education psychology, school attendance and student health and wellbeing. New centres will be established in Broken Hill and Tamworth.

From 2015, more specialist centres will be established and by the end of 2016, 15 of 20 specialist centres will be operating in rural and regional NSW.

### Q3 What funding will be available to support the centres?

Over the next four years over \$15 million in additional funding has been allocated for operational support and to enhance expertise in areas such as youth, social and welfare work, speech, language and health care across the State network of specialist centres.

### Q4 What type of specialist services will be attached to each support centre?

The specific needs of each local school community will determine the types of support and services each specialist centre will provide. Some communities may need expert support and advice about effective transition to school. Other communities may need their specialist centre to coordinate staff whose area of expertise is working with students with mental health, wellbeing or engagement issues. The network of specialist centres will draw on the expertise of Departmental staff, other government agencies and non-government organisations.

Over time the specialised services provided by these centres may alter in response to changing student, school or community needs. The Department is currently working with the NSW Ministry of Health and other organisations on how best to staff the state-wide network of specialist centres.

### Q5 Will the role of school counsellors change?

School counsellors will continue to provide support to their schools as they do now. As specialist centres are established and provide enhanced services to schools, school counsellors will be better supported in their day to day work in schools with students.

### Q6 What are Student Support Officer traineeships and how will they work?

There are currently 50 Student Support Officer positions in high schools across NSW. If individual schools or education networks decide to engage a youth worker, the young person will be offered support to undertake a traineeship. This traineeship will provide a career pathway for suitable young people in the local community and give rural and remote schools the flexibility to tailor a position to meet their local needs. The youth worker will work with teachers and Learning and Support teams. Traineeships will be available to both primary and secondary schools.

Any school or group of schools establishing a youth worker position will be able to offer a traineeship provided the youth worker meets the eligibility requirements for a traineeship. The salary cost will be met by the school or group of schools. The cost of the training will be met by State Training Services.

## **Q7** What support will teachers and school leaders receive to help personalise learning and support for students who are at potential risk?

Through the *Every Student, Every School* strategy a range of tools will be available for schools on personalising learning and support for students based on:

- collaboration with students, parents, carers and community
- identifying specific needs of individual students
- identifying and providing the support each student needs and assessing the impact of this support.