



AUSTRALIAN PARENTS COUNCIL Inc.
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Families forced to home educate during COVID-19 crisis need urgent help

The Australian Parents Council says the government needs to step up and better support students and their families forced into home learning during the COVID-19 crisis.

In a letter to the Education Minister Dan Tehan, the Australian Parents Council (APC) says immediate action is required to help parents, many of whom have lost their jobs, or are taking time off work or trying to juggle work from home to be with children.

‘The impact on parents is huge. They are trying to adapt to supporting their children’s learning at home.’

‘With the majority of children across the country now facing home schooling, students, parents, teachers and schools urgently need immediate support and resources to cope with the educational, psychological and financial impact of this current unprecedented reality.

‘The medium and long-term impact of school closures is also very worrying. Parents are concerned about how children are going to make up lost ground and how this will impact their schooling, and the impact on teachers, schools, and sectors.’

‘Many parents have lost their jobs or seen their income fall dramatically, putting them under enormous financial pressure. For parents in the non-government sector there is also the added obligation to continue paying school fees at the same time.’

Non-government schools have often been leading the way in delivering remote education and talk of withdrawing their funding is also a big concern for parents at a time of so much other uncertainty.

APC asks for a virtual meeting with the Minister in the letter to discuss the crisis at the earliest opportunity.

The letter lays out a number of parent concerns, and calls for:

- Better communication so that parents are not ‘left in the dark’
- Better engagement of parents
- Support for parents to manage home learning
- Advice on what Term 2 looks like
- A review of student assessments
- Better use of national resources and community capacity, including a national register of qualified teaching and support staff.

The letter explains that ‘Parents would like more clear and concise information and updates.

‘The government clearly needs to explain why it is in the best interests of children, that schools have not all closed. Some of the current arguments being put forward about keeping children in school centre on keeping parents, especially essential workers like medical professionals, at work. This is not an argument that reassures parents.’

‘The safety and wellbeing of all school communities - students, families, teachers, principals and staff - must be the focus.’

The letter also explains that parents need support and really clear advice on how to manage home learning, and includes a suggestion for a national parent portal.

‘Parents are not professional teachers and can’t replace the expertise of trained educators, but a little bit of reliable information could go a long way and would be far superior to the random advice, much of it from overseas, that parents are likely to get from Google searches.’

The letter also calls for a number of special provisions to help families cope, including:

- Respite options for children with additional needs
- Assistance for low literacy parents to support online learning
- Support for IT access, borrowing schemes for devices, internet cost relief and/or access.
- Support for families of young children and those without capacity for online learning.

The letter concludes by saying that support provided to parents will have a positive impact.

‘The role of parents has suddenly become much more active in the management and support of education for millions of children, and all support provided to parents will have a positive impact.’

‘In this difficult and disruptive time anything that can produce a benefit for students is surely worth the investment of resources. There is much to be gained and nothing to be lost by engaging parents better in supporting their children’s learning at the moment.’

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