

COUNTRY EDUCATION STRATEGY

2025 Progress Report



Government of South Australia
Department for Education



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

South Australia is home to more than 30 Aboriginal groups, with distinct beliefs, cultural practices and languages. The story of education in country South Australia includes the traditional knowledge passed down through generations of Aboriginal people. Today, understanding and engagement with diverse Aboriginal histories and cultures forms an essential part of children's learning.

We acknowledge that work undertaken to develop and implement this strategy has taken place on the traditional lands of South Australia's First Peoples and we respect their spiritual relationship with their country.

We also acknowledge the Aboriginal students, parents and caregivers, teachers, leaders and support staff who have contributed their knowledge and experience to support the development of this strategy.

South Australian Tourism Commission, Adam Bruzzone



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MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

I am pleased to share the progress we made together in 2025 under South Australia's Country Education Strategy.

Since its launch in September 2021, the strategy has invested over \$15.9 million into strategic efforts to help our country students learn and thrive. Co-designed with country educators, leaders and students to address the real challenges facing our regions, the strategy focuses on 3 key focus areas:

- Improved access to teachers.
- Improved access to educational experiences.
- Improved understanding of and access to post-school pathways.

Our strategy remains agile and continues to adapt to the changing needs of country students, families and staff.

This year, we introduced several new initiatives to address the evolving needs of country sites and the communities they serve. In response to the ongoing drought, we allocated over \$790,000 in targeted support ensuring students affected by drought could attend camps and excursions.

At the same time, we continued to strengthen our teaching workforce in the country by launching the International Recruitment Program to attract skilled educators from overseas while continuing to support local recruitment efforts. We also saw the establishment of newly built houses dedicated to supporting our country teachers in Renmark, Ceduna, Mount Gambier and Moonta Bay via our country teacher housing initiative.

Our annual progress report details how the Country Education Strategy continues to make an impact for country children and young people. Importantly, it demonstrates how country voices are directly shaping our collective priorities and helping realise our vision for education in country South Australia. While this report offers a snapshot of our achievements, it's just one part of the comprehensive work we are doing to improve educational outcomes for country children and young people.

I look forward to continuing to share our journey and celebrating the accomplishments of our country preschools and schools.



Professor Martin Westwell
Chief Executive
Department for Education

2025 AT A GLANCE

OUR FOCUS AREAS:



Improved access to teachers



Improved access to educational experiences



Improved understanding of and access to post-school pathways

New initiative for 2025

Ongoing programs

19 pre-service teachers received extra support for a strong start in the classroom



Teach First in Country

41 scholarship recipients completed country placements



Professional Experience Placements

52 pre-service teachers went on 8 tours



Country Tours

5 experienced teachers placed at country sites



International Recruitment

635 staff supported



162 sites supported

Country Housing

3893 days covered across



65 country sites

Country Relief and Capacity

22 students from



21 country schools participated

Rural Youth Ambassadors

4 reference group meetings



Country Education Reference Group

269 students from **21** schools to attend camps and excursions



Year 7 School Card Camps and Excursions Trial

5701 students from **104** schools to attend camps and excursions



Drought Assistance

450+ stakeholders contributed insights across 39 site visits



Country Student Access and Choice

IMPACTS

Country students have greater access to teachers who understand their context and needs

Country students have greater access to a breadth and depth of educational opportunities

Country voices shape our collective priorities and help to realise our vision for country education

COUNTRY STUDENTS HAVE GREATER ACCESS TO TEACHERS WHO UNDERSTAND THEIR CONTEXT AND NEEDS

In 2025 we continued to improve country students' access to teachers. We invested in country teacher housing and made the Country Incentive Zone Allowance ongoing.

Programs like Teach First in Country provided targeted support for pre-service teachers starting their careers in the country, with 19 pre-service teachers participating in the program this year, receiving additional support to ensure a strong start in the classroom. Through our Country Tours program, 52 pre-service teachers participated in 8 tours to learn about the professional and lifestyle benefits of teaching in rural areas. We also awarded 41 scholarships to pre-service teachers to undertake placements – with 87.5% of eligible recipients gaining employment with the department as teachers in 2026.

We launched a new program designed to attract international talent to country sites. In 2025, 3 international teachers were sponsored to work in our country schools, and an additional 2 have been supported to move to country South Australia. Our Country Housing program assisted 635 teachers and leaders in securing suitable accommodation, easing the transition, and supporting retention.

Meeting daily staffing needs remains a priority. Through the Country Relief and Capacity program, schools were supported to employ temporary relief staff, with 3,893 relief teaching days covered across 65 country sites.

SPOTLIGHT: KIM'S STORY

When Kim started her Master of Teaching at UniSA, she didn't expect her studies to take her to the heart of outback South Australia. Thanks to the Country Tours opportunity, Kim was able to secure her final university placement and a position in the Teach First in Country program. She now considers Coober Pedy Area School her second home.

"They provided me with invaluable experiences, connections and a heads up on what I could expect on my future job."

Kim says living and working in a regional area offers unique support and opportunities and she was surprised by the level of expert assistance provided by the Literacy Guarantee Unit and Student Support Services. She also appreciates the quieter pace compared to city schools.

"Being part of the school and community has been the most rewarding part," Kim says. "It's more than just teaching—the connections you make really matter."



SPOTLIGHT: BEYOND HOUSING – SUPPORTING BELONGING BY FOSTERING COMMUNITY

Poinsettia Village is a former retirement village in Port Augusta. We have extensively refurbished 8 units. Further development will also include a communal BBQ area to allow teachers to socialise within the village and build a sense of community amongst the teachers living there. Five of these units have been allocated to teachers, providing them with secure housing. The remaining 3 are being used to support the Country Housing program and Country Relief and Capacity program and other relief staff as well as pre-service teachers undertaking placements in the area.

COUNTRY STUDENTS HAVE GREATER ACCESS TO DIVERSE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Students living in the country face unique place-based challenges in accessing educational opportunities.

Initiatives to address these challenges delivered in 2025 include:

Year 7 School Card excursion trial

Two hundred and sixty nine students from 21 country schools received financial support to attend camps and excursions. The program aimed to enable students from low socio-economic backgrounds to access extracurricular activities, build friendships and feel a sense of belonging as they move into secondary school.

Evaluation showed that 85% of participating schools said the support made camps possible for students, and 92% said it improved belonging and engagement.

Country student subject access and choice

We consulted over 450 people across 39 country sites to capture innovative local approaches and develop recommendations on ways to improve subject options for country students.

We also provided targeted support for new local delivery models. This included mentoring for teachers delivering through hybrid learning, advising on technology and helping teachers and students from different schools connect, collaborate and complete their learning together.

Financial support for students impacted by drought – camps and excursions

As part of the state government's Drought Support Package, the department helped country students affected by drought attend school camps and excursions. These students often face extra challenges when participating in excursions, particularly by geographic isolation which can increase travel costs.

More than 5,700 students from 104 schools were supported to participate in camps and excursions, exploring their own region or travelling to Adelaide, including:

- Limestone Coast students travelling to Adelaide to participate in the DreamBIG Children's festival to learn about the arts
- Riverland students travelling to the Adelaide Hills to learn about science and geography
- Mid North students travelling to the Adelaide coastline to conduct experiments as part of a Geography field trip
- Far west students travelling to the Flinders Ranges to explore a new environment, travel on the Pichi Richi Railway and complement learning through the PE, health and science curriculums.



SPOTLIGHT: KAPUNDA HIGH SCHOOL

Kapunda High School, located on the outskirts of the Barossa Valley, received funding to support students who have been financially impacted by drought, enabling broader participation in camps and excursions.

Principal Tim Jones noted that the economic strain on the region's agribusinesses impacted families and the broader community.

Funding supported camps for years 7 and 10, as well as excursions including tourism education in the Barossa Valley and civics and citizenship education in Adelaide.

COUNTRY VOICES SHAPE OUR COLLECTIVE PRIORITIES AND HELP REALISE OUR VISION FOR COUNTRY EDUCATION

The voices of country students, staff, families and communities are essential in shaping our programs and strategies. By continuing to embed country voices in the delivery of our strategy, we ensure that our programs meet the most pressing needs as identified by our stakeholders.

The Country Education Reference Group provides a representative voice for country learners, teachers and leaders, and informs the implementation of the strategy and strategic departmental decisions related to country education. Members meet each term and contribute their expertise and insights from living and working in the country, ensuring country perspectives and needs shape priorities and strengthen outcomes for country learners.

The South Australian Rural Youth Ambassadors (RYA) program is run by the South Australian Area School Leaders Association with funding from the Department for Education. This initiative empowers young people from country communities by building their leadership and advocacy skills, enriching both their own opportunities and those of their peers. Additionally, the ambassadors can also provide vital student voice to the system and ensure that country perspectives and needs of country students are considered in policy development.

In 2025, 21 ambassadors attended 3 forums in Adelaide. Ambassadors facilitated 6 regional forums attended by over 100 country students to discuss life and education in the country.

RYA PROGRAM IMPACTS

Personal growth



83% felt capable after the program, up from 18% before.

Self confidence



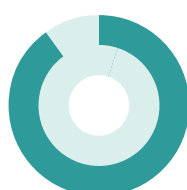
90% felt confident in themselves, up from 5%.

Confidence in the future



95% felt positive about their future, up from 40%.

Policy input



90% felt able to contribute to policy, up from 0%.

LOOKING FORWARD

WHAT WE HEARD FROM RURAL YOUTH AMBASSADORS

"I was half assured that I wanted to become a teacher but after the program I know I wanted to do something that has a positive impact on young people and makes me feel very assured that teaching is the career path I want to travel down."

"Personally, I no longer feel alone, I feel supported, powerful, able to make change, like I can talk to people and lead people. I have grown in many ways, including believing in my own ability and using problem solving and critical thinking. I feel confident again."

While significant progress has been made over the course of the strategy, country students still face significant challenges. Country students still face poor academic outcomes, unique health and wellbeing challenges, and poor understanding of post-school pathways compared to their metro peers. Moreover, we continue to receive feedback from sites that country teaching positions are hard to fill, especially in early childhood, senior school, and specialist subjects.

This is a substantial equity issue in our public education system. The state's country towns and cities are home to nearly half of all government schools and over 40% of preschools, educating around 28% of all our students. Moreover, indigenous students make up 13% of enrolments in country schools compared to 6% of enrolments of metro schools.

The department is committed to breaking the link between background and excellence. Equity between country and metro schools and preschools is a key component of this commitment. The Country Education Strategy will continue to invest in programs and initiatives that create equity in our public education system, ensuring that every child and young person in South Australia receives an education that allows them to grow, learn and thrive.

