

**Submission  
No 27**

## **SUPPORT FOR RURAL AND REGIONAL LEARNER DRIVERS**

**Organisation:** The Association of Independent Schools of New South Wales

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# **Submission from the Association of Independent Schools of NSW**

**Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety, Inquiry; Support for rural and regional learner drivers**

May 2021



**Submission from the Association of Independent Schools of New South Wales (AISNSW) Ltd**

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AISNSW will be pleased to elaborate on any aspects of this submission as required.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Geoff Newcombe AM

**Chief Executive**

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# Introduction

The Association of Independent Schools of New South Wales (AISNSW), as the peak body representing independent schools in New South Wales, welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety's inquiry into support for rural and regional learner drivers.

The NSW independent school sector is vibrant and diverse, providing the community with choice in education. The independent school sector in NSW has nearly 500 schools and campuses, educating 214,000 students and accounting for 17.2% of total NSW school enrolments. Over 25% (144) of these schools and campuses are in regional and remote areas of NSW.

Many independent schools provide a religious or values-based education. Others promote a particular educational philosophy or educate specific cohorts of students such as those with disabilities or students at risk of disengaging with education. Independent schools include:

- Schools with religious beliefs, including Islamic schools, Jewish schools, Christian schools and schools of Christian denominations, such as Anglican, independent Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Seventh-day Adventist and Uniting Church schools
- Schools of educational philosophies, such as Montessori and Rudolf Steiner
- Schools constituted under specific Acts of Parliament, such as Grammar schools
- Community schools, including in Aboriginal communities
- Boarding schools
- Trade schools and schools that specialise in meeting the needs of students with disabilities and students at risk.

Independent schools are institutions founded by religious or other groups in the community and are registered with the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA). Most independent schools are set up and governed independently on an individual school basis. However, some independent schools with common aims and educational philosophies are governed and administered as systems, for example those within the Anglican Schools Corporation and Seventh-day Adventist systems.

Two-thirds (65%) of independent schools in NSW are in communities of low to average socio-economic status. In addition to having low fees, many independent schools are small, with almost half (40%) educating fewer than 200 students.

AISNSW provides a wide range of services to independent schools throughout NSW to support their provision of education. This support is delivered flexibly to promote equity of access for schools in metropolitan, regional and remote areas. AISNSW staff spend on average four days every week in schools. Recognising that schools outside metropolitan areas often have fewer opportunities to access face to face learning and support, due to a general lack of availability as well as increased financial and time costs required to travel often great distances, AISNSW makes prioritising visits to regional hubs as well as regional and remote schools part of our regular work.

**This submission addressed these terms of reference;**

- (a) Challenges faced by learner drivers in rural and regional areas to get the required training and experience to obtain a licence, and**
  - (b) Options for rural and regional learners to access driver training opportunities**
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Australia has recently experienced one of the most prolonged droughts in recorded history, with the economic and social impact reaching far beyond primary producers and related industries. Regional and remote communities have been struggling with dwindling populations and loss of income, while also battling the devastating impact of bushfires, flood and the impact of COVID-19. Young people in these communities are experiencing relative disadvantage due to isolation, financial stress and threats to wellbeing faced by their families and communities.

Educational outcomes for children and young people are not solely about a specific post-school destination or an end of school examination result. The intrinsic value of schooling is the development and growth of well-rounded, good citizens, capable of making a worthwhile contribution to the community. Schooling provides vital opportunities to engage young people and to provide supportive environments that enable the attainment of the necessary knowledge, skills and experience to continue their education and become productive members of society.

For many in regional areas, access to education, employment and basic services requires young people to drive. The students of today will be the adults of tomorrow, negotiating complex challenges of change in communities where the traditional primary industries may need to adapt. If they are to have the best start, these young people need to be able to participate in their communities as safe, qualified drivers.

### **Why a driver licence is so important for young people in rural and regional areas?**

All students need support to develop independence and work-readiness. Having a driver licence is one way they can significantly improve employment prospects in regional areas where access to public transportation is limited. For many young people, a driver licence means independence and is sometimes a rite of passage. In metropolitan areas, having a driver licence means the ability to meet socially with friends on the weekend, or in some cases, driving to school or work. In regional areas, a young person's capacity to continue their education, access employment opportunities, access basic services and support their family can often depend on their ability to drive. Unlike many young people in metropolitan areas, they can't choose to use public transport as an alternative to driving themselves because the transport links they need often don't exist for the distances and directions they need to travel. According to the 2018 Statistical Report of the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (Chapter 6, Risky driving among Australian teens), approximately one in seven teens living in inner regional areas have their P-plates compared to their counterparts in major cities where the figure is closer to one in 10.

Where barriers exist to obtaining a driver licence, some young people without access to the necessary supports to overcome these barriers may choose instead to take the risk of driving unlicensed. Having unlicensed drivers on the roads puts them and others at risk. Rather than wait for this to happen and punish these unlicensed drivers when they are caught out, or when they are involved in a road crash,

it would be better to address the matter through prevention. It benefits the whole community if young people are supported to gain their licence, and in the process learn to drive safely. .

## **The necessary role of schools in road safety education**

Developing the social and emotional learning required to safely use roads and vehicles needs to be incorporated as an explicit aspect of road safety education in schools to prepare young people as future drivers. This is particularly important for those who rely primarily on the support of their school and teachers for this education when it is not readily available at home. For many students, particularly in rural and regional centres of NSW (where access to driver education training is more difficult than in metropolitan areas) the additional barriers to obtaining a licence can be too great to tackle without targeted support. Schools and teachers are well placed to facilitate the necessary support for these students, particularly for those whose families lack the resources to pay for private driver education training. However, schools can only do this effectively if they are empowered with the knowledge and financial resources to make it happen.

Vibrant communities are prevalent across regional and remote NSW. There are many different examples of excellent practice and innovative success stories in independent schools in regional remote NSW. Common features typically centre around a strong commitment from the school leaders, a willingness to utilise curriculum and timetable flexibility, a focus on developing students' skills, knowledge and capabilities in response to their unique contexts and interests as well as strong partnerships with local communities, local business and the further education and tertiary sector.

Unfortunately, many schools in regional centres also lack access to suitable driver education training (driver supervision) or the financial resources to access suitable fee-for-service resources to support students with driver education. Some of the key challenges faced by learner drivers in rural and regional areas are a lack of opportunities to practice driving skills, difficulty with literacy and numeracy requirements of the driving test, difficulty providing the necessary identification documents, lack of familial role models with a driver licence, generational distrust of government and/or support services or lack of authentic engagement by government and/support agencies, lack of cultural responsiveness to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and communities, and financial barriers including cost of applications.

## **Current barriers to obtaining a driver licence and how they may be addressed**

### **Literacy requirements of the Driver Knowledge Test**

Some students find it difficult to navigate the literacy requirements of the Driver Knowledge Test, to access technology that enables them to practise for the test, and lack the skills and support to navigate the identity requirements necessary to successfully apply for a licence. Schools should:

- be actively supported to provide literacy support for eligible students in Stages 5 and 6 (ie, Years 9-12), focusing on explicit instruction to enable students who need it to access and pass the Driver Knowledge Test
- target support/case management to help students who need support to understand the application forms and to compile the identity documentation required by RMS

- support students with lower levels of literacy to learn complex vocabulary in the learner handbook and on the sample online tests
- provide ease of access for students (particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students) who need support to access birth registrations and/or birth certificates necessary to be able to apply for a licence. While the NSW Registry of Births Deaths & Marriages and NSW Police have simplified these processes, they need to be clearly communicated to students looking for the information and actively promoted to schools who can support their students to understand and access them.

### **Financial barriers**

The cost of obtaining identification documents as well as the cost of permit and testing fees is out of reach for some young people. Access to no-cost application for documentation is available, but not all young people know how to apply and have a mobile phone. Service NSW and the Advocate for Children and Young People (ACYC) are working on an app as a long-term project.

In some cases, young people have already taken the risk of driving unlicensed and have been fined. They are then unable to proceed with obtaining their licence due to their inability to pay existing fines. This creates a cycle of reoffending that the young person may find impossible to break. NSW Police, via local Police Citizens Youth Club (PCYC), can expunge student driving fines on application, yet this is not widely known. If such options were promoted to schools, more would be in a better position to assist their students overcome this barrier to obtaining their driver licence.

### **Lack of understanding of risk and required knowledge for driving**

While some students may have the desire to gain their licence, they may not have the skills, knowledge and behaviours to become safe drivers. This is where schools provide essential education through PDHPE curriculum and through wider school wellbeing education. Teaching and learning in K-10 PDHPE focuses on a strengths-based approach to driving behaviour and equips students with skills and strategies to manage risks to themselves and others. There should be a continued focus on road safety education in Stage 6 through PDHPE and student wellbeing time (for those students who do not study PDHPE past year 10). Through this education, students can learn assertive communication skills and conflict resolution skills to increase their safety and learn to identify situations in which risk behaviour may be increased (including situations involving peers, family members or others). It is important to continue this education in schools beyond year 10, as these are the years when most students are learning to drive.

Part of this education should be genuine cooperation between schools and Police via local PCYC, with engagement and support from Local Government Area Road Safety Officers. Currently, engagement from these officers is variable and depends on the staffing of each council. Anecdotal feedback from schools who have tried to make these connections report that some councils are very responsive, while others consistently fail to respond to schools' attempts to engage. There are also councils that do not have a road safety officer or similar role.



### **Difficulty meeting the requirement for supervised driving hours**

One of the reasons for introducing the requirement for a minimum number of supervised driving hours is based on the notion that involving parents in the process of driver education may help improve cognitive skill deficits and resilience in learner drivers. This is certainly the case for young people who have a qualified parent/adult (with a driver licence and safe driving record) who is willing and able to provide driver supervision. However, some students have no access to role models who can demonstrate or encourage safe driving skills. Some may have a qualified and willing parent who does not have the time to provide the hours of supervision a young person needs due to work or other commitments. Others may have a willing parent, but that parent may engage in unsafe driving practices – including driving without a licence.

While subsidised safe driving courses are available through the local PCYC, access to the course currently requires a base level of supervised driver hours for participants. This means young people without access to a qualified parent/adult cannot access these safe driver courses and therefore may never be able to gain their licence and drive legally and safely. This is one reason an ongoing program providing access to community-based mentors to assist young people transition to independent and safe driving is essential in communities that do not have access to a willing and qualified parent/adult to provide safe driver supervision.

Students need facilitated, integrated and structured time to practice their theoretical and practical driving skills. In some schools, for some student cohorts, it may be appropriate to include timetabled student driving practice hours, or schedule as an extra curricular option where students can participate outside school hours. In some communities, existing agencies operating in the driver education space, such as the PCYC, might have an additional role to play in facilitating young people's access to suitably qualified adults in the local community who would be willing to provide driving supervision for learner drivers.

### ***Driver supervision Certificate IV courses for adults in regional centres***

Access to driver supervision Certificate IV courses for adults in regional centres is currently hosted online, while the practical aspect (considerably large hours) is only offered in metropolitan areas. Access to the practical training needs to be increased in regional areas allowing more adults to become qualified resulting in greater access for young people to qualified driver supervisors.

### **AISNSW school case study example**

Recognising the significant need for many young people outside metropolitan Sydney to obtain a driver licence, AISNSW undertook a project with an independent school in the Western Riverina region that wanted to understand and address the barriers faced by its students in this space. In this school - where over 40% of students identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander - less than 10% had previously been successful in gaining their learner permit and none had successfully gained their Provisional Driving Permit. A video explaining the program is available on the AISNSW website and includes testimony from those involved, including students and school staff (<https://www.aisnsw.edu.au/teachers-and-staff/funded-programs-and-projects/road-safety-education>)

Over nine months, AISNSW worked closely with the school, to deliver professional learning and guidance to educators, and to facilitate connections between the school and the Advocate for Children and Young People and NSW Police to achieve the outcomes of their project. This work also involved AISNSW working in partnership with Transport for NSW, NSW Registry of Births Deaths & Marriages and the NSW Minister for Mental Health, Regional Youth and Women to enable effective information sharing. The program successfully built the capacity of school staff to help their students navigate the process of obtaining their driver licence and connected the students to agencies where they could access resources to help them achieve their goal of becoming safe licenced drivers. These partnerships helped to build trust between the young people involved and agencies such as NSW Police, which was important to sustain the students' continued commitment to the program.

As a result of the program all students involved successfully gained their learner permits. Those students eligible for a provisional driver licence are now well on their way to completing the necessary supervised driving hours to sit the test (part of the solution via the project included training a staff member to become a Certificate IV supervisor).

Through this work, it became clear that the key to supporting young people succeed is having a local system of support that connects schools and community resources such as PCYC, local community/cultural groups and Local Government Area Road Safety Officers (where councils have these officers).

All involved must be made aware of the barriers young people face and all the options available to overcome these barriers and help them succeed. The exact model required will depend on the needs of individual communities and should involve all school sectors represented locally (Government, Catholic Systemic and Independent). Depending on the nature of each school context, (eg, student disabilities, past trauma), students may also require a different delivery of road safety education; therefore, a flexible partnerships model is important. This would include processes to facilitate connections between students and members of the local community who can act as role models for positive driving behaviours. This is particularly important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students where connections to role models and advice is best coming from within their local community.