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CHILD SAFETY COMMISSION OF INQUIRY

STATE OF QUEENSLAND

PROACTIVE STATEMENT NO. 18

STATEMENT OF SHIRLEE GALLO

I, **Shirlee Gallo**, care of Crown Law, Level 11, 50 Ann Street, Brisbane, Assistant Director-General, Department of Education in the State of Queensland state as follows:

1. I am employed as the Regional Director, Far North Queensland (FNQ) Region in Queensland's Department of Education (DoE). I commenced working in DoE in 1993 and was appointed to my current position on 26/09/22.
2. I have a Bachelor of Education and Master of Education. I am a registered teacher.
3. As Regional Director, I am responsible for leading the strategic direction, operational management, and delivery of high-quality education services across the region. My work centres on supporting school leaders, teachers, and staff to lift student outcomes, ensuring compliance with legislation, and fostering inclusive and equitable learning environments. I also collaborate with a wide range of stakeholders to align regional efforts with system priorities and strengthen opportunities for young people.
4. This statement is provided to the Commission of Inquiry into Queensland's child safety system on behalf of DoE.

Program provided in FNQ Region (or provided in collaboration with other agencies)

5. A regional Principal Advisor, Student Protection (PASP) works across the region to support schools in responding to student protection matters by providing a key point of contact for support and advice to principals, school leaders and regional staff.
6. The current FNQ PASP has extensive Child Protection experience and 18 years' work experience across the Child Safety sector. This is an advantage to the region given the

established existing relationships and knowledge of the organisation's operations and complexity/challenges that the FNQ region faces.

7. A Principal Education Officer, Students in Care (PEO SIC) provides specialist operational advice to principals and senior officers on the delivery of projects, and leads and implements regionally-based initiatives that are consistent with a statewide model to maximise learning days and deliver meaningful pathways for students in care. The current FNQ PEO SIC also has extensive Child Safety service knowledge, a background in education and early years, and understands the complexity of FNQ students in care when engaging with education.
8. Both roles with the Student, Child and Family Connect Director portfolio support the development and maintenance of cross-agency partnerships, including working collaboratively to support the education needs of students in care.

Key Initiatives

Cross-agency regional working party

9. A regional working party has been established with the Department of Child Safety, Seniors and Disability Services (Child Safety) Director; Student, Child and Family Connect Director; a School Supervisor; the PASP; PEO SIC; two principal representatives; and a Senior Guidance Officer to progress identified initiatives. This working party has been in place over the last 5 years and has evolved to ensure that it is focused on sharing information between both agencies and monitoring current initiatives to support students in care, address challenges and celebrate successes. The working group meets once every school term (4 times per year).

Transition to Prep support

10. FNQ region has established a process, in partnership with Child Safety, to identify students in care who require a transition to Prep. This process is supported by the PEO SIC, Early Years – Partnerships and Programs (P&P) team, Student Services – Early Childhood Development program team, and Senior Guidance Officers. The process occurs every year and ensures that students have confirmed enrolment places by Term 4 to commence school in the following year. This enables support from a guidance

officer and ensures schools are well prepared to support the Prep student in care to make a successful start to school.

Supported transition to boarding school

11. FNQ region implements a process to ensure early identification, succession planning and ongoing monitoring for students who are in Years 4 to 6 and reside in Community, who require transition to a boarding school for Year 7. This process is supported by the FNQ Transition Support Services. Meetings to inform and plan the process occur every school term and include representatives from both Child Safety Service Centres (CSSC) that have responsibility for the Cape and Torres Strait, alongside DoE regional staff.

Co-located support

12. The PEO SIC frequently works at 6 of the regional CSSCs, working alongside Child Safety staff to provide support with a key focus on support for students in care who are First Nations and who have disability. The FNQ region refers to these students as 'triple vulnerability students' and there are focused supports for these students. Co-location of the PEO SIC within CSSCs also helps to maintain positive relationships between the FNQ region, schools and CSSC staff. This includes the 3 Remote Hub sites in Weipa, Cooktown and Thursday Island, where the PEO SIC travels to support this collaboration. This collaborative co-location provides the opportunity for the joint review of data related to attendance, school disciplinary absences, academic outcomes, part time enrolment plans, as well as joint problem solving of issues raised by CSSCs and the hub sites.

Support for Students in Care

13. There are a number of actions undertaken by the FNQ region to ensure students in care are supported and their engagement in education is maximised. This includes:
- a. The timely progression of Education Support Plan funding in Semester 1 each year to eligible students.
 - b. A focus on students in care who are subject to part time attendance plans to ensure that learning days are maximised. This data is regularly reviewed and

escalated as required to relevant School Supervisors when further action is required.

- c. A focus on students in care who are early school leavers and require support to progress a re-enrolment, re-engagement with education or a transition plan to an alternative program. There is also a focus on students who have active enrolments but poor attendance, and those transitioning from Year 6 in primary school to Year 7 in secondary school.
- d. Monitoring students in care who are subject to school disciplinary absences to ensure appropriate supports are in place to maximise learning days.

Working in partnership with Child Safety

14. There are a number of interagency activities that have been established to address particular concerns in FNQ region. These include:
- a. An interagency meeting, each term, between DoE, Child Safety and Queensland Health representatives in response to paediatric appointments for children subject to Child Safety intervention, with the intention of improving sharing of information and documentation to support these appointments.
 - b. Fostering positive working relationships by facilitating meet and greets to introduce CSSC Managers and Leadership to FNQ school principals.
 - c. The PASP providing extensive support to both agencies when considering new enrolments for students in care, specifically when there are placement changes to ensure the best fit for the student is considered and schools are prepared and supported for the new enrolment.

Key Performance Indicators that monitor and guide practice

15. There are six key performance indicators that monitor and guide practice. These are as follows.
16. First, conduct face-to-face visits to all CSSCs across the region (Atherton, Cairns, Edmonton, Innisfail, North Cairns Lower Cape, Cape York North & Torres Strait)

including all Remote Hubs (Cooktown, Mareeba/Thursday Island and Weipa). Key performance indicator – 6 CSSCs or Remote Hubs visited each school term.

17. Secondly, collaborate with Child Safety, Student Services and Partnership and Programs Directorates to ensure students in care eligible for Prep in 2026 transition successfully. Key performance indicator – 80% of students in care are futured at the end of 2025.
18. Thirdly, collaborate with Child Safety to ensure that students in care in Year 6 transition successfully to Year 7 in 2026. Key performance indicator – 95% of students in care have future enrolments for Year 7 at the end of 2025, with the aim of achieving 100%.
19. Fourthly, collaborate with Child Safety and Transition Support Services to ensure that students in care in Years 4 to 7 who require a boarding placement are supported with a successful planned transition. Key performance indicator – 100% of Year 6 students in care in this cohort will have a boarding enrolment and transition plan at the end of 2025.
20. Fifthly, PASP will review all Monitor at School student protection reports weekly and escalate through the principal any that may require progression to authorities. PASP will record these reports and capture any changes to the outcomes subsequently recorded as a result of progression. Key performance indicator – Mandatory Reporting obligations are met and evidenced with supporting data.
21. Sixthly, focus on supporting Child Safety with the re-engagement of students in care with an education pathway who are Early School Leavers (ESL). Key performance indicator – 95% of ESL are transitioned to an educational pathway, with the aim of achieving 100%.

Services (by the region or brokered)

22. A number of students in care who are high-risk and complex have been supported through Student, Child and Family Connect brokerage funding to access one-on-one teacher aide support for a period to support stability, build confidence and support engagement at school. This short term, immediate intervention has often resulted in

success for students who commenced with part time education programs, with an increase in both attendance and engagement.

23. FNQ region is currently co-designing a referral process for the new specialised alternative learning program that will support students engaged with Youth Justice and our students who are subject to dual orders. This will provide an opportunity for students in care to access a program to cater for their needs. The age cohort is compulsory school age, 10 to 16 years. DoE has partnered with Deadly Inspiring Youth Doing Good (DIYDG) to deliver this program.

Issues/barriers the region or schools experience in supporting students in care

24. There are a number of issues that schools experience which I should bring to the attention of the commission.
25. When concerns are initially raised via the Student Protection Reporting Process and Child Safety screen this as a Standard Child Protection Response, these matters are not always commenced within screening timeframes. This means that increasingly school principals across the region are either directly supporting or overseeing their staff to manage students who are experiencing significant abuse or neglect related concerns. This also means multiple student protection reports are frequently progressed for the same student, sometimes over a prolonged period.
26. There is a process in which Standard Response Assessments that have been unallocated/not commenced by Child Safety for a certain period of time and which meet a criteria known to Child Safety are 'Reviewed and Completed' without a response. These assessments are closed to Child Safety, but there does not appear to be a process by which the DoE is informed. This situation has the potential to create significant issues in terms of oversight of the student.
27. When children have entered the out of home care system, there are challenges associated with the consistency/high turnover/multiple changes in Child Safety Officers (CSO). Principals and their staff often do not know who to contact from a CSSC or are informed the CSO has left/changed. Due to the frequency with which this occurs, CSO's are often unfamiliar with the young person or have not met them and are

subsequently unable to assist the school with their query and/or enrolment process. Due to the high turnover of staff, they are also frequently inexperienced and unable to engage to the extent necessary to address certain issues and achieve resolutions.

28. The lack of availability of CSO's due to their extensive workloads is also problematic with respect to securing their presence at critical meetings, including enrolment and re-entry meetings and case management meetings. This impacts on planning and the absence of key stakeholders affects educational and other outcomes for the student.
29. A high number of students in out of home care are placed in residential care settings. This appears to be increasing due to the lack of available family and kinship care options currently available. The quality of service provision with respect to how Residential Care Managers and their staff work alongside DoE staff differs significantly depending on which provider it is. The level of communication, transparency, commitment and experience of the staff, including the Youth Workers, is directly linked to what kind of outcomes are able to be achieved in transitioning and supporting the student to successfully integrate and remain engaged with education, leading to poorer outcomes, placements breaking down and these young people experiencing significant educational disruption.
30. For various reasons, including uncertainty surrounding the length and stability of placements, many students in out of home care experience multiple placement changes requiring new school enrolments in different areas. As a result, these students can attend multiple schools within short periods of time, which has obvious impacts on and disruption to their education. At times, due to this uncertainty, there can be delays with the enrolment meaning some students experience periods of absence from education altogether.
31. There are a lack of therapeutic supports in place to support students in care externally.

Evolve Services are always at capacity, with very few alternative options.

I make this statement of my own free will believing its contents to be true and correct.

Dated at Mareeba this 29 day of August 2025.

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Witness [Redacted]

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