

CORONAVIRUS — SCHOOLS — REMOTE LEARNING

**376. Hon COLIN de GRUSSA to the Minister for Education and Training:**

I refer to the ongoing impacts of COVID-19 and the move to provide access to education through remote learning and distance education.

- (1) For those not attending a school, to what extent is continued access to education reliant on connectivity to the internet and appropriate electronic devices to access the internet?
- (2) Can the minister confirm that students in low economic circumstances will have equity of access and an equivalent standard of education in the event that they do not have access to the internet or an appropriate electronic device if they are not attending a school?

**Hon SUE ELLERY replied:**

I thank the honourable member for some notice of the question. This question was lodged yesterday before I made the announcement that I made today so I will give the answer that I prepared yesterday and will add to it.

- (1) Continued access to education is not reliant on connectivity to the internet or appropriate electronic devices.
- (2) I continue to work from the premise that no student will be disadvantaged. Students who are not physically present at school are provided either online learning opportunities and/or physical work packages that have been prepared by schools. Electronic or online teaching and learning formats are not necessarily of a superior standard to pen-and-paper packs; however, the Department of Education is working on support for those students who need access to a device as well as the development of guidelines based on ensuring equity for the lending and availability of devices. There are 153 000 devices and 5 000 dongles or SIM cards available.

I will add to that. In addition, students in regional Western Australia, for example, who live in areas where there might not be internet access, the School of Isolated and Distance Education, which already provides a great service, will work intensively with those students. We are making sure that where there is internet access but there is a problem with devices, we will lend families devices. Where internet access is available, but the family cannot afford or for some other reason is not able to provide that, our partners at Telstra have assisted us with 5 000 dongles and SIM cards. But in term 2, in the classroom, it will be a combination of hard copy packages with regular feedback and contact with teachers and online learning where that is possible.