

1. OVERVIEW OF THE SiMERR NATIONAL SURVEY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This book is an abridged version of the full technical report submitted to the Department of Education, Science and Training in May 2006. It provides a summary of the SiMERR National Survey, including a synopsis of the findings, discussion and recommendations.

The National Survey was one of the first priorities of the National Centre of Science, ICT and Mathematics for Rural and Regional Australia (SiMERR Australia), established at the University of New England in July 2004 through a federal government grant. SiMERR Australia aims to support country teachers, students and communities in improving educational outcomes in these subject areas. In particular, SiMERR Australia aims to address concerns about the lower levels of achievement of rural and regional students in these subjects relative to their metropolitan peers.

The purpose of the National Survey was to identify the key issues that rural teachers, parents/caregivers and students see as affecting these outcomes at the primary and secondary levels. It collected base-line data on the characteristics, motivations and needs of teachers, along with perspectives from the three stakeholder groups on the strengths and obstacles associated with science, ICT and mathematics education in their schools.

1.2 ABOUT THE SURVEY

There were two phases of the National Survey. In Phase One, questionnaires were distributed to primary teachers, secondary science, ICT and mathematics teachers, and parent/caregivers in metropolitan, regional and rural schools and communities across Australia. The teachers were asked about the staffing situations at their schools, and the importance and availability of a range of professional development opportunities, resources, and student learning opportunities in their locations. Parents/caregivers were asked for their views on the science, ICT and mathematics education experienced by their children, and the strengths and challenges facing their communities and their children's schools. Survey questionnaires were sent to schools in May 2005, and responses were received from 2940 teachers and 928 parents/caregivers.

In the second phase, research groups in the eight state and territory 'hubs' of SiMERR Australia interviewed over 550 teachers, students and parent/caregivers in 38 Provincial and Remote schools. The interviews provided rich, in-depth perspectives to complement the quantitative data. The hub reports are presented in the companion volume, *Science, ICT and Mathematics Education in Rural and Regional Australia: State and Territory Case Studies*.