The Government will trial a new education position as part of a major effort to improve support for teachers working in the bush, Employment, Education and Training Minister Syd Stirling announced today.

“The trial will be conducted in the Barkly area and will see the establishment of a new Teacher Support Officer position,” Mr Stirling said.

“The role of the new officer will be to provide personal support to teachers living in remote communities and to ensure that their needs are heard and acted on in the regional offices of the Department of Employment, Education and Training.

“There are additional challenges and complexities that come with living and working in remote locations. This new position is aimed at personal support rather than professional support.

“The officer will be expected to establish a good working relationship with each teacher in the region and assist them with their needs and concerns as they arise. He or she will be able to act on each teacher’s behalf to ensure their needs are being addressed without delay.

“For example, if a teacher is unable to get into a regional centre in time to renew the insurance on their motor vehicle, the Teacher Support Officer can organise it for them.

“If a teacher is being frustrated in having their accommodation fixed or an air conditioner repaired, the Teacher Support Officer can push this along on their behalf.

“This initiative is about providing more practical support to remote teaching staff in a range of areas from accommodation needs, to repairs, to moving assistance, to paperwork, to IT support. We want to take some of that worry away from our remote teachers so they can concentrate on what they do best – teaching kids.”

The Barkly pilot will get underway as soon as possible, with advertising for the position starting on Saturday. The pilot will be evaluated for its effectiveness over the following school year with a view to implementing similar positions in other regions.

“The Territory Government is already working to increase professional development opportunities for remote teachers, but it’s often the practical tasks that can prove most challenging and stressful for them,” Mr Stirling said.

“We want to relieve as much of the pressure on our remote teachers as possible so they can focus their energy on lifting the educational standards of their students.”