



# MEDIA RELEASE

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## **SCHOOLS FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER STUDENTS WILL CLOSE WITHOUT ON-GOING SUPPORT FOR BOARDING**

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Independent Schools Australia has warned that large numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students attending boarding schools are at risk of their schools closing, removing the only secondary school option for many from remote communities, if tomorrow's Budget does not secure ongoing funding.

Indigenous Boarding Provider grants were extended in last year's Budget but were intended to be replaced by a longer-term, sustainable solution to the funding shortfall for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding students. However, the outcomes of the Boarding Design Review announced in last year's Budget are unknown, leaving schools and students in limbo.

ISA Chief Executive Officer Graham Catt said some boarding schools had warned they would have no choice but to close without these grants, which were established in 2021 to help keep boarding students engaged in schooling and improve education outcomes.

Removing funding certainty will impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarders, many of whom have no option for secondary schooling in their communities.

"This funding, which was continued in last year's Budget, has been critical to schools' ongoing ability to operate," Mr Catt said. "What these students and their families need now is certainty they can stay at school."

The Independent sector is the largest provider of boarding school education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and many of the 2,335 students are from remote communities where only primary level education is available.

Wesley Meurant, principal of Yirara College in Alice Springs, said losing funding would strike a blow to efforts to 'Closing the Gap' in education. Yirara is the largest Aboriginal Boarding school in Australia with capacity to support 220 students.

"The prospect of losing recurrent funding would strike a fatal blow at the heart of Indigenous education for the most disadvantaged students in the country, and all but ensure a hopeless catalyst for the death of an already widening 'Close the Gap' initiative," Mr Meurant said.

"Boarding school options in the heart of the nation are critical in supporting educational equity for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students seeking to further their educational opportunities.

“In assisting with the ongoing operations of such schooling options the recurrent funding provided under the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) has formed something of a foundation that ensures educational choice for First Nations families.”

ISA is the national peak body representing 1,216 Independent schools with close to 720,000 enrolled students, accounting for approximately 17 per cent of Australian school enrolments and a workforce of 122,000 people. Independent schools are diverse, serving a range of different communities across Australia. Independent schools educate over 19,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, including 2,335 boarding students.

For more information – [www.isa.edu.au](http://www.isa.edu.au)

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ISA Media Contact: Gemma Daley, M 0418 148 821, E [Gemma.Daley@isa.edu.au](mailto:Gemma.Daley@isa.edu.au)