



MEDIA RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DATE: 12 SEPTEMBER 2024

URGENT ACTION NEEDED TO CLOSE THE GAP FOR INDIGENOUS BOARDING

Independent Schools Australia (ISA) is urgently calling on the Federal Government to provide immediate and sustained funding to Indigenous boarding schools, many of which are now at serious risk due to discontinued government grants*.

These schools are essential to the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from remote communities.

Despite being critical to the viability of these schools funding for the Indigenous Boarding Provider grants, which supported more than 2,300 students, was absent from the most recent Federal Budget.

ISA CEO Graham Catt said the Government had previously announced a Boarding Design Review to explore future funding mechanisms, but no outcomes have been publicly released, leaving schools in a precarious situation.

"This is a critical setback for these kids, their communities, and the progress we've made towards closing the education gap," said Mr. Catt.

"Funding to these schools expires at the end of this year, and there have been no outcomes announced from this review. To still have no certainty of next year's funding in September is doing a grave injustice to these schools, their staff, and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students relying on them for an education."

Principal Brendan Franzone of Wongutha Christian Aboriginal School in WA said that, "We currently have 60 Indigenous boarders onsite and any loss of funding would mean the school would have to significantly supplement the boarding budget again, which would reduce the quality of academic, cultural, social and emotional well-being and development, as well as bringing greater challenges for staff including potential burnout and lack of staff retention."

The situation is similarly dire at Yirara College in Alice Springs, where Principal Wesley Meurant emphasised the essential role of fully funded boarding in closing the gap initiatives. "Yirara is working hand-in-hand with the remote communities of the NT to see their young people empowered to lead into the future. Without Yirara, this story will not happen."

ISA CEO Graham Catt said over the last ten years, three Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding schools have closed or ceased to offer boarding, and ISA is deeply concerned that more could follow.

"These schools are doing much of the heavy lifting in educating some of Australia's most disadvantaged students. If additional support is not urgently provided, more of these outstanding schools will face significant hardship, and the future for their students is dire."

"Even if a rescue funding package is announced for the next twelve months, these schools need more certainty than that, and a long-term solution must be put in place."

About Independent Schools and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students:

ISA is the national peak body representing 1,216 Independent schools, with close to 720,000 enrolled students. In 2023 there were 19,299 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled in 987 Independent schools.

Independent schools in remote regions are often the sole providers of education for these communities, with fifty-one schools in the Independent sector having an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enrolment comprising more than 50 per cent of the total enrolment.

The Independent school sector is also the largest provider of boarding in Australia, operating almost 75 per cent of all Australian boarding schools. In 2023 there were 139 boarding schools in the Independent school sector, enrolling 15,204 boarding students. More than fifteen per cent of boarders in Independent boarding schools are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The Independent schools sector also includes nine majority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding schools.

For more information – www.isa.edu.au

**The 2023 Budget papers had \$21.6 million in 2023–24 for a one-year extension of NIAA's Indigenous Boarding Providers Grant program to support approximately 2,300 students. There was no money in this year's budget to continue the program.*

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