



MEDIA RELEASE

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INDIGENOUS BOARDING SCHOOLS RECEIVE CRITICAL FUNDING EXTENSION

Independent Schools Australia (ISA) is pleased to welcome today's announcement by the Federal Government to extend the Indigenous Boarding Schools Grants Program for an additional two years.

This extension comes after months of concerted advocacy by ISA, State and Territory Associations of Independent Schools and Indigenous Boarding Schools, which highlighted the critical importance of these schools for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from remote communities.

ISA CEO Graham Catt said while this is a significant step, ISA continues to call for a permanent, long-term funding solution to ensure that these schools can continue their essential work without interruption.

"After months of campaigning, it's heartening to see the government recognise the importance of Indigenous boarding schools with this funding extension. These schools are more than just educational institutions—they provide cultural, emotional, and pastoral support to thousands of students from remote areas" Mr Catt said.

"But while a two-year extension is welcome, it's not a long-term fix. We need a sustainable, funding model to provide certainty for these schools and the students they serve."

Executive Director of the Association of Independent Schools of the Northern Territory (AISNT), Cheryl Salter said many of these boarding schools are the only option for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in remote communities, where access to secondary education is limited or non-existent.

"The funding extension is a positive step, but the uncertainty isn't over. A permanent solution is needed to ensure students continue to receive the education and support they deserve."

Indigenous boarding schools are vital for supporting Closing the Gap Outcome 5, which seeks to ensure that "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students achieve their full learning potential." Long-term funding is essential to maintaining the progress made towards this goal and ensuring that students from remote communities have access to the same educational opportunities as their peers.

Mr Catt said the focus now will be ensuring a sustainable solution for these schools.

"Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students deserve certainty and support to thrive in their education. A permanent, recurrent funding model would not only keep schools open but would help ensure these students receive the comprehensive services they rely on, including academic instruction, cultural connection, and pastoral care.

It's a small price to pay for securing the futures of some of Australia's most vulnerable students."

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 school sector also includes nine majority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding schools.

For more information – www.isa.edu.au

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