



Key Findings of the 3rd National Indigenous Education & Boarding Symposium

How do parents know that the school, teachers, and boarding staff are able to look after their children professionally, keep them safe, look after their health, respect their culture and provide them with the education to meet their child's needs?

It is hard to believe that in 2020 there are no specific standards to keep Indigenous boarding students safe. This is despite the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and recommendations by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs.

For children in boarding, parents would expect and assume that there are standards to care for their health and wellbeing, to support their specific learning needs, to communicate with families and very importantly, to recognise their cultural needs.

Anthony Bennett, Chair, IEBA



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The 3rd National Indigenous Education and Boarding Symposium held in Geelong from 17-19 March 2020 considered the need/imperative to create a National Indigenous Cultural Boarding Standard, the guiding principles that underpin a Standard and the possible format the Standard may take.

Surprisingly, in 2020 no such standard exists. This Symposium started the national conversation, laid the foundations and gave shape to a National Indigenous Cultural Boarding Standard.

Having a National Indigenous Cultural Boarding Standard is not just about producing a guiding document for boarding schools and residences. Importantly a Standard is about providing assurance to Indigenous families, school governors, to government and indeed the nation that for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, their schools and boarding are culturally safe, that their well-being and mental health requirements are being met and they are receiving an education to meet their needs.

The call for a cultural standard was made by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs in 2017. The Hon Warren Snowdon MP, Shadow Minister for Indigenous Australians, was the deputy chair of that committee. A committed advocate for Indigenous education Mr Snowdon delivered a keynote on *The Need for a Standard* at the Symposium. This keynote can be viewed at www.ieba.com.au/recordings

Guiding Principles

Principles amongst other things are key elements in determining behaviours. They can be a set of values or rules. Principles are the basic ideas or tenets that explain or control how something happens or works. They will form the 'pillars' upon which the National Indigenous Cultural Boarding Standard will stand. They will underpin and determine the shape and content of all that follows.

The Symposium found the Guiding Principles must be:

1. Realistic
2. Implementable
3. Assessable
4. Accessible
5. Reviewable

The Symposium also determined that the following must be included in the development of Guiding Principles:

- **Communication and Relationships** – For example, that communication must be effective, culturally accessible and respectful whilst recognising Indigenous voice
- **Mutual Empowerment** – Intentional Collaboration with students and community at the centre/core
- **Rights and Responsibilities** – the willingness to embrace change to move away from the current and historical paradigm
- **Health and Wellbeing** – recognising and deal with holistic Health and Cultural Identity issues
- **Transition** – recognise and cater for the numerous transition spaces and points
- **Staff Professional Practise** – Competency, Consistency and Cultural Intelligence
- **Governance** – Accountability, Safety, Funding and Indigenous Voice

The keynote presented by Dr Christine Evans, Associate Professor of Practice, National Centre for Cultural Competency, Sydney University can be viewed at www.ieba.com.au/recordings

The Framework for a Standard

Across different industries there are standards that vary in their structures and in the form that compliance takes. Some standards set minimum requirements; others set quality benchmarks. There are also models of standards that are scaled or based upon continuous improvement.

Some standards have voluntary compliance, such as the existing *Boarding Standard for Australian schools and residences*; other standards have legal mandates, such as those in aged care and childcare.

The Symposium determined/considered that the Standard be modelled on a continuous improvement structure with the following caveats:

- Not be self-assessed
- Be strength based, positively phrased and promote excellence
- Include descriptive indicators for Standards
- Have minimum compliance requirements
- Couple with existing, expected school improvement plans and strategies.
- Utilise existing frameworks such as Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership Standards for Principals and Professional Practise
- Be an addition, not an appendix to the existing National Boarding Standard and stand-alone in its own right whilst standing alongside the current standard
- Recognise and incorporate Community knowledge and voice

The keynote presented by Dr Tessa Benveniste, Senior Research Officer, Indigenous Health, Central Queensland University, can be viewed at www.ieba.com.au/recordings

To help bring the National Indigenous Cultural Boarding Standard into reality and stay informed on the progress, subscribe to receive our Boarding Buzz Newsletter.

Who is Indigenous Education and Boarding Australia?

Although we've been serving the boarding sector since 1995, Indigenous Education and Boarding Australia was launched as the new trading name of Boarding Australia in March 2019 at the 'Whatever it takes!' Symposium in Brisbane.

The name is a clear reflection of our scope and was driven by a theory of change model that recognise that whilst boarding is for many young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people their only access to a quality secondary education; a positive boarding experience in the 'traditional' manner does not always improve educational outcomes and opportunities for these students.

Shifting the model of Indigenous education in Australia is not a simple task. It requires many changes including improving education standards and practices in remote Community Schools to prepare some students for secondary boarding, imbedding classroom practice that support Indigenous students, engaging Indigenous families and helping them to champion their child's education. It also requires building pathways beyond school that provide purpose and a 'reason to attend school' as well as developing culturally intelligent staff and organisations. This all needs to be enabled by government policies and funding that appropriately resources and supports boarding schools and their students and communities.

Our vision is *'that all Indigenous students attain educational outcomes that enable them to be successful in their future choices'*, but this will only occur if the many agencies that contribute to a child's education, from early childhood to post schooling, recognise they must be part of the solution.