

MEDIA RELEASE



13 November 2020

Recommendations for Indigenous education in remote and complex environments must become actions not more NAIDOC week rhetoric

“We know what the problems are. What we need urgently is action” claims the Chairperson of Indigenous Education & Boarding Australia (IEBA), Anthony Bennett.

Whilst IEBA welcomes the recommendations in relation to education for Aboriginal and Torres strait Islander students what we don't need is for the House Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training report *Education of students in remote and complex environments*, released yesterday, to sit on the shelf alongside the myriad of other reports.

Education to Overcome Disadvantage

“Education is the key to overcome systemic disadvantage, particularly for Indigenous students from remote and regional Australia.” states Mr Bennett

Indigenous young people are amongst the most vulnerable in our community. They are far more likely to be in child protection, in detention, sick, unemployed or have attempted suicide. Education is foundational to changing the appalling statistics for First Nations people and giving every young Australian a better chance.

For significant numbers of young Indigenous people living in regional and remote Australia there are few “real” education options other than to leave their family and country to become boarding students in unfamiliar cities large distances from home. For most, boarding is their only access to quality secondary education with over 5,000 studying away from home each year.

National Indigenous Cultural Standard

“It is troubling that in 2020 there isn't a recognised national Indigenous cultural standard for boarding schools and residences.” claims Mr Bennett

The recommendation that *'all Australian students can access secondary school education, to a nationally-consistent minimum standard'* needs to be supported by a national Indigenous boarding education cultural standard.

IEBA is continuing to work towards the introduction of a national Indigenous boarding education cultural standard that will assure quality educational outcomes, consistent culturally safe boarding practices, address specific health and well-being needs and support effective parent and community engagement. It will also support appropriate practices, policies, procedures and identify the skills and competencies required by staff in the classroom and boarding environment .

“Without a standard how is it possible for Indigenous families to know which boarding school to choose or if that school does meet their children’s education needs and provide a caring stable culturally safe environment?” questioned Mr Bennett.

“Importantly a national Indigenous boarding education cultural standard will also provide guidance for schools to boost retention and academic outcomes for Indigenous students.”

Improving Educational Outcome in Remote Australia

The report acknowledges that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children transitioning to secondary schooling from remote and complex environments do so at education levels much lower than their urban peers.

“There is an urgent need to address the poor education outcomes being delivered by schools in regional, rural and remote Australia. If systemic issues aren’t addressed and Indigenous voices are ignored we will fail another First Nations generation outside of our cities” stated Mr Bennett

Recommendations supporting *'adult literacy campaigns'* - *'English as an Additional Language'* - *'bilingual education'* - *'mental health treatment and support'* with *'wrap-around models of early intervention'* and *'provide up to 30 hours per week of subsidised early education and care'* are positive steps to addressing the education gap.

The committee received many submissions on the importance of the delivery of education and nature of the school workforce on the education outcomes for students in regional and remote Australia.

However, the recommendations only went as far as to recommend to *‘Establish trauma-informed, cultural induction and training programs for educators working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students’* and *‘Support the development and professionalisation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education workforce’*. There must be urgent action in regard to these recommendations.

A significant structural problem is that the delivery of Primary School learning is largely the responsibility of state and territory governments. Unless education in regional and remote Australia is addressed collectively by the Australian, state and territory governments we fear that the desire to address Indigenous education will not be met by the appropriate and urgent action required.

Call to Action

Although IEBA hoped the report would have gone further to address the systemic challenges in providing education in remote Australia, the recommendations will, if enacted, make a positive contribution to Indigenous education in remote and complex environments.

IEBA call on the Morrison Government to urgently address the educational inequality of Indigenous students from regional, remote and rural Australia.

IEBA also calls on the Commonwealth and all state and territory Parliaments to urgently address the educational inequality of Indigenous students in their jurisdictions and to work collaboratively together to take action immediately

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Greg Franks

CEO

ceo@boardinaustralia.edu.au

Mob: 0426 629 847

Anthony Bennett

Chairperson

anthony.bennett@sa.gov.au

Mob: 0401 123 192

About Indigenous Education and Boarding Australia

Indigenous Education & Boarding Australia (IEBA) is the trading name of Boarding Australia, a not for profit company limited by guarantee registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission. Founded in 1995 Boarding Australia launched IEBA as its new trading name at the National Indigenous Education and Boarding Symposium in March 2019.

IEBA has been created to close the education gap through boarding so that all Indigenous students gain an effective education in child-safe and culturally safe learning environments with access to health, wellbeing and mental health services. Our vision is that *all Indigenous students attain educational outcomes to be successful in their future choices.*

IEBA is a social impact organisation recognised as having expertise in Indigenous education and boarding and is well placed to operate across educational sectors throughout Australia. IEBA has effective working relationships with Independent, Catholic, Christian, Lutheran and government agencies, and education providers across all states and territories. As IEBA does not have a vested financial interest as a boarding provider it also operates from a base of neutrality.

The IEBA Directors have many years' experience with Indigenous education and boarding. The Board also has representation from state government schools and education departments, the Independent and Catholic education sectors, academic expertise, and allied industry representation. Five of ten IEBA's Directors identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders and four of 10 Directors are female. The Board is geographically spread across Australia.

Directors

- Chairperson - **Anthony Bennett**, Manager, Wiltja Anangu Secondary Boarding College, SA
- Treasurer - **Samantha Franklin**, Partner, K Welsh & Co Accountants, SA
- Director - **Matt Alterator**, Director, On Country Australia, NSW
- Director - **Anthony Begg**, Head of Indigenous Education, Kinross Wolaroi School, NSW
- Director - **Antoinette Cole**, Consultant Formation-First Nations, Catholic Education Services, Diocese of Cairns, QLD
- Director - **Geoff Deans**, Group Manager, Social Performance, OZ Minerals, SA
- Director - **Sabina Smith**, Principal, Nhulunbuy High School, NT
- Director - **Richard Stewart**, Manager, Queensland Education Department - Transition Support Service, QLD
- Director - **Rosalyn Thomas**, Consultant: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education, The Association of Independent Schools of NSW
- Director - **Edward Tudor**, Executive Director, Melbourne Indigenous Transition School, VIC