

No more St Kevin's – we need a National Indigenous Cultural Boarding Standard to keep student safe

“If we are serious about keeping kids from remote communities safe we need to have a national Indigenous Cultural Boarding Standard,” states Anthony Bennett, Chairperson of Indigenous Education & Boarding Australia (IEBA).

‘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 that there needs to be an Indigenous Cultural Boarding Standard.’

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

‘If parents are sending their children away to boarding, they would expect that there are standards to care for their health and well-being, to support their specific learning needs, to communicate with families and very importantly, to recognise their cultural needs’ states Mr Bennett.

It is a big decision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to have their children leave their home and their community. These students are among the most vulnerable. English is often not their first language. Big cities are foreign places. They have no voice against authority. They often present with trauma and highly complex needs.

The evidence to date suggests that if organisations are not culturally intelligent and don't feel safe to Indigenous students, family are far more likely to remove their children from those educational settings and the student not be able to take advantage of the educational opportunity offered in a boarding setting. However, if students are culturally strong, it follows that academic outcomes will be enhanced.

IEBA believes a National Indigenous Cultural Boarding Standard will provide an assurance that child safety, well-being and cultural needs are understood and respected to enhance education outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Straits islander students. It would provide guidance and require boarding schools and residences to demonstrate safe and positive outcomes for students, give confidence to families their children are being supported and provide assurance government and industry stakeholders.

IEBA has committed to lead the development of a National Indigenous Cultural Boarding Standard starting at the [2020 National Indigenous Education and Boarding Symposium](#) in Geelong, Vic, from 17-19 March. The national symposium is the annual gathering of education leaders, boarding managers, academics, Indigenous support organisations and government policy makers. These leaders in the field will commence the work of developing the principle and framework of a National Indigenous Cultural Boarding Standard at the symposium.

IEBA acknowledges that Indigenous voices are critical in the development and validity of the standard and is proposing to establish an Indigenous Voices in Boarding network to support the development of the standard of the coming years.

‘We call on the Morrison government to support our plan for a national Indigenous cultural boarding standard as part of their commitment to make “practical” improvements in the lives of Indigenous communities. **END**

*[Indigenous Education & Boarding Australia](#) was launched as the trading name of Boarding Australia in March 2019 to support Indigenous students in boarding. Our vision is that **all Indigenous students attain educational outcomes that enable them to be successful in their future choices.***

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