

# Media Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
12 Feb 2018



---

## Indigenous boarding schools under threat unless ABSTUDY issues urgently addressed

The Independent Schools Council of Australia (ISCA) is warning that there may not be any large-scale Independent boarding schools for Indigenous secondary students remaining unless changes are urgently made to the structure and level of ABSTUDY funding.

ISCA commissioned a comprehensive ABSTUDY review last year by the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research at the Australian National University (ANU). The report, "*Barriers and Bureaucracy, Bridges and Brokers*", highlighted that Independent schools were struggling with significant issues associated with managing ABSTUDY. Schools found that ABSTUDY funding was inadequate, there was a heavy administrative burden and communication for schools was difficult, both with the bureaucracy and with student families.

The ANU report found that the current location of ABSTUDY in the Department of Social Services was incongruous with its educational purpose, its funding level is insufficient, it lacks transparency, and its administrative requirements fail to acknowledge difficulties facing parents living in remote communities.

ISCA Executive Director Colette Colman said, "The Independent sector is currently Australia's largest provider of Indigenous boarding facilities, and is frequently the only provider of educational boarding for these students in locations outside of metropolitan areas. Currently there are around 12,500 Indigenous students in Independent schools with around 2,400 of these students boarding. However, around 250 boarding beds have already closed in the last two years with the potential for a further 200 beds to close in the next 12 months."

Ms Colman went on to say that, "These boarding bed closures can almost exclusively be traced back to insufficient funding levels for Indigenous boarding students, including problems with accessing full ABSTUDY entitlements."

ISCA is urging the Government to quickly change the funding levels and administration of ABSTUDY by moving ABSTUDY payments from being classified as a means tested family payment to a more appropriate educational scholarship arrangement.

If this does not happen soon then educational opportunities for remote Indigenous students will be reduced further and there will be a continuing decline in educational achievement for these disadvantaged students. Closing the Gap targets have no hope of being met unless this is addressed.

ENDS

Media contacts: Barry Wallett 0411 278 612      Brendan Walsh 0411 850 515