

Students from rural and remote areas



When people think of students in rural and remote areas of Australia, many think of boys and girls travelling along dusty tracks to catch the bus to the 'local' school, the crackly sounds of the radio's *School of the Air*, or 'going away' to boarding school. Many families in rural and remote locations rely on independent schools to provide schooling for their children.

The independent schools sector provides a significant contribution to educating students from Australia's rural and remote areas, where the high costs of schooling provision pose a major challenge for governments and parents. The sector does this in a number of ways. Many of the students from these areas attend boarding schools in the state and territory capital cities or larger regional towns. Alternatively, they may board elsewhere, but attend school as a day student. Others attend independent schools in their local areas, and some take up the option of distance education.

Many people are surprised to learn that there are independent schools outside of the cities and larger regional centres. While 69 per cent of independent schools in Australia are located in metropolitan areas, 28 per cent are in provincial areas and 3 per cent are in remote areas. There are 31 independent schools with Indigenous enrolments of more than 50 per cent.

Independent schools in provincial and remote locations assist in creating actual schooling choice for families in these areas. They include for example Anglican, Lutheran, Christian, Montessori and Steiner schools, as well as others. In some extremely remote areas, independent schools are the only available schooling for local Indigenous children.

Students in boarding schools

The independent schools sector dominates boarding school provision in Australia, with some 155 boarding schools and about 16,900 students (**see Future directions for boarding schools, page 52**).

Today's social profile of boarding school students is a surprise to some people. Boarders in independent schools now represent a diverse group of students from a range of backgrounds, and often from a number of countries. There are students from the cities, from regional and remote areas and those whose parents are living and working overseas. Students board full-time, on a daily or weekly basis, or on an 'as required' basis, depending on their individual circumstances. This wide range brings diversity of experience and culture into school communities as a whole.

Indigenous students

There are more than 7,300 Indigenous students in the independent schools sector. Many of these students are in rural or remote areas. This represents 5.4 per cent of the Indigenous student population.

There is substantial commitment and innovation towards meeting the specific educational needs of Indigenous students across a range of settings and types of independent schools. Some students are within local independent schools, others attend schools that provide special programmes for Indigenous students, some students attend boarding schools, while others attend Indigenous schools or Indigenous community schools that cater exclusively for Indigenous students. Some schools provide boarding scholarships.



The majority of Indigenous students in the sector are located in Queensland (29 per cent), Western Australian (19 per cent), the Northern Territory (26 per cent), and New South Wales (15 per cent), where there are significant numbers of Indigenous students in metropolitan schools.

Schools and the state and territory Associations of Independent Schools (AISs) work together to provide a range of programmes for Indigenous students. These include Australian Government and state/territory government funded programmes which provide assistance to Indigenous students when starting school, and through additional classroom support, tutor assistance, homework centres, teacher and principal networks, and other initiatives.

In Western Australia, Indigenous liaison officers have been employed to provide direct support to Indigenous students from rural and remote regions of Western Australia who are boarding at independent schools in Perth. The Future Footprints project aims to facilitate the transition to school for these students and to adjust to life away from home. The overarching goal is to improve the educational outcomes for Indigenous students and as a result, enhance their opportunities after school.

Networks for support

The Independent Schools Council of Australia (ISCA) supports the work of Rural Education Forum Australia (REFA), a group of national organisations with an interest in education in rural and remote Australia. REFA's work is directed towards ensuring that quality education and training outcomes are achieved in rural and remote areas, so that those living in these communities can develop their full potential and participate in the social, economic, political and cultural life of the nation.

ISCA also liaises with relevant parent bodies such as the Isolated Children's Parents Association (ICPA) and the Australian Parents Council (APC) that are active in promoting quality education for all students and between them represent parent groups of remote, rural, and metropolitan students.

For further information:

The Aboriginal Independent Community Schools (AICS) website provides information about the schools that make up this group, resources available, and the AICS Support Unit: www.aics.wa.edu.au

Information about the Future Footprints project can be found in the Education Issues area of the AISWA website: www.ais.wa.edu.au

The Rural Education Forum Australia (REFA) website provides information about REFA, its members, current activities, events and news: www.refa.edu.au

The Isolated Children's Parents Association (ICPA) is a national parent body dedicated to ensuring that all geographically isolated students have equality of access to an appropriate education: www.icpa.com.au

The Australian Parents Council, a national federation of organisations representing parents of children in non-government schools: www.austparents.edu.au

