

# Leading schools open doors

Joel Gibson  
Indigenous Affairs Reporter

THE country's biggest indigenous boarding school scholarship scheme is preparing to go national with a \$5 million endowment fund to send hundreds of Aboriginal children to private schools throughout Australia.

If the concept succeeds, by the time another decade has passed many of the nation's most coveted private schools could have more than 50 indigenous students each, paid for by private and corporate donors.

St Joseph's College at Hunters Hill has given 68 indigenous students scholarships since 1998, including NSW Waratahs rugby union player Kurtley Beale and university student Craig Ashby, who was selected to dine with the Pope last month.

From next year, a new Australian Indigenous Education Foundation set up by the founders of the St Joseph's scheme will offer up to 50 more scholarships a year to other private schools around Australia, beginning with four Sydney girls schools: Kincoppal-Rose Bay School, St Catherine's Anglican School for Girls at Waverley, St Scholastica's College at Glebe and St Vincent's College at Potts Point.

The former governor-general Sir William Deane and Tenix founder Carlo Salteri will be its patrons. The foundation's chief executive, Andrew Penfold, called the concept "a highly efficient and effective tax-deductible means for



Take five ... Zaylai Jarrett, Karina Smart, Dwanna Donation, Kirsty Jarrett and Taylor Jarrett are boarders at Kincoppal-Rose Bay School where they have added to the school's diversity. Photo: Jon Reid

corporate, private and philanthropic investors" to invest in indigenous education.

Mr Penfold said he expected the first four schools would double their numbers of indigenous boarders, and the foundation then hopes to expand nationally to other boys' and girls' schools, some of which have already expressed interest.

The existing St Joseph's Fund had raised \$4 million in two years, he said, which demonstrated the desire in the private sector for an expanded national scheme.

The new foundation's board members and ambassadors will include the former national ALP president, Warren Mundine; P&O's chief executive, Ann

Sherry; BT Financial Group's chief executive, Rob Coombe; the NSW Fair Trading Minister, Linda Burney; the former Wallaby captain, John Eales; and television journalist Ray Martin.

Kincoppal-Rose Bay's principal, Hilary Johnston-Croke, said there were five indigenous boarders at the school and the foundation would help the school's program

to grow. "They give us a great deal. It has added to the diversity of our school community. When you know somebody personally it challenges stereotypes and changes your thinking."

There are several indigenous scholarship schemes in Australia, including St Joseph's Fund, Noel Pearson's Higher Expectations Program, and the Yalari Foundation. Supporters say they give indigenous children choice and access to high-quality education.

Critics say they take the most talented children out of remote and regional schools and relieve governments of their funding responsibilities in those areas.

The executive director of the Indigenous Education Leadership Institute, Chris Sarra, has said only about 2 per cent of indigenous students benefit from the schemes and big business should invest in building schools in regional and remote areas.

Mr Penfold said the foundation's private-sector approach meant donors could invest with a high degree of confidence.

"We're not saying that boarding schools are for everyone, or are the only answer, but we all know we have a serious problem when it comes to indigenous education in this country. All schools - including boarding schools - need to be part of the solution."

"Indigenous children should not be excluded from these sorts of schools simply because of the colour of their skin and the economic circumstances they inherit at birth."