

From Thursday Island to parliament



RAY STRANGE

Ebithia Mills arrives in Canberra yesterday to begin her work experience in parliament, including spending a day in Liberal MP Philip Ruddock's office

ROSIE LEWIS

AT 16 years old, Ebithia Mills already has the qualities of a future leader. She is smart, determined, friendly and likes to stand up for those who do not always feel they have a voice.

And the Year 11 student from Sydney's Pymble Ladies' College hopes a trip to Canberra this week will bring her one step closer to the beginning of a successful career.

Ebithia is one of 100 indigen-



ous students chosen to experience life inside Parliament House through the Learn, Earn, Legend! work experience with government program, which is co-organised by the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation.

As part of the initiative, she will spend one day in veteran Liberal

MP Philip Ruddock's office. "I would never have thought I'd actually get the opportunity to go down and see Parliament House," she said yesterday.

"It's so exciting. I've posted a Facebook status saying 'I'm going to work in Parliament House'. I told my sisters and they said, 'Oh my God, do well, have a look at politics and see if you want to do it'."

When she was 12, Ebithia won an AIEF scholarship and moved from Thursday Island to start high school at PLC, on Sydney's

upper north shore. Having always spoken Torres Strait Creole, she had broken English and experienced culture shock upon arriving in Sydney.

"It was the hardest thing I had to do to move from home and come down to a boarding school in Sydney," she said. "We dress differently, we speak differently, we act differently. I still find it hard to adjust now even though I've been down here for so long."

"But then, it was also the smartest thing I've ever done. I get so much out of it."

Ebithia said her mother, Ellen, who assured her the AIEF scholarship would be "really good", has been her greatest support and role model.

"Every time I get stressed about something, she says, 'It's all right, just try your best, no one's perfect'," Ebithia said.

"Every time I get a good mark I tell her and she says, 'I told you you could do it'."

Ebithia admits she is not currently interested in politics but has a passion for indigenous affairs.