

Swire helps indigenous kids make the grade



JAMES CROUCHER

John Swire & Sons chief executive Bill Rothery, right, with AIEF chief Andrew Penfold, who says the scholarships will help prepare indigenous kids for future careers



ANDREW MAIN

IN a country where 80 per cent of school students now complete Year 12, Andrew Penfold is very happy that more than 90 per cent of the students in his federally funded program are in that category.

But considering they are in the

Australian Indigenous Education Foundation (AIEF) program, he is even more proud, as the national average for Aboriginal teenagers is about 50 per cent.

As chief of the AIEF he has just signed a deal with Bill Rothery, chairman and chief executive of logistics group John Swire & Sons. Swire will not only put up \$1 million over six years to provide scholarships, it will also expose the AIEF's scholarship students to the full range of the company's activities. Swire employees will also be engaging with AIEF through mentoring and tutoring programs.

Mr Penfold, who aims to build a \$140m fund that can assist as many as 7000 young Australians, can see benefits all round.

"What this program does is increase the number of scholarships we can offer," he said. "And as well as the scholarships, we will be working with corporate partners such as Swire to prepare these kids for careers."

He said that nearly 100 per cent of his AIEF scholarship students made a successful transition to employment or further study after Year 12 thanks to corporate partnerships that provided about 62 per cent of AIEF's funding.

The commonwealth government provides 38 per cent and students' parents are also contributors, although the amounts depend on their circumstances.

Since 2009, the government has put \$32m into the scheme and the private sector \$32m. The companies involved include CBA, HSBC, BHP Billiton, Qantas and Leighton.

Mr Penfold said the investment was producing a more consistent return than a raft of other initiatives that had been tried over the years, as most students went on to contribute to the economy.

He said Swire's range of oper-

ations, from transport to refrigerated storage to mining services, was a particularly good fit with AIEF's strategy and "can offer challenging and exciting career opportunities and industry exposure to poor scholarship students".

Mr Rothery said: "Swire is fully aligned with what AIEF are doing and we are impressed by their achievements over a short period of time. Our investment in AIEF will help indigenous children access a quality education and opportunities which will have a ripple effect on their families, friends and communities."