

AFL stars' elite school leg-up just the Goodes



RENEE NOWYTARGER

Adam Goodes, foundation chairman Peter Meurer, AIEF CEO Andrew Penfold and Michael O'Loughlin



MITCHELL NADIN

INDIGENOUS teenagers will have the opportunity to study at some of Sydney's most elite high-schools through a new partnership involving AFL stars Adam Goodes and Michael O'Loughlin and the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation.

Goodes, named Australian of the Year in January, said the Goodes-O'Loughlin Foundation intended to build on the AIEF's program of providing scholarships to attend boarding schools for indigenous students from remote areas of Australia.

The new program, which has funding of several million dollars, will allow indigenous students from Sydney to attend the elite schools. Goodes said he hoped the program would go nationwide.

Annual fees at many private high schools in Sydney can reach \$30,000, making access for most students prohibitive.

"This is just the start," Goodes said. "We see this partnership growing and we see what we're

trying to do with kids, giving them the option to board or not to board, being a really successful thing.

"This is our first real big project on education so we're totally committed to getting as many boys and girls as we possibly can to get a better education, because we know that the (AIEF) program works fantastically well."

AIEF founder and chief executive Andrew Penfold said the program hoped to provide scholarships to at least 40-50 students in the next few years.

The aim was to emulate the success of his own program that now sees about 500 students gain access to top boarding schools each year across Australia. Figures released this week showed 93 per cent of AIEF-supported students completed Year 12 last year.

"With everything we do we always start small and build on success because that's what creates strong foundations for growth," Mr Penfold said.

Mr Penfold said the Goodes-O'Loughlin program had already partnered with 15 schools across Sydney that would initially cater for the students. However, as the program expanded, he hoped more schools would see the benefits and come on board.

Mr Penfold said applicants would apply directly to the school for the scholarships.