



RENEE NOWYTARGER

KPMG NSW chairman Martin Blake with Victoria Ashley, left, Gabby Ebsworth, Brendon Donnelly and Brett Russell on Brindabella in Sydney

Brindabella's platform for those who harbour hope

EXCLUSIVE

SIMON KING

The only sailing Brandon Donnelly had done was while fishing around Palm Island off the Queensland coast.

Now, thanks to the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation Pathways Program and KPMG, he and a group of students past and present — from Sydney's St Gregory's College Campbelltown and Kincoppal-Rose Bay School — have raced Jim Cooney's iconic maxi Brindabella across Sydney Harbour.

"I've just done a bit of fishing on little boats, that's about it," the St Gregory's Year 9 student tells *The Australian*. "It's nice, it's something different. And it's good to get the word from former students about their experiences."

For KPMG NSW chairman Martin Blake — who bought a yacht before he "had a job, a car, a house and a girlfriend" — the experience on board the "people's



maxi" is not just about building connections between students, it's about opening the door to the "art of the possible".

"The point is not so much about sailing, it's 'Imagine what you can do if you open your eyes to the opportunities of coming to boarding school in NSW'.

"It's really the art of the possible and providing them with an opportunity that they wouldn't normally have," he said.

KPMG first partnered with the AIEF in 2010 and it recently received the Human Rights Business award in recognition of its Reconciliation Action Plan, which commits it to addressing the inequalities facing indigenous Australia.

AIEF executive director Andrew Penfold said getting the students on board Brindabella was about building bridges for better

outcomes and generating "aspiration and enthusiasm... It's a good opportunity for some of the students who have moved on into jobs and uni to chat with the younger students and give them some encouragement, support and advice and to help build those sorts of relationships," he said.

"A lot of these kids come from places where there's not much water and most of them have probably not been on a boat — Sydney Harbour is a beautiful place, and it is all about opportunities, experience and building resilience and aspirations."

Former AIEF scholarship-holder Brett Russell — who on leaving St Gregory's went on to become a NSW cricket development officer, before being offered a Big Bash League rookie contract — said it was important for those going through the AIEF system to talk to people who already had experienced it.

"It's really good, it builds a bonding with the former students being able to have a bit of fun," Russell said.