

Hopes of growth for scheme ensuring heritage and future

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For Jaimee Moran, winning a scholarship to a prestigious boarding school immersed her more deeply in her indigenous heritage than she could ever have imagined.

Jaimee, now 17 and a first-year nursing student at Griffith University in Brisbane, spent six years at The Cathedral School of St Anne and St James in Townsville, thanks to the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation.

The foundation, which has grown in seven years to have more than 500 students in exclusive boarding schools nationwide, has raised about \$100 million to advance its cause. Since 2008 it has produced 311 Year 12 graduates and 19 university graduates.

At tonight's Sydney launch of AIEF's annual report, Indigenous Affairs Minister Nigel Scullion is expected to announce further federal funding for the scheme, which began with \$20m from then prime minister Kevin Rudd and has received a total \$38m government support.

AIEF director Andrew Penfold believes the scheme has the capacity to double. "It would cost



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AIEF scholarship recipient Jaimee Moran



around \$20m a year to be putting 1000 students through," he said.

Critical to identifying extra schools that might join the present 35 participants, Mr Penfold said, were institutions that "have a critical mass of indigenous kids, that have indigenous-specific programs, that celebrate indigenous culture and heritage".

That is one of the reasons the

experience was so significant for Jaimee, and her younger sister Orana, in Year 11 at the same school. With the indigenous side of their extended family in Wollongong, south of Sydney, where they spent their early years, the girls were living with their non-indigenous mother in central Queensland — so that "critical mass" at the heart of AIEF policy became a cultural lifesaver.

"Moving away from NSW there was a sense of leaving that (identity) behind," Jaimee said.

She sees the scholarship scheme as having cemented a lifetime of learning.