

Helping hand puts Year 12 target in sight



LACHLAN MOFFET GRAY

Australia may have failed to close the gap on several measures but Allira Hammond Purcell and Stephanie Pholi are examples of where we are succeeding.

The girls are the embodiment of the progress made towards halving the gap between the number of non-indigenous and indigenous Australians finishing Year 12 by 2020.

In 2006 the number of indigenous people who had completed high school was 47.4 per cent. Now it is 66 per cent, not far behind the 89 per cent of non-



Allira Hammond Purcell, left, and Stephanie Pholi at Presbyterian Ladies College in Sydney

JOHN FEDER

indigenous people who have done the same.

The two 17-year-olds are nearing the end of their time boarding at Presbyterian Ladies College in Croydon, Sydney, and are hoping to go to university next year.

But their success might not have been possible without the help of their fellow Australians.

The girls, both from single-

parent families, are beneficiaries of Australian Indigenous Education Foundation scholarships, which have helped more than 600 children finish Year 12 since they were established in 2008 with funding from the federal government and private sector.

"I've only had aunts, and only one of them finished school — my mum dropped out when

she was in Year 9," Allira, who grew up in Sydney's west, said.

"If I didn't get the scholarship I probably would have had a different outcome."

Stephanie, a Bundjalung woman through her mother, lives with her Maltese father. "I never knew where I stood because I come from a mixture of cultures," she said.

"But my dad is always trying to connect me to my culture. He read about the scholarship in *The Australian* and thought it would be a great opportunity and help me connect with other indigenous boys and indigenous girls.

"There are so many opportunities at PLC and it will give us so many when we finish school too."

With their eyes trained towards university life, both girls said they were committed to making Australia a kinder, more equitable country.