

Schools failing Indigenous Australians

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Indigenous teenagers are four times more likely to drop out of high school before finishing Year 10, census data shows.

Among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders aged in their 20s, barely half had finished Year 12, compared to 83 per cent of other Australians the same age. And Indigenous teenagers are four times more likely to have dropped out of school at the age of 13 or 14.

The 2021 census statistics reveal one in every 13 Indigenous Australians aged in their twenties had failed to finish Year 10.

The educational handicap flows through to university, with just 7.4 per cent of Indigenous adults qualified with a degree, compared to 26 per cent of all Australians.

In 2021, Indigenous Australians were half as likely to be studying at university.



Penfold

Australian Indigenous Education Foundation executive director Andrew Penfold said that finishing high school was the key to closing the health and wealth gap between Indigenous and other Australians.

“All the evidence shows that if an Indigenous person is given the same educational opportunities, there is almost no gap across all the social metrics,” he said.

“Completing Year 12 changes the whole trajectory of your life – but that gap is still not closing.”

Mr Penfold said 50 Indigenous students applied for every board-

ing school scholarship awarded by his foundation.

“Not every kid should or wants to go to boarding school, but it is one of the things that is proven to work,” he said.

“But it’s not being scaled up due to a lack of funding.”

The Australian revealed this week that literacy and numeracy among Year 12 Aboriginal students is falling in Western Australia’s public school system, where just 42.7 per cent of Indigenous students in the final year of high school met the requirements to graduate with a WA Certificate of Education in 2021.

In NSW, the proportion of Indigenous final year high school students attaining their HSC has gone backwards from 46 per cent in 2017 to 45 per cent in 2020 and 43 per cent in 2021.

The fresh census data, released on Wednesday, shows that a quarter of Indigenous Australian adults hold a vocational qualification, such as a trade or TAFE

certificate – which is on par with other Australians.

University-educated workers are concentrated in Canberra, where 43 per cent of residents boast a degree.

Victoria and NSW residents are more highly educated than Queenslanders or Tasmanians.

Separate data released by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research on Wednesday shows apprentice and trainee commencements this year were at their highest level in a decade.

Commencements in the first three months of this year were 24 per cent higher than the same time last year.

A total of 387,830 apprentices and trainees were in training at the end of March – up 17 per cent in a year.

NCVER managing director Simon Walker said the increase reflected government wage subsidies, as well as the easing of Covid-19 restrictions and rising demand for workers this year.