

Distance Raises the Bar *for Boarding School Communications*

Distance is built into the DNA of the boarding experience. It's a big reason students thrive, but it also raises expectations for communications. If families can't rely on regular campus visits, or when information is hard to find, the distance feels even greater as silence and uncertainty fill the gap.

It's a layer of complexity for some 21K boarders across Australia, including the more than 15K rural boarders and 1,640 international boarders. That mix is a reminder that many families manage school life from far away, and whether that's across a state or just an hour's drive, any uncertainty about school logistics or communications makes the silence grow louder.

Parent Expectations Have Shifted

The job of supporting students on campus and supporting families off-campus has changed in recent years. Families

still want warmth, trust, and a sense of connection, but they also want a level of access that meets their expectations.

In an Australian Parents Council Parent Sentiment Survey, 70% of parents said they wanted time available outside school hours to talk with teachers. For boarding families, "outside school hours" often becomes the only shared window to connect, and in-person problem-solving is harder to come by.

That pressure rarely starts with a single, major issue, though. When a family wants to confirm a travel detail, they're

trying to understand weekend routines or double-checking a policy they remember from last term, the stakes are raised.

At the same time, schools can't be expected to monitor an inbox 24/7, and boarding staff shouldn't have to choose between responsiveness and burnout. So the goal becomes simpler: give families dependable ways to get answers, and a straightforward route to the right person when a conversation is needed.

Your Website Does Double Duty

Independent Schools Queensland's recent findings show that 92% of parents visited school websites when making school decisions, and when parents were asked to name their top three most influential sources, "school website" ranked in the top five.

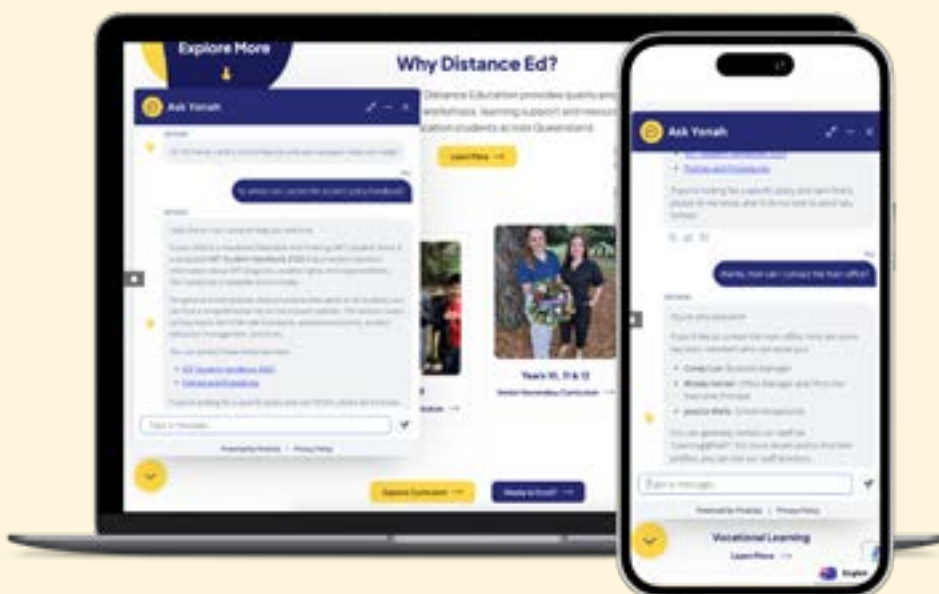
For boarding families, the people aspect matters even more: 70% of parents of boarding students rated meeting the boarding master/mistress as "extremely important," a strong signal that families want fast access to information and a personal, human touch.

Queensland boarding parents spoke up about what matters most, like:

- Being kept informed
- Getting responses
- Access to teachers when concerns come up

This is when the website becomes the source of truth, but where do the answers live?

More international boarding schools are adding an AI chatbot to their websites to be that reference point for families. Using the school's publicly available information,





it's a 24/7 resource for term dates, weekend permissions, policies, who-to-contact lists, and more, even when staff aren't available.

Schools like Faith Christian School of Distance Education are using Finalsite's AI-powered chatbot, Ask AI, and leveraging its ability to hold conversations in 45+ languages, using their own branding and tone to match the school's colors, logo, and brand voice.

Plus, with insight into the questions users are asking day and night, schools can better understand what information families need and how to improve their website's content and user experience.

Close the Distance

Distance is part of boarding, but it doesn't have to create gaps in communication. Help families feel closer to campus by giving them quick access to school-approved information and the right people,

even when school is asleep.

- **Fast answers across time zones** - Families can ask about directories, schedules, or key dates and get pointed to the right page, form, or calendar item in seconds.
- **One dependable home base for boarding life** - The chatbot can answer parents' questions about school life and all the essentials, so families always know where to start, even months after enrolment.
- **Quick access to the right contact, without the guesswork** - When a question needs follow-up, the chatbot can route families to the right person or team (boarding, wellbeing, health centre, academics) and help them choose the best channel.
- **Better support for multilingual households** - For international families, it can help them find translated resources or understand key pages, reducing the risk of missing details.
- **Stronger responsiveness without staff burnout** - By handling the repeat

"where do I find..." questions, the chatbot helps with the email overload and protects staff time for the conversations that need extra care and context.

Distance will always be part of boarding, and that's a good thing. It gives students room to grow, helps them build independence, and opens opportunities they wouldn't find elsewhere.

Families trust the experience when answers are easy to find, and the right people are easy to reach. That's the bar, and your website can help you meet it, even when home is far away. ■

