Lights Out

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The Hidden Harvest: *What boarding gives to us*

Beyond the Phone Call - *building relationships*



AUSTRALIAN BOARDING SCHOOLS ASSOCIATION
Making Boarders' Lives Better

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ON THE COVER
St Scholastica's College boarders admire the city

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Why Boarding Schools Can No Longer Treat Staff Training as Optional

Every boarding school in Australia exists on a simple promise to families: when we hand over our child, they will be safe, cared for, and supported as if they were your own. It is a promise made in enrolment brochures, open days and welcome speeches. But a promise is only as strong as the people who carry it out day to day - and increasingly, the evidence tells us that untrained boarding staff are the single biggest gap between what schools say and what they can actually deliver.

As the peak body for boarding schools across Australia, the Australian Boarding Schools Association hears from Principals, Heads of Boarding and Boards every year who are grappling with the same question: is staff training really necessary, or is it a "nice to have" that competes for budget against renovations, technology and academic programs? The honest answer, in 2026, is that it is no longer a choice. It is a legal, ethical and operational necessity - and schools that treat it as optional are exposing themselves, and the children in their care, to real and growing risk.

Boarding is a distinct role, not an extension of teaching

The most persistent misconception in the sector is that a good teacher, or a warm and caring adult, will automatically make a good boarding supervisor. Boarding work is fundamentally different from classroom teaching. It happens

in the evenings, overnight and on weekends, often with reduced staffing ratios and without the immediate backup of a full school leadership team. It requires skills in adolescent wellbeing, mental health first aid, behaviour management in a residential setting, cultural safety, homesickness and transition support, and the recognition of abuse or neglect indicators - skills that are not part of standard teacher training and are not acquired simply through goodwill or experience in a classroom.

The Boarding Standard for Australian Schools and Residences (AS 5725:2015), developed by Standards Australia, makes this explicit. The Standard requires boarding schools to implement formal risk management systems, especially when dealing with the safety of boarders and their care and supervision, and requires boarder-specific policies that go beyond what schools already have in place for day students. A related requirement under the Standard is that "a trained person be accessible at all times" - a clause that puts staff competency, not just staff presence, at the centre of a school's duty of care, and this has been even further strengthened in the 2026 updating process of the Standard.

The legal exposure is real, and it is growing

Schools sometimes assume that because boarding compliance sits under a voluntary standard, the legal stakes are lower. That assumption is dangerous. Beyond the Standard itself, boarding schools operate under the common law student duty of care, alongside a complex array of State and Territory legislation and regulation covering child safety, working with children checks, mandatory reporting and workplace health and safety. None of that legal framework is voluntary.

Work Health and Safety law adds a further layer that is often overlooked. Every State and Territory requires organisations to train staff in how to maintain a safe work environment, and there is a duty to protect both boarding staff and boarders from workplace harm. Untrained supervisors are not only a risk to boarders - they are a workplace hazard to themselves and their colleagues, particularly when responding to incidents involving self-harm, aggression, medical emergencies or critical incidents overnight.

Privacy is another area where the gap between policy and practice creates exposure. Compliance with privacy law requires far more than publishing a policy on a website, and boarding schools need to ensure all staff are trained in their privacy obligations and the school's expectations around handling personal information - a requirement directly tied to how boarding staff record, share and store sensitive information about boarders' health, family circumstances and behaviour.

Should a serious incident occur - a student self-harms, a disclosure of abuse is mishandled, a medical emergency is not managed appropriately - the first questions asked by a court, an insurer, a regulator or a coronial inquiry will not be "did you have a policy?" They will be: what training did the staff member on duty have, when did they last receive it, and can you produce the records? Schools that cannot answer those questions with evidence, not assurances, carry a far heavier liability burden, and their insurers are increasingly asking these questions before a claim is ever made.

Governance expectations have shifted

The National Boarding Standard also raises the bar at governance level. It increases compliance and risk management obligations for boarding governance, including a requirement that boarding staff meet child protection and other screening requirements, and that all policies and procedures relating to staff, including recruitment and engagement, are provided to staff at the commencement of employment. Screening and induction are the floor, not the ceiling. A working with children check confirms a staff member has no known history of harm; it says nothing about whether they know how to run a safe evening routine, de-escalate a distressed teenager, or recognise the early signs of an eating disorder or family violence disclosure.

Boards and school leaders who rely solely on screening as their risk control are leaving a significant gap in their governance obligations - one that regulators and child safety bodies are increasingly scrutinising as community and legislative expectations around child-safe organisations continue to rise.

Where schools can access relevant training

The good news is that schools no longer need to build boarding-specific training from scratch. ABSA's own Training Academy was established for exactly this purpose, offering staff a structured pathway from introductory boarding skills through to leadership development, built around the practical realities of the boarding role and mapped to the requirements of AS 5725:2015. Other training options are available in the area, however the ABSA Training Academy has been developed and resourced around what schools actually want and need, not trying to fit it within another structure or program.

Beyond formal qualifications, schools should build a layered approach: mandatory induction training before a new staff member ever supervises boarders unsupervised, regular refresher training aligned to the two-yearly policy review cycle required under the Standard, scenario-based practice for critical incidents, and clear records of who has completed what training and when. Those records are not bureaucratic overhead - they are the evidence base a school will rely on if its duty of care is ever tested.

The bottom line

Boarding schools are not just providers of education. They are, for many students, a second home and a second family - often overnight, unsupervised by parents, and reliant entirely on the competence of the staff on duty. Training is not the cost of running a boarding program well. It is the cost of running one safely, lawfully and defensibly. Schools that continue to treat it as discretionary are gambling with the wellbeing of the children in their care and with their own legal and reputational future. Those that invest in it are protecting both. ■



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Knowing Them, and Knowing When

What boarders can teach us about wellbeing

After almost three decades working in boarding schools, I thought I understood boarding wellbeing reasonably well. Then I asked boarders.

My doctoral research began with a relatively simple question: what does wellbeing actually look and feel like for a young person living at boarding school?

I wanted to hear not only from the adults responsible for boarding, but from the young people living it. The research eventually took me into 18 boarding schools across four Australian States, involving 142 boarding students, 33 boarding staff and 32 parents. Together, they provided a remarkably rich picture of what helps young people thrive in boarding and what can sometimes get in the way.

There was considerable agreement between students, staff and parents. Relationships mattered. Good staff mattered. Friends mattered. Family remained enormously important. A positive boarding culture mattered.

But there were also differences, and those differences became some of the most revealing parts of the research.

Students spoke about things that adults did not always see. They talked about privacy and personal space, food, rigid routines and the frustration of having relatively little control over parts of their daily lives. Parents could see structure and routine as reassuring, while students could experience exactly the same things as restrictive. Adults sometimes believed older students were being given independence while those students felt they still had very little meaningful agency.



"All we want is to be normal and lie on our beds like normal kids do on the weekend."

She wasn't asking for boarding schools to abandon structure. In fact, students generally valued routine. Particularly when they first arrived, predictable routines provided security in an unfamiliar environment. What changed was their need for flexibility as they grew older.

That distinction stayed with me.

Good boarding practice may therefore be less about choosing between structure and freedom and more about understanding when a young person needs one and when they need the other.

That idea appeared repeatedly in the stories students told about staff.

They knew the adults who knew them. Not simply the staff member who knew their name, checked the roll or knew whether their room was tidy. They valued the adults who knew enough about them to notice when something was different.

And perhaps even more importantly, they valued staff who knew when.

When to enforce the routine and when to bend it. When to ask another question and when to give someone space. When a young person needed encouragement, food, sleep, humour, a phone call home or simply an adult prepared to sit beside them.

"Wellbeing in boarding is not created by programs alone. It is created by people."



This became one of the strongest lessons I took from the research.

Boarding is unusual because the ordinary and the significant happen in exactly the same place. Dinner might simply be dinner, but it might also be where a staff member notices that a student hasn't eaten. A dormitory corridor might simply be where students move between rooms, but it might also be where someone quietly says, "Are you okay?" A weekend activity may be fun for one student but, for another, the thing preventing them from having the quiet time they desperately need.

This is why relationships sat at the centre of so many participant accounts. Boarders described wellbeing not primarily through programs but through their everyday interactions with people, places and routines.

It also caused me to think differently about recognition.

Young people want to be seen, but being seen is not necessarily about awards, certificates or public praise. Recognition can be very quiet. It might be remembering something about a student's family. Noticing effort rather than achievement. Knowing that a normally enthusiastic student has become withdrawn. Or recognising that the boarder who says very little may actually need someone to initiate the conversation.

There is an important difference between being noticed and being monitored.

Food was another, perhaps unexpected, example of recognition. Anyone who has worked in boarding knows that food can be one of the most consistent sources of complaint. Too much of this, not enough of that, meals repeated too often, portions too small, nothing they like. It can be tempting to hear these simply as complaints about food. Yet listening to the boarders in my research suggested that sometimes they were saying something more. Food carried emotional, social and symbolic meaning. It could represent home, comfort, culture, choice and care.

A complaint about food could therefore also be a boarder's way of asking: Do you know me? Do I have a voice here? Does what matters to me matter to you? Being asked what they thought about the menu, having cultural or dietary needs understood, being offered something familiar when homesick, or simply having someone notice that they had stopped eating could communicate something much larger than the meal itself. The research showed that food was more than sustenance. It could become a mechanism through which boarders experienced recognition, relationships and community.

"Food is home when you are away from home."

Mealtimes also provide staff with a remarkable daily window into wellbeing. Who is not eating? Who is sitting alone? Who has suddenly changed tables? Who lingers after everyone else has left? In that sense, perhaps we should not always ask, "Why are they complaining about the food again?" but occasionally ask, "What might they actually be telling us?"

The same applies to autonomy. Boarding schools cannot operate without rules, routines and communal expectations. But adolescence is also the period in which young people learn to make decisions and increasingly take responsibility for themselves.

Students responded positively to staff who could gradually "loosen the reins". Appropriate choices around routines, activities, study and personal space communicated something important: I trust you. The research suggested that autonomy works best not as freedom from all boundaries, but as growing independence within relationships of trust.

Are all of our rules still there because students need them, or are some there because they make boarding easier for adults?

Another strong theme was transition.

We understandably devote considerable attention to a student's arrival at boarding. Yet the research showed that transition is much broader than the first day or even the first term. Students transition after holidays, between year levels, between dormitories, into leadership and through changing friendships.

Homesickness was also more complex than simply something to be eliminated. Participants described its considerable emotional difficulty, particularly early in boarding, but many also associated working through homesickness with growing independence, self-awareness and resilience.

The research also changed the way I thought about parents.



After many years in boarding, I realised I had probably underestimated their transition.

For many families, particularly those living considerable distances from the school, sending a child to boarding involves handing over much of their everyday care to other adults. Parents remain deeply invested in their child's boarding experience while having very limited physical access to it.

"We're not just onboarding students. We're onboarding parents."

That is worth remembering. Transition into boarding is not simply something that happens to a child. It happens to a family.

Finally, there was safety.

Naturally, boarding schools require strong safeguarding policies, procedures and supervision. But students described another kind of safety that was harder to capture in a policy document: emotional safety.

Could they say they were struggling? Could they make a mistake without being humiliated? Could they cry? Would they be believed? Would an adult respond calmly? Would asking for help somehow change the way people saw them?

The research reminded me that emotional safety is not simply whether help is technically available. It is whether the culture makes it safe to feel.

These recurring ideas eventually came together in a practical framework I called BRATS , Belonging, Recognition, Autonomy, Transition and Safety. The framework grew from the wider research concepts of relating, being and having and was designed as a practical way of translating the research into boarding practice.

BRATS was never intended to become another wellbeing program.

Rather, I see it as a lens through which boarding staff can periodically look at the young people in their care.

It also became the foundation for Boarding Well: Stories and Strategies for Wellbeing in Australian Boarding Schools. After completing the research, I found myself asking a very practical question: What do we actually do with all this?

Boarding staff operate in a real world. There is a young person crying at 10.30 at night. Someone has skipped dinner. Another student has been excluded by their friendship group. A senior boarder is frustrated by a rule they think belongs in Year 7. A parent is calling from hundreds of kilometres away because they are worried.

Boarding Well attempts to take the voices and findings from the research and bring them back into those everyday moments.

Its central premise is simple: wellbeing is created through people who know their students and know when to step in, when to step back and when simply to be present.

Five questions for every boarding house

1. **Belonging:** Who feels genuinely part of our community, and who might still be standing on the edge?
2. **Recognition:** Which students are being noticed, and who could quietly pass through our week unseen?
3. **Autonomy:** Where can we appropriately give young people greater voice, choice and responsibility?
4. **Transition:** Who is going through change right now, including parents, and have we noticed?
5. **Safety:** Do our students genuinely feel they can be vulnerable without losing dignity?

After listening to 142 boarders, 33 staff and 32 parents, I came away convinced that boarding wellbeing is often created in moments that would never appear in a strategic plan.

A conversation in a corridor. Sitting beside someone at dinner. Knowing something about home. Recognising when a normally talkative student becomes quiet. Giving an older boarder a little more freedom. Checking again when "I'm fine" doesn't quite sound right.

None of those things is particularly complicated.

But collectively, they can determine whether a young person merely lives in a boarding house or genuinely feels that they belong there.

Know them. And know when. ■

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Beyond the Dining Hall.

Understanding the true nutritional needs of boarders.













What does it really take to nourish a boarder?

It is a simple question, but one that requires more than menu planning, nutritional guidelines or calorie calculations to answer. To truly understand what young people need, you first need to understand how they live.

That was the thinking behind a recent 'Day in the Life' study led by Ellen Gleeson, Chartwells Accredited Dietitian. Working alongside one of our boarding school partners, Ellen undertook a detailed review of boarders' daily routines, food choices, activity levels and nutritional intake to understand how the food we provide can best meet the distinctive demands of boarding life.

Rather than analysing the menu in isolation, the study followed a typical weekday from breakfast through to supper. It considered when students ate, what they selected, how their day was structured, and the relationship between classes, co-curricular activity, gym or sports sessions, recovery and sleep. A 24-hour food recall and activity record were then assessed using evidence-based guidelines and nutrient reference values.

Chartwells

A boarding day places unique demands on young people.

The review showed why boarding nutrition cannot be treated like a standard three-meal food service. A boarder's day can stretch from an early breakfast to evening study and supper, with classes, recreational activity, training and other commitments in between. The timing, composition and accessibility of food all matter.

The day analysed confirmed a strong foundation: students had access to an appropriate volume and variety of food throughout the day. It also highlighted the value of Chartwells' tailored dietetic approach, showing how small, evidence-based refinements to carbohydrate availability, hydration support, breakfast engagement and balanced-plate education can further enhance concentration, activity and recovery across the boarding day.

The findings reinforced a central principle of our approach: nutritional adequacy is not simply about serving enough food. It is about providing the right food, at the right time, in a format students will choose, supported by clear information and practical education.

Turning student perceptions into better outcomes.

Like many young people, the boarders involved were interested in whether they were getting enough protein and enough food. The analysis found that their selected meals and snacks already provided sufficient protein and, in some instances, exceeded estimated requirements. The greater opportunity was to improve the balance between protein, fuelling carbohydrate and colourful plant foods.

This distinction matters. Online fitness and nutrition content can encourage teenagers to focus heavily on protein while overlooking the carbohydrate needed to fuel activity, the plant foods that provide fibre and micronutrients, and the fluids required for hydration. Specialist dietetic support helps schools translate evidence into practical guidance that students can understand and apply.

From insight to action.

The study produced practical recommendations for the school and foodservice team. These included helping students build balanced 'performance plates', reviewing menus for suitable carbohydrate-rich sides, encouraging a more substantial breakfast, supporting regular hydration, improving the way menu components are communicated, and directing students to reputable nutrition resources.

It also highlighted the importance of service design. If the full breakfast requires students to walk to another part of the campus, convenience may influence what they select. If menu items are not clearly identified, students may misunderstand what is available. If a recovery meal does not offer the right balance after training, students may seek more protein when what they need is a better mix of foods. These are not issues revealed by a menu spreadsheet alone. They become visible when we observe the full day.

Why tailored expertise matters.

Every boarding community is different. Student ages, sporting programs, timetables, facilities, school culture and dining routines all influence nutritional needs. A generic approach may meet a standard, but it will not necessarily deliver the best outcome for a specific school or its students.

That is why Chartwells invests in dietetic expertise and initiatives such as 'Day in the Life'. We work with our partners to move beyond assumptions, listen to students and staff, analyse what is happening in practice, and convert the findings into tailored menus, education and service improvements.

For heads of boarding, the question is no longer simply, 'Are we feeding our students?' The more valuable question is, 'Do we truly understand what they need across the whole day?'

When foodservice is informed by evidence, observation and specialist expertise, it becomes more than the provision of meals. It becomes an active contributor to student wellbeing, engagement and performance. That is the difference a genuine foodservice partner can make.

For more information, or a discussion about how Chartwells can support your school, please reach out to:
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The Hidden Harvest:
What Boarding Gives to Us



I am standing in my backyard, watching five figures roughly 400 metres in the distance across the sprawling flats of Nudgee College. The figures are tiny-not just because they are far away, but because they are children, well four of them are and one is a dog. Two children and a dog are my own, and two are "adopted" - Year 7 boarders who have recently joined our community.

One of the boys hails from Longreach, the other from Moree, and right now, they are doing their best to wrangle my excitable and slightly chaotic daughters, aged five and three.

Some parents might feel a prickle of anxiety at the idea of 11-year-old boys taking the reins of babysitting. Truthfully, from 400 metres away, my supervision is completely redundant anyway. But I didn't have a choice; my stubborn three-year-old, Ella, had flatly insisted on walking back from the on-site dam instead of joining her parents in the car: "Dad, I want to go with Digby and James."

Despite my lack of control over the situation, watching from the porch, I don't feel worried. Instead, I sit proudly marveling at the unique upbringing my daughters are exposed to. I watch these good young men, from varying regions of the country, fully embracing their new home away from home - and embracing their new, pint-sized family members. They patiently endure the endless energy demands of an excitable three- and five-year-old. They play chase, tackle each other into the grass, and laugh all the way back to the house. Absolute bliss.

I sit there, watching proudly, bathing in the gratitude of what must be the world's greatest job.

Sure, boarding is a tough gig. We all know it. We've all had a million staffroom discussions about how draining it can be, whether it is sustainable long-term, and how on earth to balance the work/family chasm. But that is not what this article is about. We can save what boarding takes from us for another, more rainy and gloomy day.

For now, I want to talk about what boarding gives to us. Beyond the baseline appreciation for the material security this career provides - food on our tables and a roof over our heads - the true gifts of this profession are far more profound.

Life on "Ramsay Street".

At Nudgee, we affectionately call our on-campus staff housing strip "Ramsay Street." It feels like we've successfully rewound the clock to a bygone era, or at least to how communities were portrayed in old films. We live alongside like-minded people with shared values. You actually know your neighbors; you share your tools, you borrow books, and you knock on a door for a cup of flour when you run short. Your kids play freely together and you are never worried about being an imposition. It is a safe, deeply connected sanctuary.

A Bridge to the Bush.

This role grants us a golden ticket to visit regional and remote Australia, spending time on the sprawling cattle, sheep, cotton,

and cropping properties our boys call home. We get to water-ski, shoot, drive motorbikes, and go pigging with the very kids we care for. On truly special days, we might get a joyride in a helicopter! More than the fun activities, though, we are welcomed openly and warmly by the boarding families. They make us feel feel a part of their home, much like we hope they feel when at school. It bridges the urban-rural divide in a way few other careers can match.

Alliances of Trust:

The intimate relationships forged with boarding parents are incredibly special. They are built on absolute trust and a joint dedication to their child's wellbeing, growth, and development. We aren't just educators; we are partners in raising their sons. There is no greater privilege.

320 big brothers:

We are blessed to walk alongside the young people in our care, navigating the highest highs and the lowest lows with them, building relationships that extend far beyond graduation day. But perhaps the greatest benefactors of this life are my own daughters.

My girls are the ultimate boasters. They love to tell their teachers and classmates about their running track, their playground, their pool, their buggies, their cows, their sheep, and their chickens. They have absolutely no idea what a "normal" suburban upbringing looks like - and I am entirely fine with that.

"They have absolutely no idea what a 'normal' suburban upbringing looks like-and I am entirely fine with that."

More importantly, though, they also love to tell anyone who will listen that they have 320 big brothers!

I want them to relish this amazing, chaotic, beautiful life they've been handed through my work. I hope they know one day what a great gift this lifestyle is, and I hope I never forget this golden era of my life. I am certainly not looking forward to the bitter disappointment my girls will face if we ever move into a standard suburban street one day... but that, too, is a problem for another time.





It's a well-worn cliché, but they say if you love your job, you'll never work a day in your life. I truly love my job. More importantly, I am incredibly grateful for all that it gives to my family. I hope that other boarding staff reading this feel the same.

Our lives are spent in service of other families, which can easily lead to burnout if we lose sight of the horizon. So, whilst acknowledging the challenges, let's all vow to remember these unique gifts. Let's count our blessings when we are deep in the trenches, having a tough day, or simply needing a gentle reminder of the "why" behind what we do. ■

AUTHOR:
Casey Brealey
Dean of Boarding
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The Financial Independence Ladder

Boarding school provides young people with an unusual opportunity to develop independence.



Living away from home requires students to manage routines, organise their time, look after belongings, navigate relationships and make everyday decisions without parents immediately beside them. Yet boarding is not complete independence: students remain within a community of adults who provide guidance, boundaries and support.

This combination of independence and safeguards makes boarding an ideal environment in which to develop another important life skill - financial capability.

For many young people, financial independence arrives surprisingly suddenly. Throughout school, parents may pay most expenses, provide spending money and make significant financial decisions. Then school ends. Within a short period, a young person may encounter wages, tax, superannuation, rent, transport costs, credit, contracts and countless opportunities to spend.

Perhaps we should not wait until then.

The financial independence ladder

Financial capability can be developed progressively, just as other forms of independence develop during the boarding years.

One way of thinking about this progression is a financial independence ladder:

Dependence → Guided responsibility → Independent decisions → Financial capability

There is nothing wrong with financial dependence when children are young. Parents appropriately make most financial decisions and provide what their children need.

The opportunity is to gradually move young people towards guided responsibility.

A younger boarder might receive an agreed amount of spending money for a week or fortnight. Rather than additional money automatically appearing when it runs out, the student begins making choices. How much can I spend today? Do I really need this? What else might I want later? Should I save some?

The amounts need not be large. It is the responsibility attached to the money that matters.

Moving towards independent decisions

As students mature, financial responsibility can increase.

A student might manage money over a month rather than a week. Parents could gradually transfer responsibility for particular expenses. Students with casual or holiday employment can learn to manage earnings and understand payslips, tax and superannuation.

They can establish savings goals, compare prices, monitor subscriptions and learn to distinguish between something they can buy and something they should buy.

Boarding life provides particularly useful opportunities because money is also social.

What happens when friends have considerably more spending money? What if everyone is ordering takeaway food or planning an expensive activity? Should you lend money to a friend? What happens if it is not repaid?

Being comfortable saying, "I can't afford that" or "I'd rather save my money" is an important financial capability.

Financial literacy is not enough

Knowing about money and being able to manage it are not necessarily the same thing.

A student may know what a budget is and understand the difference between needs and wants. But can they make $100 last? Can they delay a purchase because they are saving for something more important? Can they recognise a suspicious financial offer? Can they resist pressure to spend because their friends are spending?

Financial literacy provides knowledge. Financial capability requires young people to apply that knowledge to real decisions.

Boarding provides an excellent environment for practising those decisions because students can exercise increasing independence while adults remain available when guidance is genuinely needed.

The value of small financial mistakes

Parents naturally want to protect their children from mistakes. However, some small financial mistakes can provide valuable learning experiences.

Consider a 15-year-old who receives spending money intended to last two weeks but spends most of it during the first weekend.

A parent could immediately transfer more money. The immediate problem disappears - but so does much of the learning opportunity.

Alternatively, it could generate a conversation. What happened? Where did the money go? What choices are now available? What could be done differently next time?



A manageable mistake involving $50 at 15 may prevent a much more significant mistake involving credit or debt at 20.

New risks require new capabilities

The financial environment facing today's boarders is very different from that experienced by their parents.

Money is increasingly invisible. Purchases can be made with a phone or watch. Online shopping operates around the clock. Games and apps encourage instant purchases. Social media exposes young people to investment promotions, financial influencers and scams.

Young people therefore need more than budgeting skills. They need to understand digital security, recognise scams, question promises of easy money, understand the consequences of credit and know when to seek help.

Importantly, they should know that making a financial mistake is something to discuss, not hide through embarrassment.

A partnership between boarding families and schools

This does not mean boarding schools need to become financial advisers or introduce another formal subject.

Instead, families and boarding communities can recognise financial capability as part of preparing young people for independence.

A younger boarder might manage a weekly allowance. A middle-years student might budget over a longer period and save towards a goal. An older student might manage employment income and selected personal expenses. By Year 12, students could create a realistic monthly budget for life beyond school.

The destination is not financial expertise. It is financial capability: the confidence and competence to make informed decisions, recognise risks, manage limited resources and seek assistance when necessary.

Boarding schools already provide young people with an opportunity to rehearse independence before adulthood. Perhaps financial independence should be rehearsed too.

A useful question for every boarding family might therefore be:
What financial decisions can our child make independently today that they could not make twelve months ago?

If the answer changes each year, they are moving up the financial independence ladder - from dependence, through guided responsibility and independent decisions, towards genuine financial capability. ■

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Founder
The Wealth Academy

SchoolHouse
Leadership Lens

At SchoolHouse, we have the privilege of working closely with Australia's education community and meeting the people who are making a difference in schools every day. Through these connections, we have gained a unique insight into the leadership, ideas and experiences shaping the future of education.

Our Leadership Lens publication was created to share the stories and insights of inspiring leaders across Australian education. It provides an opportunity to look beyond titles and achievements to explore the values and leadership philosophies that influence the way people lead their schools, teams and communities.

In a recent edition, SchoolHouse was pleased to feature Richard Stokes, CEO of the Australian Boarding Schools Association (ABSA), recognising his significant contribution to Australian boarding and his longstanding commitment to the people and communities that make boarding schools thrive.



RICHARD STOKES - MAKING BOARDERS' LIVES BETTER

Richard has dedicated much of his career to advocating for quality boarding, supporting boarding professionals and championing the wellbeing and development of young people. His leadership journey began almost by accident - as a university student looking for somewhere to live - but developed into a lifelong passion for residential education.

A career shaped by boarding

While at university, Richard returned to his former school and accepted a full-time boarding position supervising around 100 boys. He quickly discovered a genuine passion for working with young people and continued in boarding while completing his teaching qualification. His career progressed through a number of leadership roles in boarding, including responsibility for large residential communities. These experiences shaped his belief that successful boarding depends on clear expectations, consistency, trust and, above all, strong relationships.

For Richard, boarding is about much more than providing accommodation. It is about creating an environment where young people feel supported, valued and encouraged to grow.

Leading through relationships

A central theme of his leadership philosophy is the importance of "walking with people". Richard believes leaders should understand their experiences, work alongside them and build genuine trust. The same philosophy applies to students. Richard recognises that teenagers will make mistakes and test boundaries, and these moments should be used as opportunities to teach young people how to make better decisions and take responsibility.

According to Richard, exceptional boarding leaders are people who thrive on working with young people and demonstrate patience, humour, resilience and strong interpersonal skills.

Building a national voice

Richard's influence extends beyond individual schools. His involvement in ABSA grew from informal gatherings of Queensland boarding professionals who came together to share ideas and learn from one another.

Those conversations helped lead to the establishment of ABSA in 2007, with Richard becoming its full-time CEO in 2011. Since 2012, every Australian boarding school has been an ABSA member – a significant achievement that reflects the sector's recognition of the value of collaboration and professional advocacy.

Professionalising boarding

A major focus of Richard's work has been strengthening the professional standard of boarding staff. Together with his UK counterpart, he helped develop the Accredited Boarding Practitioner framework, providing pathways for professionals to gain recognition for their experience, knowledge and contribution.

Richard believes boarding is a specialist profession requiring appropriate training and experience. He argues that schools should be just as committed to preparing residential staff as they are to preparing teachers.

For him, professional development is about more than qualifications. It is about mentoring, sharing knowledge and developing people who can positively influence the lives of young people.

Developing future leaders

Richard believes future boarding leaders are often those who consistently go above and beyond – supporting colleagues, improving systems and looking for ways to make life better for boarders.

Developing these people is one of the most rewarding aspects of leadership. By providing mentoring, professional development and opportunities to grow, leaders can help talented staff realise their potential.

Looking to the future

Richard is conscious of the important role boarding plays in Australian education, particularly for students from rural and remote communities who may otherwise have limited access to secondary education.

However, the sector also faces challenges around affordability, staffing and maintaining high standards of residential care. He believes the answer lies in continued investment in the profession and the people working within it. His message is simple: quality boarding begins with quality people.

When schools invest in strong relationships, professional staff and positive residential cultures, boarding becomes far more than accommodation. It becomes a community – and, for many students, a genuine second home.

Through his work with ABSA, Richard Stokes continues to champion that vision. His leadership demonstrates that making a difference is often about the everyday work of supporting people, building relationships and creating environments where young Australians can feel safe, valued and able to thrive.

For SchoolHouse, featuring Richard Stokes in Leadership Lens was an opportunity to recognise not only his contribution, but also the vital role of boarding professionals across Australia – and to share the leadership lessons that can inspire and inform the wider education community. ■

SchoolHouse



Learning from Those Who Walk the Floors

Reflections on a Wesley Boarding Leadership Professional Learning Tour



One of the greatest strengths of the Australian boarding community is its willingness to share.

In recent years, boarding schools have faced increasingly complex challenges. Expectations around student wellbeing, pastoral care, leadership development, risk management, and community engagement continue to grow. While each boarding house is unique, the challenges we face are often remarkably similar. As a result, some of the most valuable professional learning comes not from conference presentations or policy documents, but from spending time with colleagues who are living the work every day.

With this in mind, the Wesley College Boarding Leadership Team recently travelled to Melbourne for a five-day professional learning tour. Our objective was not simply to visit boarding houses and admire facilities. Rather, we wanted to spend time with those who walk the floors each day and night, observe operations in action, and engage in professional conversations with fellow boarding practitioners.

Departing Perth on a Thursday morning, it was not long after touching down at Tullamarine Airport that the team was already "on duty", joining staff at Caulfield Grammar to experience boarding life as it unfolded. This set the tone for the week ahead. Whenever possible, we sought opportunities not simply to be shown around a facility, but to observe the lived reality of boarding and learn directly from those responsible for creating the culture within it.

Over the course of the visit, we were fortunate to visit seven educational institutions. These ranged from some of Australia's most established and prestigious boys' boarding schools through to newly developed co-educational residential communities reflecting a contemporary vision for boarding. While the settings, histories, and facilities varied considerably, each institution provided valuable insights and lessons for our team.

What became immediately apparent was that there is no single model for successful boarding. Every school reflected its own culture, traditions, and community expectations. However, there was a common theme that emerged throughout the tour: boarding houses are increasingly positioning themselves as developmental environments rather than simply places for students to sleep each night.

Across a range of schools, we observed purposeful programs designed to complement the work of the day school and contribute to the development of the whole person. Leadership programs, wellbeing initiatives, life-skills education, academic support structures, mentoring opportunities, and community-building

activities all played an important role in the boarding experience. The modern boarding house is becoming increasingly intentional about developing young people who are capable, connected, resilient, and prepared for life beyond school.

This was reflected not only in programming but also in the design of facilities themselves. Many boarding houses have evolved significantly in recent years. While comfortable accommodation remains important, increasing attention is being given to creating spaces that encourage connection, independence, collaboration, recreation, and wellbeing. The physical environment is increasingly being viewed as an extension of the educational experience, supporting the growth of students both academically and personally.

One of the most valuable aspects of the tour was the opportunity to observe staff interactions with students. The subtle ways relationships are built, expectations communicated, and culture reinforced are often what distinguish outstanding boarding environments. Watching experienced staff in action provided insights that cannot be gained through presentations or reports. It reminded us that while buildings and programs are important, people remain the defining feature of every successful boarding house.

Equally valuable were the conversations that occurred around dining tables, in staff offices, and while walking through boarding houses. The willingness of Heads of Boarding and their teams to openly discuss both successes and challenges was a reminder of the collaborative spirit that exists within our profession. There is tremendous value in being able to test ideas, explore different approaches, and learn from colleagues who understand the unique demands of boarding life.

A particular highlight of the tour was a visit that sat outside the traditional secondary school environment. Our team spent time at Marcus Oldham Agricultural College on the outskirts of Geelong, an institution well known to many boarding schools as a destination for graduates pursuing careers in agriculture and agribusiness.

For many of us, it was the first opportunity to see firsthand the educational pathway chosen by a number of our former boarders. The visit provided valuable insight into the modern agricultural industry and challenged any lingering perceptions that agriculture is somehow disconnected from innovation or technology. We were impressed by the highly practical, industry-connected nature of the programs and the strong links between education and workforce development. Given the number of rural and regional students who transition from boarding schools into agricultural careers, the experience offered an important perspective on the journey many of our students undertake after graduation.

Perhaps the most unexpected outcome of the tour was the impact it had on our own team.

The travelling group consisted of the core of the Boarding Leadership Team that will help shape and direct Wesley Boarding in the years ahead. While the formal purpose of the trip was professional learning, five days spent travelling together, sharing meals, discussing observations, and reflecting on what we were seeing created something equally valuable: a stronger sense of team cohesion.

Throughout the tour, conversations rarely ended when we left a boarding house. What one staff member noticed, another questioned. What impressed one person sparked debate in another. The hours spent in airports, buses, cafés, and around dinner tables became opportunities to unpack ideas, challenge assumptions, and explore what might work in our own context. As a leadership group, we were able to develop a shared understanding of contemporary boarding practice and a collective vision for where Wesley Boarding might head in the future.

The value of this cannot be understated. Successful improvement is rarely driven by one individual. It requires a team with common purpose, shared experiences, and the confidence to engage in robust professional discussion. By seeing the same programs, facilities, and approaches together, our leadership team developed a common reference point that will continue to inform conversations long after the tour itself.

As we return to Perth and begin the work of reviewing, adapting, and implementing many of the ideas encountered, we do so with a stronger sense of unity and direction. The relationships strengthened during those five days will undoubtedly support our capacity to lead change and continue enhancing the boarding experience for our students and families.

As boarding professionals, we often encourage our students to embrace new experiences, remain curious, and learn from others. This tour reminded us that the same principles apply equally to staff. Professional growth occurs when we are willing to step outside our own context, ask questions, challenge assumptions, and remain open to new ideas.

The boarding sector has always been built on relationships. While every institution we visited was different, the commitment of staff to caring for young people was remarkably consistent. Whether in century-old boarding houses steeped in tradition or contemporary residential communities designed for modern learners, the common purpose remained unchanged: creating environments in which students can flourish.

Our sincere thanks go to the Heads of Boarding and staff who welcomed us so generously into their communities. Their openness, hospitality, and willingness to share their experiences made the tour an invaluable learning opportunity.

We departed Perth seeking ideas and insights. We returned with those in abundance, but perhaps more importantly, with a renewed appreciation for the professionalism, innovation, and dedication that exists across the Australian boarding community, and with a stronger, more connected leadership team ready to translate those insights into action.

As boarding continues to evolve, the importance of learning from one another, and learning together, remains as important as ever. ■

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Same Phone. Different Threat.
Why gender matters when we think about online safety in boarding

Imagine two boarders.
One suddenly needs several hundred dollars and is unusually desperate about it. They will not explain why, but they are constantly checking their phone.
Another has withdrawn from friends, stopped coming down to dinner and becomes visibly distressed whenever a notification appears. Eventually, they disclose that someone has an intimate image of them and is demanding more.

Both students could be experiencing the same type of online crime: sextortion.

But the pressure being applied to them may look very different.

That distinction matters for anyone caring for young people. At Cybernetic Shield, we spend a lot of time talking with schools about recognising online harm before it becomes a crisis. Increasingly, one part of that conversation is gender.

Not because there is a neat list of "boys' risks" and "girls' risks", but because the evidence shows that while boys and girls are exposed to online harm at remarkably similar rates, **the type of harm, the way it is weaponised and the way a young person responds can differ considerably**.

Same exposure. Different experience.

The latest national research from the eSafety Commissioner makes the point particularly clearly.

Around three-quarters of Australian children aged 10 to 17 have encountered content associated with harm online. For boys it is 74%, for girls, 73%.[1] So this is not a story about one gender being safe and another being vulnerable.

It is about understanding how the risk materialises.

Girls, for example, are somewhat more likely to experience cyberbullying: eSafety found 56% of girls had experienced it compared with 50% of boys.[2]

More significantly, Australian research found that 10.9% of girls had experienced non-consensual sharing of a sexual image of themselves, compared with 3.8% of boys. More than one in four girls (26.3%) had experienced online sexual solicitation by an adult before age 18, compared with 7.6% of boys.[3]

That means the online harm affecting a girl may be more likely to become sexualised: pressure to send an image, an image being shared without consent, sexual harassment, or increasingly, a completely fabricated sexual image created using AI.

The image does not have to be real for the humiliation, fear or social consequences to be very real.

For boys, the threat often comes with a price tag.

Sextortion provides perhaps the clearest example of why understanding gendered patterns can change the questions adults ask.

A national study of 1,953 Australians aged 16 to 18 found **11.3% had experienced sexual extortion.**[4] Among those experiences, the demands made of boys and girls were strikingly different.

Boys were significantly more likely to face demands for money: **79.3% compared with 33.6% of girls.** Girls were much more likely to be pressured to provide additional intimate material: **59.5% compared with 18.3% of boys.** Boys were also more likely to have been targeted by someone they had never met in person.[4]

For boarding staff, this changes what a warning sign might look like.

A young person asking to borrow money, attempting unusual transfers, selling possessions or becoming distressed about access to their bank account may not initially present as an "online safety" issue.

Neither might a student becoming increasingly secretive about a relationship or seemingly unable to stop responding to someone online.

The behaviour in front of us may only make sense once we understand the pressure happening behind the screen.



Boarding changes the equation.

Online harm does not stop when school finishes or the lights go out.

In boarding, the student involved in an online conflict may sleep down the corridor. The person who received an image may sit beside them at breakfast. A rumour that started on Snapchat can become a face-to-face issue in the boarding house within minutes.

But that proximity also creates an enormous opportunity.

Boarding staff see things other adults may never see: the student pacing the corridor late at night, the sudden change in friendship groups, the child who no longer wants to hand over their phone, the unexplained request for money, or the normally social boarder who suddenly disappears into their room.

Those observations can be the first clue that something is wrong.

Gender is a clue, not a conclusion.

There is an important caution here.

A boy can experience image-based abuse. A girl can be financially sextorted. Any young person can be groomed, bullied, impersonated, scammed or exposed to harmful content.

And some students face even greater vulnerability outside a simple male-female comparison. In eSafety's latest national research, **81% of trans and gender-diverse children surveyed reported having experienced cyberbullying**, although eSafety appropriately cautions that this finding was based on a smaller sample.[2]

The goal is therefore not to create two different online safety rulebooks.

It is to become better at recognising patterns without turning them into stereotypes.

At Cybernetic Shield, our approach with schools is built around preventing incidents where we can, responding quickly when something happens, and supporting recovery afterwards. For boarding communities, a crucial part of that is ensuring the adults closest to students know enough about emerging online risks to recognise when behaviour might actually be a warning sign.

Boarding staff do not need to become "cyber" or "online incident" investigators.

But knowing that a boy being blackmailed may urgently be looking for money, or that a girl may be trapped in escalating demands for images, can help us ask the right question sooner. ■

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cybernetic shield
countering the impacts of cyberbullying and cyberthreats

What Shapes the Way We Work?

our every day decisions matter



Growing Professional Practice: A simple model for exploring what grounds our practice, what informs it, what we do, who we work with, and the community we create together.

In boarding, our everyday decisions matter. But what shapes the way we work with young people? Janet Caitens shares a simple flower model that is helping boarding staff at Fairholme College reflect on their values, deepen understanding, choose their tools with intent, and grow a stronger professional garden together.

Developing professional practice in boarding

Working well with young people in boarding requires a considerable breadth and depth of knowledge.

We train people in duty of care, child protection, mental health essentials, boundaries, risk and the practical requirements of residential life. This knowledge is invaluable.

There is, however, another question we ask less often.

What shapes the way a boarding professional works with a young person?

At 7am when someone refuses to get out of bed. At 9pm when a boarder says, "Just leave me alone". When a young person rolls their eyes, slams a door, becomes distressed or simply needs an adult to sit by them for a while, what shapes what we do next?

That question became the starting point for a series of reflective staff conversations called Growing Professional Practice.

These conversations began with a flower as a metaphor for our practice.

A simple model for complex work

The roots and soil represent our values. These ground our work. We ask staff, "What do you hope every boarder experiences when you are working with them? Respect? Fairness? Safety? Kindness? Consistency? Acceptance?

The stem represents our knowledge and understanding. This includes what we know about young people, development, relationships, mental health, emotional regulation and relational pedagogy. Knowledge is derived from formal learning, but also from experience, colleagues, reflection, mistakes and all that young people themselves teach us.

Next, we explore the petals. These are our tools and approaches. These are the things we do. We notice, pause, listen, make eye contact, slow down, ask questions, name emotions, use humour, give space, offer choices, make cups of hot chocolate, set boundaries, follow up, and repair.

The distinction between knowledge and tools is important.

Our knowledge is not the tool. Our knowledge helps us choose the tool.

Good professional practice is not about learning one preferred response and applying it to every situation. Good care is contextual. It means having options and considering what might be helpful for this boarder, in this situation, at this moment.

Then comes the bee

The bee represents the boarder.

This is where the model becomes more interesting. Professional practice does not happen to young people. It happens with them.

Every boarder arrives with a story that began long before we met them. This story includes family, culture, community, temperament, strengths, fears, relationships, previous experiences, ways of communicating, ways of coping, hopes and expectations. We may only get a glimpse of that story.

During one conversation, we use a parable about a married couple on a cruise. When the ship begins to sink, they reach a lifeboat with only one place left.

The husband takes it, leaving his wife behind.

We stop.

Judgements come quickly.

Then we learn more.

As the lifeboat pulls away, his wife calls, "Take care of our child."

Years later, their child discovers that their mother had been terminally ill. The father had desperately wanted to stay with her, but knew their child needed one parent to return home.

Nothing about the behaviour we first witnessed changed.

Our understanding did.

There is an important lesson here for boarding.

We see the eye roll, the slammed door, the refusal, the angry response.

The behaviour is real. Boundaries still matter.

But seeing behaviour is not the same as understanding it.

Professional curiosity asks us to consider what we may not yet know - not to excuse the behaviour, but to understand it more fully and respond accordingly.

Practice happens in relationship

Here is another reason for the bee.

When a bee visits a flower, the interaction is not one way. The bee takes nectar, and in the process, pollination occurs.

Both are affected.

The same is true in boarding. We influence the young people in our care, but they also influence the professionals we become. They challenge our assumptions, reveal our strengths, and at times expose our blind spots.

Professional curiosity therefore needs to travel in two directions. What might be happening for this young person? And what might be happening in me? Understanding ourselves is part of understanding our practice.

Conversations, not another training course

We deliberately call these sessions conversations.

Boarding staff already bring considerable knowledge to their work: professional learning, life experience, mistakes, successes and thousands of interactions with young people.

During these conversations staff talk, reflect, and reconsider. Whilst doing this, our practice which is often intuitive, or operating on 'automatic' becomes more visible and intentional. We consider: What grounds me? What informs me? What do I draw upon? What happens in me when things become difficult? Where do I need to remain more curious?

Something else has emerged. These conversations have created an appetite to keep talking about practice, leading to the introduction of group supervision. This is a regular space for staff to explore the real experiences of boarding and learn from each other.





Perhaps group supervision in boarding is a conversation for another edition.

The garden we create together

Our model eventually pulls back from the individual flower to reveal the garden.

No boarding professional works alone. Each contributes to the environment young people experience. We notice. We whisper. We ask, rather than assume. We hold a boundary without humiliation or blame. We return after conflict to repair.

These moments may seem small. Accumulated across hundreds of interactions, they become a young person's experience of boarding.

We are operating from the framework that developing boarding professionals is not simply about giving staff more information. It is also about helping them examine and continue to develop the practice they already have.

Professional practice is not something we complete. It is something we grow. ■

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Preparing Year 10 for Senior Study:
A Holistic Approach to Student Development

We all know that teachers strongly influence student motivation and learning, but enhancing a learning culture within a form requires both staff and students to embrace personal growth. This is no different in a boarding context. Structures that support continual learning are essential; and structures implemented in the classroom, need to be replicated in the boarding environment to ensure the culture of learning and to encourage individual student growth.

St Joseph's College, like other boarding schools, occupies a unique position in education. Unlike traditional day schools, the learning experience does not conclude when students leave the classroom at the end of the day. For boarding students, the school is simultaneously a place of learning, living, friendship, challenge and personal growth. This creates an important opportunity to deliberately connect the boarding environment with the classroom, ensuring that academic and pastoral development are viewed not as separate responsibilities, but as complementary parts of a young person's education.

The transition from Year 10 to Year 11 represents an important step in a student's secondary education. The increased academic expectations, greater independence and more demanding workload require students to become organised, disciplined and proactive in their approach to learning. While the transition can be challenging, it also provides an important opportunity for students to take greater ownership of their education, establish strong study habits and develop the skills required to succeed in their senior years. It is important that students recognise Year 11 as a significant step forward and approach it with maturity, purpose and a willingness to challenge themselves.

Throughout this year, Year 10 students have been deliberately encouraged to begin bridging the gap between their current learning experiences and the expectations of Year 11. Rather than waiting until the end of the year to address the transition, a range of strategies have been implemented across the academic and boarding programs to gradually develop students' independence, organisation, study habits and ownership of learning.

These strategies have provided students with opportunities to experience increased responsibility while still benefiting from appropriate structure, guidance and support. The intention has been to create a gradual and supported transition, allowing students to develop the confidence and routines necessary to meet the increased demands of Year 11.

The following strategies have been implemented to assist students with this adjustment:

Consolidating understanding through Journalling

The connection between boarding and the classroom is also important in developing positive habits. Boarding provides an ideal environment to reinforce the skills required for academic success, including organisation, time management, independence and resilience. While structured study periods can certainly support academic progress, the greatest value often comes from teaching students how to manage their responsibilities independently.

The implementation of the Learning Journal has greatly assisted students in developing these skills. Originally completed at the end of the evening to consolidate the learning gains from the day, the Learning Journal is now completed during the first 30 minutes of study. This time is also designated as tech-free, reflecting one of the strategies suggested by Dr Mark Williams.

The journal requires students to reflect on the lessons and content covered throughout the day, while also encouraging them to extend their thinking and delve deeper into their learning. It prompts students to make connections, ask questions and engage more meaningfully with the work at hand. Importantly, this change was student-led, with the boys actively voicing their desire to bring the journal forward in the study period.

The response has been overwhelmingly positive. Students have embraced the opportunity to take greater ownership of their learning, demonstrating that when boarding and the classroom work together, we can create an environment that not only supports academic progress but also develops the habits and independence students need for future success.

"Completing the learning journal early in study has helped me to set up my evening" Max Q (Weekly Boarder).

"I don't just rush through the journal now. I complete it properly and reflect on the days work" Charles L (Full Boarder).

"I feel more efficient in study after completing the journal" Dlyan Y (Weekly Boarder).

Teamwork

Ultimately, connecting boarding to the classroom requires strong relationships and consistent communication. A greater connection between KLA departments and the boarding program has been achieved this year through increased communication, staff presence and the promotion of subject-specific work. Activities such as subject masterclasses and teacher led sessions have been incorporated into evening routines, while student work samples are displayed throughout the dorms, creating a stronger sense of connection between students' academic and boarding environments.

Study techniques shared by teaching staff have also been developed into posters and promoted throughout the dorms. Students are increasingly using these approaches, particularly during collaborative study sessions, helping to reinforce effective learning strategies beyond the classroom. Directive terms are also displayed in breakout spaces, further consolidating the language and skills being developed in the classroom.

These initiatives demonstrate that boarding can play an important role in extending and reinforcing classroom learning. By creating greater consistency between the two environments, students are provided with regular opportunities to practise the skills, language and approaches that support their academic success.

The Importance of Language

The language we use plays a pivotal role in the academic growth of our students. Reinforcing our expectations through specific terminology helps to engrain this in the students. The boarding staff have been encouraged to replicate this language in their dealings with the boys of an evening. Referencing collaborative study techniques along with providing positive purposeful feedback creates a shared language that helps students understand learning is a priority, academic effort is valued and they are expected to take increasing ownership of their progress.

The Beauty of Collaboration and Connection

Collaboration is one of the many strategies within the 'Science of Learning' approach, which focuses on how students acquire, process and retain knowledge to optimise learning and understanding. At Joeys, Year 10 students are given opportunities to break out and utilise collaborative spaces during the second session of evening study. They also have access to collaborative spaces within the dorms, which they are encouraged to use before school and after formal study time for additional work. It has been pleasing to see the boys access these spaces before school, after study and on the weekend.

Students are readily taking up these opportunities and reaping a number of benefits, including:

- Peer learning: Students can explain concepts to one another, share ideas and learn from different perspectives.
- Deeper understanding: Explaining their thinking to others helps students consolidate their own knowledge and identify gaps in their understanding.
- Problem-solving: Working collaboratively encourages students to approach challenging tasks from different angles and develop solutions together.
- Increased engagement: A collaborative environment can make learning more interactive and enjoyable, encouraging students to take greater ownership of their work.
- Communication skills: Students develop their ability to articulate ideas, ask questions, listen actively and provide constructive feedback.

Importantly, these opportunities reinforce the idea that learning does not stop when students leave the classroom. By creating spaces where students can work together, seek assistance and share knowledge, the boarding environment becomes an extension of the classroom and an important part of the broader learning experience.

Connection

Connection is another key factor in encouraging learning. As Bowles et al. (2018) note, "If students feel disconnected from school, their learning and even their health can suffer." When boarding and classroom experiences are deliberately connected, schools can provide a more consistent and holistic approach to student wellbeing, engagement and academic achievement. Collaboration between boarding and teaching staff, particularly through evening study, is proving successful in strengthening this connection. Providing students with access to subject-specific resources, study strategies and teacher support during evening study, while also promoting these opportunities more broadly, encourages students to take greater ownership of their learning and access support in their own time. This approach helps to reinforce the message that learning extends beyond the classroom and that the boarding environment is an important part of the overall educational experience.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the goal is to create a consistent culture of learning across both the classroom and boarding environment. By reinforcing high expectations, independence and positive learning behaviours, students are better prepared for the demands of Year 11. These approaches encourage students to take greater ownership of their learning and personal growth. In doing so, the transition to senior schooling becomes a supported and purposeful step forward. ■

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Across continents and codes

Jordan Lenac channels international sporting experiences into a future in physiotherapy

The smell hits first - liniment and anticipation. Deep Heat, sharp enough to sting the nose, mixes with sweat and the nervous charge that settles over athletes before competition. Athletic tape rips in quick bursts. Ice buckets sit ready and treatment tables fill with bodies built for impact - six foot eight, 140 kilograms, impossibly fast.

Among the giants of American college football stands an Australian rugby player turned physiotherapy student, barely six foot and giving away 50 kilograms to some of the athletes asking him the same bewildered question.

You play rugby?
Yes.

Without pads?
Yes.

"They thought it was insane," laughs Bond University Doctor of Physiotherapy graduate Jordan Lenac.

"These guys were six foot eight and 140 kilos, but terrified at the thought of tackling another person without protective equipment."

For five weeks at Stanford University just outside San Francisco, Lenac worked alongside Division One college footballers during a placement that would help shape his future. The facilities felt closer to a professional sporting empire than a university.

"There were millions and millions of dollars pumped into it," he says.

"The facilities and the equipment and the support they had were unlike anything I'd ever seen before."

But amid the scale and spectacle of American college sport, it was rugby that became his unexpected icebreaker.

The students who had completed placements before him had tipped off players that an Australian rugby player, who had spent time in the European pro leagues for Glasgow before returning home to study, was among the next intake.

Questions came immediately.

How brutal was rugby?

Was it really played without helmets?

How could someone Lenac's size survive in a sport built on contact?

At under six foot and around 85 kilograms, he looked nothing like the footballers surrounding him.

"At first they couldn't believe a guy my size could play," he says.

"But once I started showing footage of me in Glasgow or playing at Bond, they were dumbfounded."

The exchange gave him instant credibility.

Long before he stood in elite sporting environments overseas, Lenac arrived at Bond University on the John Eales Rugby Excellence Scholarship carrying ambitions in both rugby and physiotherapy.

The scholarship represented opportunity. The timing could not have worked out better.

In his final season of rugby, Lenac helped deliver something Bond had spent decades chasing - the University's first Queensland Premier Rugby Hospital Cup premiership. Then, almost simultaneously, came the clearest signal that his future no longer lay on the field, but beside it. The plan had worked perfectly, for Bond and for Jordan.

Graduation would come with a physiotherapy degree, elite international placements and a sharpened understanding of the profession he once viewed solely through the eyes of an athlete. That understanding changed most profoundly in New Zealand.

At the start of this year, Lenac spent 10 weeks in New Zealand embedded with the Chiefs, one of Super Rugby's powerhouse franchises. It became the defining experience of his degree.

"That was definitely the highlight of my whole study career by far," he says.



"From the moment I got there I was treated as another staff member."

He arrived expecting to observe. Instead, he found himself trusted.

After an introductory period, Lenac was handed his own caseload of players. Assessments, treatment plans and rehabilitation became part of daily life. He joined discussions with senior medical staff, offered opinions on player management and sat in meetings involving specialist surgeons consulting from the United Kingdom.

The environment was demanding but collaborative. On game days, he strapped players before matches, triaged injuries, assessed athletes coming from the field and acted as an extra set of eyes and ears between doctors and medical staff.

At times, there were familiar names in the room - players he already knew from rugby circles, and others whose reputations made him momentarily hesitant to speak.

"There were some All Blacks boys that I was pretty tentative to put my two cents in," he says.

"But by the end, I was a part of those conversations."

The placement gave him more than technical experience. It changed how he viewed physiotherapy itself.

As a rugby player, Lenac admits he once saw medical staff through a narrow lens - the people standing between athletes and next week's game. Bad news often felt personal. A delayed return could feel unfair.

Behind the scenes, he discovered a far more considered reality.

"There's a lot of thought that goes into it, far more than I ever thought did as a player," he says.

"They weren't rushing boys back just because they were going to be on the All Blacks tour in a couple of months.

"They were asking: how is this going to affect them long term? What's this going to mean physically years from now?"

For an athlete who had spent years wanting only to play, it was an eye-opening shift.

"You just kind of see physios and medical staff as the bad guys standing between you and playing your next game," he says.

"But seeing those conversations happen behind the scenes completely changed my perspective."

There was another lesson too. Physiotherapy, he realised, requires more than technical expertise. Some skills are learned through textbooks and placement hours. Others emerge through lived experience. Hard skills mattered. Working in elite sport could be physically exhausting. Hours of treatment on bodies much larger than his own often left him battered. Being an athlete helped.

"There were definitely days where I came home a little bit sore after four or five hours of treatment," he says.

"But I think I was in a lot better stead because I had that physical side, I had kept up my training.

"And there are skills and tricks that you learn along the way to make your job a lot easier. Even little things like asking the patient or the player to position themselves in a way that's going to be best suited to you.

"I think as a new grad, you're probably a little bit uncomfortable in doing that because you just want to make sure the athlete is the focus."

It was the softer skills that surprised him most.

During his degree, much of the classroom focus on communication centred on hospital settings and clinical patients - understandable in a profession where sports physiotherapy represents only a small percentage of graduates. His placements at Stanford and the Chiefs taught him something different.

How to deliver difficult news. How to build trust. How to communicate with athletes who often define themselves through performance. And importantly, how to speak as someone who understood their world. Because he had lived it.

At the Chiefs, senior staff regularly asked how he would have wanted injury timelines or disappointing medical decisions communicated if he were the player.

"They appreciated that lived experience," he says.

"It gave me insight too.

"As a player, you don't realise how many conversations are happening behind the scenes trying to find the best solution for you."



He learned quickly that communication could be as important as treatment.

"I probably learnt more in my ten weeks at the Chiefs around soft skills than I ever thought would be possible in the classroom," he says.

"That experience was invaluable."

His journey through physiotherapy had hardly followed a straight line. Before elite sport came placements at the Bond University Health and Wellness Clinic, Logan Hospital, Gold Coast Private Hospital and Gold Coast University Hospital.

Orthopaedics. Neurological rehabilitation. Respiratory wards. A mixed bag that broadened his perspective.

For a period, he even found himself enjoying hospital work more than expected. But returning to sport confirmed where he belonged.

"The sporting environment reminded me why I wanted to get into physio in the first place," he says.

"It suits my personality more.

"You're thinking on your feet, relationships are more casual and communication is a huge part of it."

The Chiefs placement has already opened unexpected doors. Later this year he will travel to the Dubai Sevens with a New Zealand invitational rugby side - an opportunity born directly from relationships formed during those ten weeks.

Closer to home, Lenac has accepted a graduate physiotherapist position with Kieser Australia and will begin his career at the company's Burleigh Heads clinic.

Like much of his career so far, those opportunities have arrived less through applications than through conversations, rugby networks and word of mouth.

"A lot of it has actually come through Bond Rugby," he says.

"People putting my name forward and random calls."

That support, he says, extends beyond rugby.

Lenac speaks warmly of a university community that checked in through heavy study loads, demanding training commitments and the inevitable pressures of balancing elite sport with a physiotherapy degree.

"People had a genuine invested interest in how you were doing as a person," he says.

"Not just how you were doing as an athlete or a student."

In many ways, the ending could hardly have been scripted better.

A John Eales Rugby Excellence scholar. A Hospital Cup premiership in Bond's breakthrough season. Elite placements in America and New Zealand.

A physiotherapy degree. A graduate role with Kieser Australia. A career pathway already taking shape.

"It was a fairytale ending, if that is the ending," Lenac says.

After years of running onto rugby fields, Jordan Lenac now sees the game differently. He understands what happens in treatment rooms, behind closed medical meetings and in the difficult conversations athletes rarely see.

The work is not simply about getting players through next weekend. Sometimes, the hardest call is the one that protects the rest of someone's life. ■

BOND UNIVERSITY

AUTHOR:
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Spinifex Boarding Campus
Do It For Dolly









Students at Spinifex State Boarding Campus in Mount Isa are very busy young people. Last year we held a Pink Bloom Party for Breast Cancer and raised $1800 by inviting locals in our community to a cooked breakfast. It was so successful that this year we changed colours and decided to go blue for our Do It For Dolly Day Fundraiser.

As many of you know, Do It For Dolly Day is a national initiative dedicated to raising awareness about bullying and supporting young people and families impacted by it. This cause is deeply important to us as a boarding community. It was a chance for us to stand together, promote kindness, and show our students that they are not alone.

We held an afternoon tea on our deck, with our theme proudly set as blue—Dolly's favourite colour. The "Go Blue" campaign honoured her memory, raised awareness of the very real impact of bullying, and supported the vital work of Dolly's Dream.

We asked people who were unable to attend to consider donating through the QR code. We emphasized that no contribution is too small—every dollar and every act of kindness truly does make a difference.

Dolly's message reminds us all: "Speak up, even if your voice shakes." A staff member told a heartfelt story of the bullying her child endured as a teenager. The boarding students and community members who attended the afternoon tea showed their compassion, generosity, and support in helping us make a positive difference in the lives of young people and we raised $1628 for the cause. More importantly, we stood together, united in our goal to speak up when new saw or heard something that was said or done that was unkind to another person. ■

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Was it really *the crisis you didn't see coming?*

When an organisation suddenly finds itself dealing with a difficult communications issue, one response sometimes tends to surface very quickly:
"We didn't see this coming."

Very often that's absolutely true. An accident or another genuinely unforeseen event can and will occur without warning.

But after more than 35 years working across journalism, issues management and crisis communications, I've found that many of the communications crises organisations face aren't really unexpected at all. The moment they become public may be unexpected however the issue itself often isn't. It is an important distinction.

Think about it in the Schools and education context. A difficult staffing matter may have been developing for months. Parents may be unhappy about a proposed change. Fees may be about to increase. A building project may be attracting opposition. There may be a sensitive staff or student matter, a regulatory issue or a decision the school knows will be controversial.

None of these is necessarily a crisis. But any one of them can become a communications crisis surprisingly quickly.

The speed of escalation has changed

This is particularly important for schools because the boundary between an "internal" and "external" issue has almost disappeared. A letter sent to parents can be forwarded outside the school community within minutes. An email can become a screenshot. A parent discussion can migrate to social media. A complaint can attract wider attention.

And by the time the school realises that an internal matter has become public, other people may already be defining the issue on its behalf. That's a difficult point at which to start thinking about what you want to say.

The better time is considerably earlier.

Your greatest advantage is time

In crisis communications, one of the most valuable assets you can have isn't a beautifully written crisis manual. It's time. If you know an issue exists before it escalates, you have the luxury to think.

You can establish the facts. You can determine what you can and cannot say. You can identify the stakeholders most likely to be affected. You can prepare messages and anticipate the difficult questions you're likely to receive.

Most importantly, you have choices. Should staff hear about the issue before parents or vice versa? Do parents need to hear directly from the Principal or Head? Are alumni likely to be concerned? Does the Board need agreed talking points?

Could regulators, government agencies or other external stakeholders become involved?

And what happens if the issue appears on social media before you've communicated anything at all? Those questions are much easier to answer on a quiet Tuesday afternoon than they are at 3.30pm on Friday with a journalist asking for a response by six.

Reputation is often determined by the response

There is another important reason to prepare. Schools can't always prevent bad things happening. Nor can they ensure that every decision they make will be popular. What they can influence is how they respond.

I've seen organisations emerge from objectively serious situations with their reputation largely intact because stakeholders regarded their response as responsible, transparent and credible.

I've also seen relatively manageable problems become significant reputational issues because the response was slow, defensive, inconsistent or poorly thought through.

People judge the original event. But they also judge what the organisation does next. Did the school communicate promptly? Was it open about what happened? Did it demonstrate that it understood people's concerns? Were its words consistent with its actions? Did different representatives of the school give the same account? Was there a vacuum in which rumour and speculation could flourish?

Those are communications questions, but ultimately they become questions of trust.

Find the issue before the issue finds you

One of the simplest things a school can do is periodically stop looking at issues solely as operational matters and start looking at them through a communications lens.

It doesn't need to be an enormous exercise and it certainly shouldn't be about dreaming up every catastrophe that could conceivably befall the school. Instead, ask a much simpler question:

What could become a contentious issue for us during the next six months?

Look across the school. What's changing? What decisions are coming? Where are people already unhappy? What sensitive matters are unresolved? What regulatory or government decisions could affect you?

What changes are planned to fees, staffing, facilities, enrolments, curriculum, boarding, governance or school operations?

Then look at each issue from the perspective of the people affected by it. For every significant issue, ask:

Who cares about this?

What will concern them?

What will they want to know?

What will we be able to tell them?

Who should communicate with them?

And finally:

What happens if this becomes public tomorrow?

That last question has a remarkable ability to concentrate the mind.

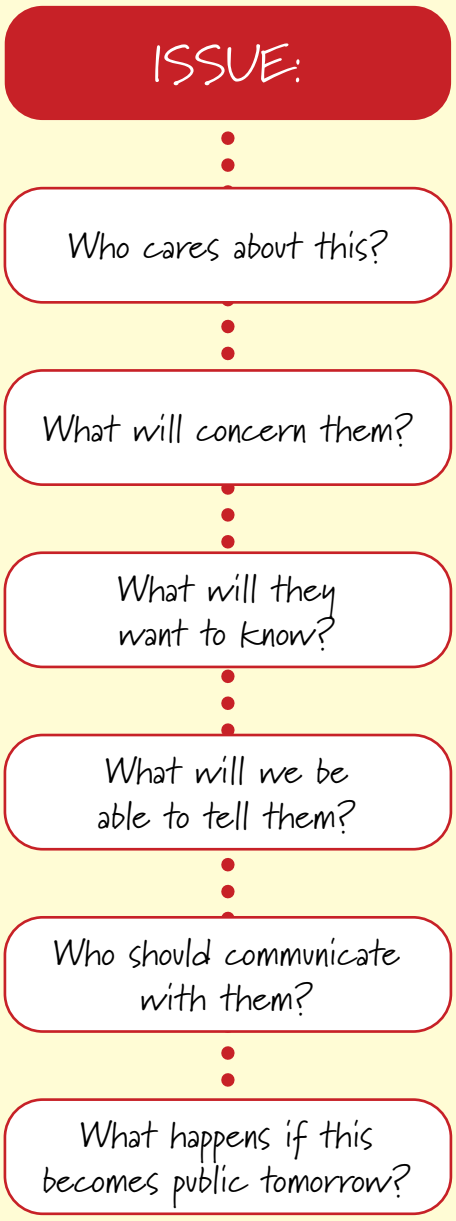
You don't need to predict the future

The objective is not to make school leadership permanently apprehensive about what might go wrong. It's about preparedness.

For the more significant issues, you might prepare key messages, anticipated questions and answers, a draft parent communication or a holding statement. For others, simply identifying the issue, deciding who is responsible for monitoring it and agreeing on the circumstances that would trigger a communications response may be enough.

I'd recommend schools undertake this exercise at least twice a year, with emerging issues added as circumstances change.

Because the uncomfortable truth about crisis communications is that once a contentious issue becomes public, your options rapidly begin to narrow. ■



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Turns Out, the Staff Had a Point

A year of reflection from a former boarder turned boarding supervisor

I was probably one of the last people anyone would have expected to become boarding staff. I came into boarding through foster care, and I certainly did not arrive excited about the idea. Boarding was not something I had chosen for myself and, as a teenager, I wasn't particularly interested in making the transition easy for anyone.

To put it politely, I had a flexible interpretation of the rules. I dropped the occasional F-bomb, lied about where I was, pushed boundaries, tested patience and even ran away. Looking back, I can laugh at some of it, although I'm sure the staff responsible for me at the time found it significantly less amusing. There is something wonderfully ironic about the fact that the girl who once quite literally ran away from boarding would eventually become someone desperately trying to get back into it.

Towards the end of my time as a boarder, I started to mature and my relationship with boarding changed. I settled in, began to enjoy the community around me and, once I started university, realised just how much the experience had prepared me for life outside school. Boarding had taught me independence, resilience, adaptability and how to live alongside people from all walks of life. The circumstances that brought me there were difficult, but with time I became incredibly grateful for where they had led me. Perhaps that explains why, years later, I became determined to return to boarding as a staff member. It took 14 applications and 13 rejections before somebody finally gave me that opportunity. Apparently, boarding was slightly less eager to have me back than I was to return.

A year into working as a boarding supervisor, I can confidently say that seeing boarding from the other side has been both rewarding and humbling. There have been plenty of moments when I've caught myself thinking, Oh... so that's why they did that. Things that seemed completely unreasonable when I was a teenager suddenly make perfect sense when you are responsible for the wellbeing of a house full of young people. I now understand why knowing where everyone is matters quite so much, why routines need to be consistent and why "I'll do it later" is not always the reassuring answer a boarder thinks it is. There have also been occasions when a student has offered me an explanation, and I've had to resist smiling because I recognise exactly what is happening. Being a former rule-bender turns out to be surprisingly useful professional development.

But my first year has taught me that boarding is about far more than rules and routines. Before working in it, I don't think I appreciated how much of the job is simply noticing. You notice when the student who usually fills a room with noise suddenly goes quiet. You notice when somebody hangs around the common room longer than usual because perhaps, they don't quite want to be alone yet. You notice the stress building before an assessment, the friendship disagreement that has suddenly become the most important event in the world, the homesickness that appears unexpectedly and the excitement when something has finally gone right. Some nights require serious conversations and careful decisions. Others involve laughter, helping with something completely ordinary or listening to a story that takes significantly longer to tell than it probably needed to. I've learnt that these seemingly insignificant interactions are often where relationships are built.

I've also discovered just how unpredictable boarding can be. You can begin a shift thinking you know exactly how the evening will unfold and very quickly discover that the boarding house has other plans. Working in boarding requires you to move constantly between roles. In the space of an evening, you can be the person enforcing a boundary, listening to a problem, celebrating an achievement, settling a disagreement, reminding somebody of something for what feels like the hundredth time and trying not to laugh when a student says something completely unexpected. There is no single version of what a boarding shift looks like, and I think that is part of what I have grown to love about the work.

One of the biggest lessons of my first year has been learning the balance between consistency and compassion. As a former boarder, my instinct can sometimes be to understand immediately why a young person has made a particular choice. As

a staff member, I've learnt that understanding someone's behaviour does not mean removing the boundary. Sometimes caring for a young person means listening and giving them space. Sometimes it means saying no. Sometimes it means having a conversation they would rather not have. And sometimes it means following through with a consequence while making sure the student understands that the relationship has not disappeared because they made a mistake. That balance is something I am still learning, and I suspect good boarding staff probably never stop learning it.

I've also gained a completely new appreciation for the team behind a boarding house. As a student, I saw whichever staff member happened to be standing in front of me. As a supervisor, I now see the conversations, handovers, documentation, planning and collective decision-making that sit quietly behind the everyday life of boarding. One person notices something, another follows it up, someone else checks in the following day. Good boarding care is rarely the work of one person. It is a group of people sharing information, supporting each other and trying to provide young people with consistency even when different staff are coming on and off shift. That was an entire side of boarding I simply never saw as a student.

Perhaps the strangest part of this year has been recognising pieces of my younger self in the students I now work with. Not because their circumstances are necessarily anything like mine, but because I remember what it feels like to be young and completely convinced that the adult standing in front of you simply does not understand. My past has given me empathy, but working in boarding has taught me not to assume. Every boarder arrives with their own personality, family, culture, experiences and story. My job isn't to see myself in every student. It is to get to know the person standing in front of me.

That distinction has become increasingly important to me. My own experiences may have brought me into this work, but this job isn't about recreating my story through somebody else's. It is about using what I learnt from mine to be a better adult for the young people I serve. Sometimes that means recognising that challenging behaviour may have something sitting underneath it. Sometimes it means remembering how important humour can be. Sometimes it simply means continuing to show up the next day, regardless of how difficult the previous evening was.

There have been plenty of things I have had to learn this year, and plenty I am still learning. I have made mistakes, questioned whether I handled situations correctly and discovered that things that appear very straightforward from the outside become much more complicated when there is an actual young person standing in front of you. I've learnt that you won't always finish a shift knowing whether you said exactly the right thing. You won't always be the student's favourite person, particularly when you're the one enforcing the boundary. And you don't always get an immediate indication that something you did mattered. Sometimes the job is simply to be consistent, do your best and trust that the accumulation of those small interactions contributes to something bigger.

That is perhaps the greatest lesson boarding has taught me from both sides. A boarding house is built through hundreds of ordinary moments. It is built through routines and boundaries, but also through jokes in the common room, conversations after difficult days, celebrations of small achievements, checking that someone has eaten, remembering what somebody told you three days ago and simply being a familiar face when home is far away. As a boarder, I experienced the result of those things. As a staff member, I now understand the work that goes into creating them.

I still don't want to give my former boarding staff too much satisfaction. Becoming a supervisor has certainly not convinced me that teenage me was wrong about everything. But after a year on the other side, I understand them in a way I never could before. I understand the responsibility behind the questions, the care behind many of the routines and why sometimes the least popular decision is still the right one.

My journey into boarding began through circumstances I never would have chosen. My journey back into it was entirely by choice. Fourteen applications later, I finally got the opportunity I had been chasing, and one year into the job, I am incredibly grateful that I did.

Somewhere between the late-night conversations, the laughter, the challenging moments, the endless reminders and the privilege of watching young people grow, I have reached a conclusion my teenage self would probably hate. The staff had a point. ■



Archana in Year 12 at Ballarat Clarendon College



Archana Nair and colleagues from Peninsula Grammar School at Phillip Island

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Innovation For Every Space: *How AFS Reimagines Boarding School Cleaning*

Austral Facility Services (AFS) is redefining what "clean" means in boarding schools by pairing professional expertise with smart robotic technologies like the TN70 Robotic Floor Scrubber and Sparky Jr TN10. This combination delivers consistently spotless floors while freeing staff and boarding teams to focus on the wellbeing and learning experience of students.

Advanced Cleaning Solutions for Today's Schools

AFS positions revolutionary cleaning technology at the heart of its service offering, bringing advanced and intelligent cleaning robots directly into the everyday environment of boarding schools. TN70 Robotic Floor Scrubber and Sparky Jr TN10 are user-friendly tools that can be deployed across a wide range of layouts, from long corridors and common rooms to busy dining halls and study areas.



These robots deliver precise cleaning even in high-traffic areas, provide stronger scrubbing power than traditional manual methods, and can run for extended periods of up to around four hours without interruption. AFS then uses real-time monitoring and remote management capabilities to track performance, generate cleaning reports, and fine-tune schedules, turning cleaning into a data-informed, reliable service rather than a reactive chore.

Manual Methods Under Pressure in Modern Boarding Schools

Boarding schools face unique challenges when cleaning is done purely with manual tools. Shared living spaces, late-night study sessions, sports activities, and constant foot traffic mean that floors and common areas rarely get "quiet time" for deep cleaning. Staff must juggle routine tasks such as vacuuming, mopping, and scrubbing with supervision, pastoral care, and operational responsibilities, which can lead to inconsistent standards and rushed cleaning at peak times.

Manual cleaning in large or complex layouts, multi-storey dormitories, long corridors, and mixed-use common rooms, also places physical strain on staff and often depends on individual technique and energy levels. In addition, it can be difficult to document what has been cleaned, when, and to what standard, making it challenging for school leaders to demonstrate hygiene compliance and reassure parents and students.

Transforming Boarding School Environments Through Smart Cleaning Solutions

AFS tackles these challenges by integrating robotics and other innovations into its cleaning solutions. The TN70 and Sparky Jr TN10 are designed to autonomously plan cleaning routes, avoid obstacles, and deliver consistent floor care even in busy environments, ensuring that areas stay clean throughout the day rather than only after-hours.

By automating heavy, repetitive tasks such as scrubbing and dust removal, AFS allows onsite teams to redirect their time to higher-value activities, supporting students, maintaining safety, and managing complex facilities. The robots' long runtime, strong brush pressure, and wide cleaning paths mean more area can be covered with fewer interruptions, while cloud-based or remote monitoring allows performance to be tracked and reported in real time. This aligns with AFS's broader innovation focus: investing in quality systems and technology to deliver reliable, measurable outcomes rather than relying on ad hoc manual effort.



Measurable Outcomes in Boarding School Settings

Emerging research and field evidence show that using robotic cleaning technologies in boarding schools can lead to clear, measurable outcomes in hygiene, safety, and efficiency. Studies of autonomous cleaning robots in educational settings report increases in verified floor-cleanliness scores, with robot-assisted cleaning achieving more consistent coverage and fewer missed areas than traditional manual-only routines. Trials in schools and similar facilities also indicate reductions of 30–50% in staff time spent on repetitive floor work, allowing teams to redirect effort towards supervision, maintenance, and student-facing tasks.

From a health and safety perspective, research on disinfection and cleaning robots highlights potential decreases in environmental contamination and associated infection risks, especially when robots are used to supplement, not replace, human cleaners. For boarding schools, these findings translate into cleaner shared spaces, lower likelihood of slip and spill incidents due to more frequent floor care, and improved confidence among parents, students, and staff that living and learning environments are maintained to consistently high, evidence-based standards.



A Step Toward Smarter, Safer School Environments

As a dedicated cleaning and facility services partner, we are committed to tackling the challenges boarding schools face when they rely solely on traditional, non-innovative cleaning methods. Together with ABSA, we recognise that manual approaches alone can struggle to keep pace with high-traffic, 24/7 residential learning environments. Our commitment is to help boarding schools transition towards smarter, technology-enabled cleaning solutions that lift hygiene standards, improve safety, and free staff to focus more on student care. By working closely with ABSA and its member schools, AFS aims to make innovation in cleaning accessible, practical, and tailored to the unique needs of boarding communities. ■

AFS
Austral Facility Services



Beyond the Phone Call
building relationships

There are probably easier ways to build relationships with boarding families than standing at the back end of a cow wearing a very long glove. But boarding has a funny way of taking you places you never expected.

I was visiting one of our boarding families on their property when Dad announced they were preg-testing cattle. Before I really knew what was happening, he had the glove on, his arm where you would expect it to be, and then looked across at me.

"Right, Kyle. Your turn."

Welcome to family engagement.

It certainly wasn't what I had in mind when I first started thinking about how we could strengthen the connection between our boarding house and the families who entrust their children to us. But perhaps it captures the idea better than anything else could. Because strangely enough, that moment probably says more about building connection with boarding families than anything I could put into a strategic plan.

Somewhere between school and home, beyond the phone calls, emails, newsletters and parent functions, there is another kind of relationship waiting to be built. One where the titles disappear a little and we simply get to know each other.

The view changes from the back of a four-wheeler

On another property visit, I arrived while a family was weaning cattle.

A calf became separated from its mother and suddenly I was on the back of a four-wheeler with one of our Year 10 girls, holding onto this animal while we tore across the property.

I was hanging on for dear life. She, meanwhile, was completely at home. There was something wonderfully humbling about it. At school, I was Mr Langman. The Director of Boarding. Out there? I was very clearly the rookie.

The next morning, we were on horseback mustering cattle. Cattle kept breaking through my line, instructions were being shouted in my direction, and nobody appeared particularly concerned about protecting my professional dignity. I loved it.

I wasn't seeing this boarder in our world. I was seeing her in hers. I wasn't learning about her; I was learning from her.

We know our boarders extraordinarily well: who struggles to get out of bed, who needs quiet after a difficult day, who gets homesick and who needs pushing. But another version of that young person exists hundreds or thousands of kilometres away.

I've watched young people drive large manual vehicles, work cattle, operate machinery and carry enormous responsibility. Then they return to boarding, where we tell them to walk down the road in a group of three.

Of course we do. Our duty of care is different. But it made me wonder: What happens when a young person who is deeply capable at home arrives somewhere that doesn't always know what they are capable of?

Getting lost helps

On one of my first trips, I was heading to a sheep property near Bollon. Dad had drawn me a map involving dirt roads,

gates, letterboxes and distances that probably made perfect sense to someone who knew where they were going.

I did not.

I thought he told me to travel seven kilometres down a dirt track. He had actually said seventy… There is quite a significant difference between seven and seventy kilometres when you're losing phone reception, the sun is disappearing and your fuel gauge is heading in the wrong direction.

Eventually Dad managed to get through. "Mate, I'm coming to find you." Sometime later, headlights appeared. He pulled over on this dirt road in the middle of nowhere, got out, gave me a hug and handed me a cold drink. Before directions. Before apologies. Just: You're here. You're all right. Have a drink.

I had set out to visit a boarding family. Instead, they were looking after me.

Perhaps that's when something shifts. Connection becomes very different when we allow ourselves to be known too.

The conversations you can't schedule

Some of the best parent meetings in boarding happen when nobody realises they're having one. They happen at smoko, around a kitchen table, in a ute, beside cattle yards, at a local event when everyone has stopped trying to have a "school conversation".

That's when you hear about the skills a child needs back on the property, something a daughter or son is finding difficult, phones, activities, or simply how much they miss having their child around.

Those conversations have influenced programs, made me reconsider how we give boarders responsibility and helped me understand frustrations that didn't make sense when viewed only through the lens of school. They've also reminded me that connection is rarely efficient.

A student desperately wants an opportunity but doesn't know where to start. They don't have a résumé, so you make one. You help them recognise that what they do every weekend at home constitutes skills. You ring businesses. You drive them to an interview.



One of our girls wanted to learn how to DJ. We don't offer DJ lessons, so I searched who local venues were using, found a DJ and now we're organising lessons. None of it is revolutionary. But together those moments say: You matter enough for me to spend time on this.

Protecting what already exists

None of us owns the boarding community we lead. We inherit it for a while.

At Toowoomba Anglican School, former boarding leaders Ian Bassett and Bianca Lingard are still part of families' stories. So when I've travelled to meet families, I've taken them with me.

Why wouldn't I?

Families know them. They trust them. That history doesn't become irrelevant because somebody new has "Director of Boarding" written under their name. Perhaps alongside building relationships, we should think about protecting the relationships that already exist. Connection has a memory, and boarding communities have very long memories.

To be seen

When I think about why this matters to me, I eventually end up back at school myself. I grew up without a dad, and I was a troubled teenager. There was plenty going on, plenty of bravado and plenty for adults to react to. Then I had a maths teacher who did something different. She saw through it. She saw me. I don't know whether she ever realised the impact that had. But I did. Someone had taken the time to look past what was immediately in front of them and become curious about the person underneath.

Maybe that's why I have such a strong reaction to making boarding personal. Because being known changes things.

We can know a boarder's behaviour history, academic results, hometown and parents' names. But to really know somebody, eventually we must enter their world.

That doesn't necessarily mean driving seventy kilometres down the wrong dirt road. It doesn't require a horse. It definitely doesn't require preg-testing a cow.

It requires curiosity.

Who is this young person when they're not here? What are they brilliant at that we've never had the chance to see? What does home feel like to them? And what would change in the way I cared for them if I understood the answers?

I started out thinking I was visiting families because it would help them feel more connected to boarding. What I didn't expect was how much it would change the way I saw boarding.

Building connection isn't only about bringing families closer to us. Sometimes we need to be the ones willing to travel the distance.

Even if, every now and then, we end up at the wrong end of a cow. ■

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The 2027 Horizon: *Reclaiming Human Connection in the Tech-Enabled School*

As education navigated the rapid acceleration of artificial intelligence and digital transformation over the past few years, screens increasingly replaced spaces for conversation, and algorithms began shaping personalized learning paths. Technology brought remarkable efficiencies, but it also exposed a quiet vulnerability: a growing deficit in human connection.

A common theme has emerged this year in the discussions we have had with speakers, trainers and clients as we look to 2027, education (and the world at large) stands at a pivotal turning point. The initial novelty of AI-driven classrooms has matured into a realisation that technology, no matter how sophisticated, cannot replace the core of human development. Conversations we are having indicate that 2027 marks a definitive shift from a sole focus on digital capability to a deliberate recommitment to humanity - rebalancing high-tech environments with high-touch relationships to build truly inclusive school cultures.

The Power of Human Connection in an AI World

At its foundation, an inclusive school culture rests on a simple truth: learning happens through relationships. While digital tools provide instant access to information, they cannot model empathy, celebrate a breakthrough, or offer comfort after a setback.

Integrating technology without sacrificing human connection requires intentional design. EdTech should serve as an amplifier for human interaction, not a wall behind which staff and students isolate. A blended approach ensures technology handles repetitive administrative tasks and foundational drills, freeing up educators to do what they do best: mentor, guide, listen, and build genuine rapport.

When schools protect spaces for face-to-face dialogue, collaborative problem-solving, and shared experiences, they nurture emotional intelligence (EQ) alongside academic growth. Students learn to read non-verbal cues, manage interpersonal conflict, and express empathy - skills no algorithm can synthesize. For staff, strong peer connections reduce burnout and cultivate a shared sense of mission.

Psychological Safety and Mutual Respect

Inclusion cannot exist without psychological safety. For both students and educators to take intellectual risks, ask tough questions, and embrace diversity, they must feel confident that vulnerability will not be met with ridicule or punishment.

A culture of mutual respect operates as a two-way street:

- **Student to Student:** Learning to value differing perspectives, backgrounds, and learning styles.
- **Staff to Student:** Seeing each learner as an individual with unique strengths rather than a set of data points.
- **Leadership to Staff:** Creating a supportive workplace where teachers feel trusted, heard, and empowered to innovate.

When psychological safety is established, diversity moves from a policy mandate to an active, lived practice. Inclusive schools actively invite varied voices into the conversation, ensuring that every member of the community feels seen, heard, and valued for who they are.

Leadership as the Cultural Catalyst

Building and sustaining this balance requires adaptive leadership. School leaders set the tone for whether technology isolates or unites.

Leadership in 2027 demands a relational approach rather than a purely administrative one. Leaders must model the emotional intelligence and open communication they expect from their teams. By prioritizing staff wellbeing, setting clear boundaries around digital availability, and actively listening to the needs of the school community, leaders create an environment where human-centered policies thrive. They set the expectation that while technology is a tool we use, connection is the culture we live.

Wellbeing, Movement, and Mindful Engagement

An inclusive culture addresses the whole person, acknowledging the deep link

between physical health, mental wellbeing, and cognitive focus.

By embedding physical wellbeing into the daily framework, schools help students and staff regulate stress, improve executive functioning, and maintain the emotional stamina required for deep learning.

Embracing the 2027 Paradigm

The journey toward 2027 is not about stepping back from progress or discarding the digital advances of recent years. It is about placing technology in its proper context: as a servant to human flourishing, not its master.

By placing human connection, psychological safety, and emotional intelligence at the centre of educational vision, schools can construct a culture where technology enhances learning while humanity defines the environment. In doing so, we prepare students not just to navigate a digital economy, but to thrive as empathetic, resilient, and connected members of a diverse world.

Much of this takes time, planning, forward thinking and a proactive approach. And perhaps an external voice that lends a different perspective.

The talent we work with bring hard-won experience from the boardroom, the frontline, and beyond. They challenge comfortable thinking, spark new ideas, and give your team the tools and mindset to act on what they've heard, long after they leave the room. Real outcomes, real change. Talk to us about your 2027 PD and student engagements. ■



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Boarding School of the Year

Beyond the award: building the whole boarding journey at Kaziw Meta

Winning Boarding School of the Year recognised a period of strong growth at Torres Strait Kaziw Meta. More importantly, it confirmed the value of planning for every stage of a boarder's journey - before arrival, during school and after Year 12.

Winning the 2026 Australian Boarding Schools Association Boarding School of the Year award was a proud moment for our boarders, families, staff and Management Committee. To be recognised alongside established boarding schools from across Australia meant a great deal to a small, community-run organisation in the Torres Strait.

The award gave us a chance to look back at what has changed, but it also sharpened our thinking about what comes next. We do not want Kaziw Meta to be chosen simply because a young person has no secondary school on their home island. Our ambition is to become the first-choice boarding option for Torres Strait families because of the quality of our people, programs, facilities, opportunities and care.

Why Kaziw Meta exists

Kaziw Meta was established in 1978 on Waibene, Thursday Island. We support students in Years 7 to 12 from outer island communities who attend secondary school on Thursday Island. In 2025, our boarders came from 18 Torres Strait island communities. We expanded from 67 to 88 places in one year and planned around a cohort of about 90 students.

Every term, families send their children across Zenadth Kes by dinghy, ferry, plane and sometimes helicopter. That is a big act of trust. We must provide a safe home, support their education and keep them connected to family, culture and island life.



TSKM 2026 ORITENTATION CAMP

Most of our workforce is Torres Strait Islander and our Management Committee is Indigenous-led. Staff understand the communities our boarders come from, the importance of family and sorry business, and the cultural and language differences across the islands. That local knowledge is central to the way we operate.

A boarding strategy of our own

One of the most important decisions we made was to develop a strategic plan specifically for boarding. A school's strategic plan naturally concentrates on teaching and learning. Boarding has different responsibilities and needs its own direction, measures and investment plan.

Our plan starts with the whole life of a boarder at Kaziw Meta. It covers the period before they arrive, their years living with us and the transition into work, training or further study. It also brings together safety, health, wellbeing, leadership, culture, entrepreneurship, staffing, facilities and financial sustainability.

We have mapped an optimum staffing model for our current operation and for future growth. This helps us plan the roles, skills and leadership capacity we need in the short term and over the longer term, rather than adding positions only when pressure appears. We are investing in leadership development for boarding staff, particularly pathways that allow Torres Strait Islander staff to progress.

The next step is to turn the plan into a practical set of key performance indicators. Academic results matter, but they are only one part of the story. We also need to measure attendance and retention, boarder and family confidence, health and wellbeing, safety, staff capability, participation in leadership and cultural programs, and what happens to young people after they leave us. Those measures should tell us where support is working and where we still have gaps.

Before the first day

Transition starts well before a boarder arrives at Kaziw Meta. For a young person from an outer island, the move may involve leaving family for the first time, adapting to a larger school and learning the routines of a shared home.

We are expanding our island visitation program so families can meet us earlier and ask honest questions about the boarding experience. These visits are not simply recruitment. They help with enrolment documents and other paperwork, build confidence and give us a better understanding of each young person's strengths and needs. Just as importantly, they give us time to listen, strengthen personal relationships and build better networks with families, schools and community organisations.

Good information before the move prevents avoidable problems later. A family that knows who to call, what the routines are and how their child will be supported begins the boarding journey with greater confidence.

Support that continues through school

In 2025, Kaziw Meta became the first Indigenous boarding provider in Australia to be certified against the Australian Boarding Standard, AS 5725:2015. The three-year process required us to improve policies, records, staff training, supervision, child safety, feedback and facilities. More importantly, we had to show that our daily practice matched what was written down.

We have strengthened access to two full-time teachers through a partnership with Queensland Education and secured funding for after-hours tutoring. Monday to Thursday includes structured study, literacy and EALD assistance, assessment planning and coaching linked to QCE and vocational pathways.

Our reported English pass rate increased from 14 per cent in 2023 to 70 per cent by Term 4, 2025. Year 11 GPA rose from 2.29 to





2.77 and Year 12 GPA from 3.11 to 3.22, with improvement across several other subjects. There was no quick fix. Staff and boarders turned up, worked through assessments and built better habits.

The boarding experience must be broader than grades. We are building programs around leadership, culture, entrepreneurship and wellbeing, with health support and recreation included in the weekly rhythm. Family feedback sessions and Boarders' Council meetings help us identify what is missing. Sometimes the answer is a new service; sometimes it is a change to food, routines, phones, study or communication. Either way, boarders and families need a genuine say.



Transition does not end at Year 12

The third part of the journey is what happens after boarding. A graduate may have completed Year 12 or secured an apprenticeship but still face practical barriers to keeping that opportunity. In the Torres Strait, accommodation, transport and the cost of moving between islands can quickly turn a good start into a difficult one.

Our learner-driver program shows what practical support can achieve. With a dedicated vehicle and supervised driving hours, 15 boarders gained learner licences in 2025. Our Career Transition Officer works with senior boarders on job readiness, work experience, training and employment, and five senior boarders moved into paid work while still at school.

This work led directly to our 2026 Transition House project. With a $450,000 commitment from the Ian Potter Foundation, subject to securing a suitable property, the Year 13 and 14 pilot is designed to provide stable accommodation and continued support while graduates begin work, an apprenticeship or further training. The aim is simple: support should not disappear on the day a boarder finishes school.

People, facilities and sustainable growth

Grant success has allowed us to move important work forward. Additional funding support for programs and wages includes:

- Learners Program and staff wages
- Learn-to-drive vehicle
- Mentoring and employment support
- Youth Wellbeing and a Recreational role

- Cultural Programs and Cultural Staff wages
- We also secured and progressed around $5 million in campus improvements, centred on the Waiwi Meta extension, with more boarding space and upgrades to security, fire systems, laundries, outdoor areas and study spaces.

Our facilities master planning now links buildings to the way boarding actually works: bed numbers, supervision, learning, recreation, health, staff needs and cultural life. More beds are useful only if staffing, services and operating income grow with them.

That is why we are exploring creative revenue-generation models and community partnerships that can expand our capacity and bring the right expertise into boarders' lives. Grants remain important, but a run of successful grants is not the same as reliable recurrent funding. Responsible growth means knowing what a program will cost after the launch funding ends and being prepared to slow down if care cannot keep pace.

What the award means

The award belongs to the people who do the work every day, house parents waking boarders for school, staff sitting beside students during study, cooks preparing meals, drivers getting young people to appointments, work and activities, and families taking phone calls when their child is having a hard week.

It has given our team confidence, but it has also raised expectations. Our families should expect a lot from us, and we should expect a lot from ourselves.

Good boarding should give young people more choices without weakening their connection to family, culture and community. Our strategic plan gives us a clearer way to judge whether we are doing that - before a boarder arrives, throughout their time with us and after they leave. The award was a milestone, not the finish line. ■

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The Little Things Matter

In boarding, it is easy to become consumed by the big things.

Every day, we are managing behaviour, responding to wellbeing concerns, completing risk assessments, planning programs, coordinating travel, overseeing compliance requirements, managing budgets, supporting staff, communicating with families, and ensuring the smooth operation of our boarding houses.

These responsibilities are important and demand our attention. They fill our calendars, occupy our minds, and often determine how we measure the success of our day.

Yet, in the midst of all this, it is often the smallest interactions that have the greatest impact.

A simple "Good morning."
A genuine "How are you?"
A smile as a student walks through the door.
Remembering a sporting result.
Asking about a family member.
Taking a few extra minutes to listen.

These moments can seem insignificant when compared with the complexity of modern boarding. However, they are often the moments that build trust, strengthen relationships, and create a genuine sense of belonging.

One practice I have always tried to be mindful of is beginning every conversation with "How are you?" regardless of the reason for the interaction. Even when a conversation needs to address behaviour, punctuality, or a poor decision, taking a moment to acknowledge the person before addressing the problem reminds them that they are valued.

Students are remarkably perceptive. They can tell when they are viewed primarily as a behaviour issue to be managed rather than a young person who is still learning, growing, and navigating life's challenges. A simple check-in can completely change the tone of a conversation and often leads to a more positive and productive outcome.

Unlike a classroom, where a degree of respect often comes with the role, boarding is different. Boarding is our students' home away from home. We share in their daily lives, their successes, their disappointments, their excitement, and their struggles. In this environment, respect is not simply granted because of a title or position. It is earned through consistency, authenticity, and the relationships we build over time.

The best way to earn that respect is to ensure every boarder feels known as an individual.

Not as a room number.
Not as a behaviour record.
Not as a name on a roll.
But as a person.

That foundation does not begin during a formal wellbeing meeting, a behaviour conversation, or a major boarding event. It begins with the little things. It begins when we greet students by name, when we remember what is important to them, and when we demonstrate through our actions that they matter.

For me, one of the most important parts of evening duty is making sure I say goodnight to every boarder. It is a simple gesture that only takes a few moments, but it represents something much more important. It is an opportunity to check in, celebrate a success, offer reassurance, or simply let a student know that someone notices whether they are there or not.

More often than not, it is during these seemingly insignificant moments that students choose to open up about what is really happening in their lives.

The same philosophy extends to the start of the day. When I am on morning duty, I make a conscious effort to greet every boarder with a cheerful "Good morning" as they make their way to breakfast. Admittedly, the response is often less enthusiastic than my greeting. Most mornings I am met with an "Urgh", a grunt, or a sleepy nod as they zombie their way towards the dining room.

But that is not really the point.

The value is not in the response I receive. The value is in the consistency of the message I am sending.

Every morning, those students know they have been noticed.
They have been acknowledged.
They matter.

Over time, those small interactions begin to add up. A greeting in the morning, a conversation at dinner, a follow-up after a difficult day, attendance at a sporting event, or a goodnight before lights out

all contribute to what I often think of as the relationship bank account. Every interaction is either a deposit or a withdrawal.

When difficult conversations inevitably arise, and they always do, it is often those deposits that make all the difference.

For new boarding staff, it is worthwhile remembering that relationship building in boarding is very much a long game.

During your first term, many boarders will naturally be polite, compliant, and respectful as they get to know you. In many ways, they are assessing you just as much as you are assessing them. They are observing whether you are consistent, whether your expectations are fair, and whether your interest in their wellbeing is genuine.

The first term can sometimes feel easy.
The second term is where the real test begins.

It is often during that second term that you begin to see the results of the foundations you have laid. The level of engagement you receive, the quality of the relationships you have built, and the respect students demonstrate will often be influenced by the investment you made in those early months.

Have you learnt their names?
Do you know what they are passionate about?
Have you shown up to support them?
Have you taken time to listen?
Have you been present when they needed you?

Boarders have an incredible ability to recognise authenticity. They quickly identify those who genuinely care about them and those who are simply performing a role. While students may not remember every rule we enforce, they rarely forget how a boarding staff member made them feel.

The same principle extends beyond our students.

Boarding is demanding work. Long hours, emotional investment, shift work, weekends away from family, and the unpredictability of life in a boarding house can take their toll on all of us. While much of our focus is understandably directed towards the young people in our care, it is equally important that we extend the same level of care and consideration to our fellow boarding staff.

We often speak about the importance of greeting our students, checking in on their wellbeing, and making them feel seen and valued. Yet sometimes, in the busyness of the role, we forget to do the same for the colleagues standing beside us.

A simple “How are you going?”
An offer of support after a challenging shift.
A genuine acknowledgement of a job well done.
Taking a few moments to listen.

These small interactions matter just as much within staff teams as they do with students.

The strongest boarding teams I have worked with are not necessarily those with the most experience or the most resources. They







are the teams where people genuinely care for one another, where staff notice when someone is struggling, and where support is offered before it is requested.

Just as we build relationship bank accounts with our students, we build them with our colleagues. The little things create trust, foster respect, and contribute to a positive team culture. When difficult periods arise, as they inevitably do in boarding, those relationships often become the difference between simply getting through the challenge and growing from it together.

As boarding professionals, we have a responsibility to care for our students. Equally, we have a responsibility to care for each other. After all, when staff feel supported, valued, and connected, they are better equipped to provide the same experience for the young people in their care.

As leaders and educators, we will always need to focus on the big things. Good governance, effective behaviour management, operational excellence, compliance, risk management, and robust systems are all essential. They help ensure our boarding houses are safe, successful, and sustainable.

But they are not what students remember.

Years from now, our boarders are unlikely to remember the rosters we developed, the reports we completed, the policies we reviewed, or the risk assessments we wrote.

What they will remember is how we made them feel.
They will remember who greeted them in the morning.
Who checked in when things were tough.
Who attended their sporting fixtures.
Who celebrated their successes.
Who listened when they needed someone to talk to.
Who took the time to say goodnight.

In boarding, we are entrusted with caring for young people during some of the most formative years of their lives. While the big things are important, it is often the little things that leave the biggest legacy.

Those small moments may seem insignificant at the time, but together they form the foundation of every great boarding house: trust, belonging, connection, and respect.

Sometimes, the most important things we do are not the biggest things at all.

Sometimes, they are simply the little things. ■

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Ipswich Girls Grammar School



Act Now
don't put off the hard conversation

"He was fired."

I was asking about a colleague I hadn't seen in a while.

While I was shocked, I wasn't surprised.

He was a senior exec, responsible for three business units, one of which was led by someone who should have been removed from the role at least a year earlier. The reason he wasn't, is because he was very popular, despite being a bit shit at his job.

My colleague didn't want to have the difficult conversation, so the issue was tolerated until it became too big to ignore.

I see versions of this everywhere.

The more I observe organisations, the more convinced I become that most workplace problems can be traced back to the conversations people are unwilling - or unable - to have.

Issues such as:

- underperforming employees no one addresses
- leaders avoiding difficult feedback
- unrealistic workloads everyone can see but no one challenges
- tension between teams that gets ignored instead of resolved
- values breaches people quietly tolerate
- burnout signs dismissed as "just a busy period".

Avoiding difficult conversations often feels easier in the short term, but the longer we avoid them, the more expensive they become.

Silence leads to ambiguity, which leads to assumptions, which create frustration, resentment, disengagement, and mistrust.

Human-centred leadership is not about avoiding hard conversations. It's about learning to have them with clarity, compassion, and curiosity.

Your willingness - and ability - to have these conversations is directly linked to the quality of your culture.

If it's been a while since you last had a difficult conversation, perhaps it's time to ask yourself "What conversation am I avoiding that my team most needs me to have?". ■



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Beyond the Boarding House: *Global Learning in Singapore and Japan*

For boarding schools, travel can offer something particularly powerful: the opportunity for students to step beyond familiar routines, grow in independence, strengthen friendships and see their learning in a real-world context.

At Student Horizons, we design educational travel experiences that balance curriculum relevance, personal development, cultural immersion and shared adventure. Two destinations increasingly resonating with Australian and New Zealand boarding schools are Singapore and Japan.

Both are accessible, rewarding destinations for young people, but each offers a distinct lens through which students can explore the world. Singapore brings innovation, global enterprise and multiculturalism to life; Japan combines tradition, technology, sport, language and deep cultural connection.

A recent Future Innovators Tour to Singapore with Kincoppal-Rose Bay School of the Sacred Heart, Sydney, demonstrates what is possible when a school tour is designed not simply as an itinerary, but as an extension of the classroom and school community.

A future-focused experience in Singapore

In April 2026, Kincoppal-Rose Bay students in Years 6, 7 and 8 travelled to Singapore on a Future Innovators Tour with Student Horizons. The program brought together STEM learning, sustainability, creativity, global citizenship and personal confidence.

Singapore is an ideal destination for this type of learning. Students can see ambitious ideas at work: green spaces integrated into a dense urban environment, advanced transport systems, automated manufacturing, research and a multicultural society functioning within a compact, highly connected city.

At Kok Fah Technology Farm, students explored how technology is reshaping agriculture and food production. Rather than learning about sustainability as an abstract concept, they saw how innovation can respond to challenges around land use, food security and environmental responsibility.

The group also visited a life-science incubator, where students met female scientists working in cutting-edge research. For many, the opportunity to speak directly with people building careers in STEM was a defining moment. It made future pathways feel more visible and achievable: if you can see it, you can be it.







Learning through connection

One of the tour's most memorable experiences was connecting with students at the Australian International School in Singapore.

The group participated in a robotics session, collaborating with peers to solve challenges, exchange ideas and explore technology in a practical setting. The experience showed students that learning does not stop at the school gate, or at Australia's borders.

For boarding students, who understand the importance of community and shared living, international exchanges can be especially meaningful. They foster confidence in unfamiliar settings, strengthen communication skills and help students recognise both differences and common ground with young people from around the world.

At the Art Science Museum, students explored the intersection of creativity, technology and artificial intelligence through immersive exhibits and an interactive workshop. They were encouraged to question, experiment and think critically about how emerging technologies can be used effectively and responsibly.

At Weston Robot, students met robot dogs and humanoid robots. At the Hyundai Motor Group Innovation Centre Singapore, they explored smart manufacturing, automation and the future of mobility. Together, these experiences offered a practical insight into rapidly changing industries and the skills that may help shape them.

Confidence beyond the classroom

Educational outcomes are central to every Student Horizons program, but some of the most enduring learning occurs between scheduled visits.

Navigating Singapore's MRT system, travelling through an international city, ordering meals, managing time and adapting to new surroundings all develop capability and confidence. For younger students especially, these are important steps towards independence.

The group also experienced Singapore's cultural highlights. A river cruise through Marina Bay led into the evening light show; Gardens by the Bay demonstrated how nature and urban design can work together; and the Night Safari provided an unforgettable wildlife experience after dark.

The itinerary included the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum, a DNA workshop at the Singapore Science Centre and an oceanarium experience, allowing students to explore biodiversity, genetics, conservation, engineering and innovation from different perspectives.

A final day at Universal Studios offered time to celebrate, reconnect and reflect. This balance of challenge, learning and fun is central to successful school travel. Students return with new knowledge, stronger friendships, greater resilience and a clearer sense of what they can achieve outside their comfort zone.

Japan: tradition, technology and teamwork

Japan is a compelling complement to Singapore for boarding schools planning future educational travel.

Where Singapore offers a concentrated view of a highly connected global city, Japan allows students to experience ancient traditions alongside modern innovation. A program can move from a temple or cultural workshop to a robotics experience, professional sporting environment or world-class science museum, often within the same day.

Japan supports a broad range of school-tour themes. STEM groups can explore robotics, engineering, design and sustainability. Language and cultural groups can immerse themselves in Japanese customs, food, art and daily life. Sporting groups can experience Japan's exceptional sporting culture through rugby, football, volleyball, hockey land baseball.

Japan also provides a valuable setting for conversations about respect, teamwork, discipline, wellbeing and belonging, values students can observe in public transport, hospitality, sporting environments











and school life.

Student Horizons is working with several ABSA member schools on 2027 Japan and Singapore programs, including a Japan STEM Tour for Loreto Normanhurst, a Japan Rugby Tour for St Gregory's College, Campbelltown, a Singapore multi-sport tour with Methodist Ladies' College (Perth) and a Japan hockey tour with Rangi Ruru Girls' School.

Safety, governance and partnership

For boarding schools, international travel carries a significant duty of care. Students are away from home and schools remain accountable for their wellbeing, supervision and experience throughout the journey.

That is why working with a reputable, accredited and certified educational travel provider matters. A safe school-travel program is not secured by one policy, itinerary or experienced staff member. Safer outcomes come from six connected elements: leadership and culture; planning and due diligence; clearly defined people and roles; communication and decision-making; monitoring and response; and review and improvement.

An accredited educational travel provider can help schools strengthen supplier due diligence, itinerary stress-testing, age-appropriate program design, escalation pathways, emergency-response planning and communication with students, staff and families. It is a genuine partnership that enables school staff to focus on their students and the learning outcomes of the journey, supported by experienced educational-travel professionals.

Travel with purpose

An overseas tour should never be travel for travel's sake. The strongest programs begin with clear objectives: what do we want students to learn, feel, practise and take back into school life?

The Kincoppal-Rose Bay Singapore experience shows what can happen when students learn beyond the classroom within a purposeful, carefully managed program. They return not only with memories of another country, but with greater curiosity, confidence, independence and connection to the world around them. ■

Student Horizons.

If you are interested in chatting more about any upcoming tours at your school, please reach out:
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Organisational Culture and Values
how do they show up?

I've had quite a few conversations recently about organisational culture and values. What they are, how they show up, and the behaviours that undermine them.

Years ago, I worked with a client whose core value was safety. They did an enormous amount of work to make sure their people were safe while doing often dangerous work. However, the company had a huge bullying issue, and seemingly, nothing was done to address it.

I'll never forget one of the senior "leaders" screaming at me after I sent her some information that wasn't relevant to her business unit. I had been working with them for two weeks, and she knew I was still trying to figure out who was who.

Culture is not what you say your organisation stands for. It is what people experience on any given Tuesday.

It lives in how decisions get made when things are under pressure. In whether people feel safe to say what they really think. In the space between the values on the wall and the behaviours in the room.

Google's Project Aristotle, an initiative designed to discover what makes teams effective, found that the single biggest predictor of a high-performing team is not talent, seniority, or resources. It is psychological safety — the belief that one can speak up, take risks, and be honest without fear of punishment or humiliation.

Amy Edmondson's decades of research at Harvard reinforces this: psychological safety is not a soft extra. It is a performance condition. When people feel genuinely safe, they bring more of their thinking, creativity and honesty to the work. When they don't, they manage up, cover their mistakes, and leave — quietly or loudly.

The leaders who shape culture most powerfully are not the ones with the best culture statements. They are the ones whose behaviour is consistent with what they say they believe, especially when it's inconvenient.

We need to remember that culture isn't built during strategy days or all-staff meetings. It's built in thousands of everyday moments. In how feedback is given. How mistakes are handled. Who gets promoted. What gets rewarded. What gets ignored.

Questions to ask yourself:

Do your people feel genuinely safe to speak up, disagree, and be honest?

Is your culture something that happens to people, or something they actively shape?

Are your values lived in practice, or aspirational at best?

What behaviour have you tolerated recently that undermines the culture you're trying to create?

If a new employee joined your organisation tomorrow, what would they say your real values are after their first month?

Leadership isn't demonstrated by the values you publish. It's demonstrated by the behaviours you model, reward, and refuse to accept.

Sustainable success doesn't happen by accident. It grows in cultures where people feel safe enough to contribute, challenge, learn and lead. Fear limits performance long before it limits results.

So I'll leave you with one final question:

What do your values look like? ■



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The new rules of law

AI is prompting the legal profession to re-examine its expertise, ethics, and value.

The legal profession, like many industries, is at a pivotal moment as artificial intelligence (AI) reshapes the role of the modern lawyer. People are turning to ChatGPT for legal advice and several high-profile cases have put lawyers in the spotlight for using legal precedents later proven to have been 'hallucinated' by the technology. Large language models (LLMs) are getting smarter, with researchers finding OpenAI's reasoning model, o3, can now ace law school final exams, a significant improvement on earlier models. LLMs have already proven capable of passing the United States (US) bar exam.

Against this backdrop, Bond University alumna and PhD candidate Chantal McNaught is examining how lawyers navigate conflicts between the industry as a profession and a business. She also heads her own company teaching legal professionals to safely use AI, and says the best way to predict the future is to create it.

"We've all heard alternate predictions of utopia, where the robots do our groceries and load the dishwasher, and then dystopia, where the world is burnt to a crisp and we are slaves to the robot overlords," she says.

"How do we get to the middle path?"

The modern lawyer in an AI world

With generative AI producing convincing legal services product, how do lawyers bring value to the table? Ultimately, Chantal says it comes down to ethics and judgement, innately human traits that are essential in upholding the rule of law, and vital to a functioning society.

"In their advisory role, lawyers help people make decisions that align with our rule of law, and in the advocacy sense, lawyers know how to interpret the law," she says.

Chantal describes the current environment as VUCA — volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous — as professionals worldwide consider how to effectively adapt AI into their roles to enhance efficiencies and improve outcomes, without damaging quality and trust.

Formal guidelines are already being put in place for lawyers, with the **Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia's Practice Direction** outlining the principles and responsibilities of using AI, including advising for professional education to understand its capabilities and limitations.

"Within professional practice, there are already legal requirements," Chantal says.

"It is important to understand that while AI is good at talking about capabilities and limitations, it is a mirror, it is not neutral.

"We need to keep that in mind. It is built by people who are not necessarily legally trained and have their own interests that might not align with your needs."

Risks and rewards

The risks that come with harnessing AI in legal work have already made headlines. Solicitors **have been disciplined** or **had their practising certificates revoked** for submitting case citations that were fabricated by AI, leading to career and financial implications.

"The consequences and realities are there, but then you have the more hidden risks as well," Chantal says.

"Things like cognitive offloading. If we are delegating too much of the judgment job to AI, our brains are like a muscle and if we fail to use it, we lose our strength. That is a risk that has not yet been quantified and there is a scramble to quantify it; we know it exists."

However, the rewards the technology brings encourage little debate, particularly from time-poor lawyers tasked with synthesising large amounts of

information. Researchers have already developed an **AI Fluency Framework**, designed to help professionals better harness these opportunities. The framework defines AI fluency as using the technology effectively, efficiently, ethically, and safely against three modalities — automation, agency, and augmentation.

"There are so many things we can do to enhance our own brains, but it is an amplifier. That's the true opportunity, asking 'how can I amplify my own thinking?'" Chantal says. "We are creating more risks if we're only going down the 'do it faster' route.

Where law, technology, and business meet

The intersection of law, technology, and business is one Chantal has long been passionate about. She was inspired to study law at Bond in 2010 because of its deep influence on all aspects of society. Her first job in migration law, where she was tasked with printing and filing every piece of correspondence, led her to research how technology could improve efficiencies. She later moved into legal marketing, before shifting into legal software.

That diverse professional background encouraged her back to Bond in 2022 to research her PhD, under the supervision of Bond University Executive Dean of the Faculty of Law, **Professor Nick James**.

She also co-founded **43° Below**, with best-selling author Wenee Yap, to help lawyers develop AI literacy and fluency, empowering them to use the technology to amplify intelligence without delegating responsibility. She teaches how to safely employ AI for legal drafting and research, protect confidentiality, and draw hard lines around delegation.

An industry advocate, she hosts the **Law and Beyond Show**, interviewing legal professionals about leveraging technology, navigating compliance, and other topical industry insights.

"Doing a law degree is no longer just about being a lawyer. A law degree is, yes, understanding legal judgement, but if you decide to get admitted you are an officer of the court forever. Your responsibility in upholding the rule of law follows you and what you do," Chantal says.

"That is a fantastic thing because the more lawyers we have committed to upholding our values and obligations, the stronger our communities are."

Navigating the future

While the future seems uncertain, Chantal believes we have more influence than we may believe.

"What I am building to see is a profession that is accountable to its sense of responsibilities and duties, one that is about trust, and trust is about relationships," she says.

"We're seeing more people turning to ChatGPT and then going to a lawyer and asking 'can you fix this?' That is indicative that the relationship of trust is still there and still important.

"It is not about what is generated, the contract, or the artifacts of work. It is about relationships and lawyers feeling confident to say what their value is to their clients and to society." ■

BOND UNIVERSITY



Developing the Next Generation of Boarding Leaders

The Invicti Program - St Joseph's Nudgee College

In boarding communities, leadership is often associated with titles, positions and formal responsibilities. Yet the most influential leaders are not always those who hold a badge or stand at the front of a room. They are the students who have the courage to make good decisions when no one is watching, who look out for others, and who understand that leadership is fundamentally about service.

At St Joseph's Nudgee College, the Invicti Program was developed to intentionally prepare our Year 11 boarding students for the leadership responsibilities that come with becoming Year 12 students and senior members of the Boarding Village. However, Invicti is about much more than producing the next group of boarding leaders. It is about forming young men who understand who they are, what they stand for and how their actions can positively influence the people and communities around them.

The program combines faith formation, personal development and practical leadership experiences. It provides students with tools that can make them better leaders, but, more importantly, better people - young men who can contribute positively to their communities and become compassionate, courageous and responsible global citizens. The central question is not simply, "How can I become a leader?" but, "What kind of person am I becoming, and how can I use my influence for good?"

What does it mean to be Invicti?

The name Invicti comes from the Latin invictus, meaning "unconquered" or "unbroken". Within the program, this does not refer to physical strength, dominance or the ability to overcome everyone else. Instead, it represents inner resilience, moral courage and strength of character. An Invicti student is encouraged to remain grounded in his values, particularly when faced with challenge, discomfort or peer pressure.

To become Invicti is therefore to strive to become a living sign of faith through the way we treat others, make decisions and respond to the world around us. Faith is not presented as something separate from leadership or everyday life. It is reflected through service, humility, courage, compassion, responsibility and the willingness to do what is right.

This philosophy provides a powerful foundation as Year 11 students prepare to become Year 12 boarders. Senior students have significant influence over the culture of a boarding house. Their words, choices, relationships and responses to difficult situations can shape the experience of younger students. Invicti challenges them to recognise that influence as both a privilege and a responsibility.

From "me" to "we"

A major theme throughout Invicti is the movement from individual thinking towards collective responsibility. One session, Moving from "Me" to "We", challenges students to consider the impact they have on others and the culture they help create. Students explore the consequences of a "Me Mindset", consider the people who have influenced their own lives and examine the power of collaboration, kindness and community.

This is particularly relevant in a boarding environment. Students do not simply attend school together; they live together. Their relationships, decisions and behaviours influence the wellbeing of an entire community.

Invicti therefore seeks to normalise the idea that leadership can be found in everyday actions: checking in on a younger student, including someone who is isolated, making the right decision when surrounded by peers, showing gratitude, or having the courage to challenge behaviour that does not align with the values of the community.

These are not simply leadership skills. They are life skills. The ability to listen, collaborate, show empathy, make ethical decisions and take responsibility for our actions helps students become better friends, family members, colleagues and citizens long after their time in boarding has finished.

Learning through stories and experience

Rather than relying on traditional leadership lectures, Invicti uses discussion, storytelling, reflection and practical activities to engage students. Students are encouraged to contribute to and lead elements of the program, reinforcing the idea that leadership is developed through action and experience.

Guest speakers are an important part of this approach. The opening session focused on moral courage and facing tough times, with students hearing personal stories from members of the Nudgee community. Students were then asked to share their own experiences of challenging periods during their time at Nudgee and reflect on what they could learn from the speaker.

The conversation then moved into real-life scenarios: Who do you want to be when you are around your mates? What do you want others to think about you? Who are the people you choose to surround yourself with? These conversations recognise that the leadership moments that matter most often happen away from formal meetings or organised activities.

By giving students practical tools to reflect, communicate, collaborate and make decisions, the program aims to equip them for moments when leadership is not easy or obvious. The same tools that help a student lead a boarding community can help him navigate university, employment, relationships and wider society.

Faith, character and becoming better humans

Faith formation is woven naturally throughout the program. Sessions incorporate prayer, reflection and opportunities for students to consider their responsibilities to others and the wider community. Some activities are deliberately held in significant spaces such as the College Chapel, allowing students to reflect on the generations of students who have come before them.

The program's themes - courage, service, humility, resilience and gratitude-provide a framework for students to explore what it means to live with character. These qualities are not simply desirable characteristics for a school leader; they are qualities that can shape the kind of adults our students become.

For us, success is therefore not measured only by whether a student becomes a House Captain, senior boarder or formal leader. It is also seen in the quieter moments: a student who has the courage to stand up for someone else, who chooses kindness when it is easier not to, who acknowledges a mistake, who serves without recognition, or who uses his influence to bring others with him.

In this sense, Invicti is as much about human formation as it is leadership development. We want students to leave the program with a stronger understanding of themselves and a clearer sense of their responsibility to others.

Preparing global citizens

Ultimately, Invicti is about creating a sustainable leadership pipeline within the Boarding Village, but its purpose extends well beyond the College gates. The program seeks to equip students with transferable skills - communication, ethical decision-making, courage under pressure, self-awareness, collaboration and service-oriented thinking - that can support them throughout adult life.

In an increasingly connected world, young people need more than the ability to lead others. They need the capacity to understand different perspectives, work collaboratively, respond to challenge with resilience and use their influence responsibly. We want our students to recognise that being a good leader and being a good person are deeply connected.

The hope is that our Invicti students will become people who contribute positively wherever they go: in their families, workplaces, sporting communities, universities, local communities and the wider world. In this way, the program contributes not only to the future of Nudgee boarding, but to the development of young men who can make a meaningful difference in society.



Leaving a legacy

Perhaps the most important message of Invicti is captured in its guiding philosophy: "True leadership is not about control or recognition, but about the courage to act rightly, serve others, and remain steadfast in character."

As our Year 11 students prepare to become the senior students of the Boarding Village, our hope is that they recognise that leadership does not begin when they receive a title. It begins now - in the choices they make, the way they treat others and the example they set.

Invicti is ultimately about developing young men who are prepared not only to lead, but to serve; not only to influence, but to inspire; and not only to leave their mark on Nudgee, but to leave their communities and the wider world better than they found them. ■

AUTHOR:
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St Joseph's Nudgee College

Rethinking Prep:
How Data-Driven Strategy, Teamwork, and Purpose Are Transforming Boarder Study

For generations of boarding practitioners, the evening prep routine has been an accepted fixture of residential life. The bell sounds, boys trudge to their desks or study halls, laptop lids click open, and for ninety minutes to two hours, the house enters a period of enforced quiet. Yet, as any boarding master will candidly admit, physical presence at a desk does not always equate to intellectual engagement. All too often, young men launch aimlessly into their tasks without a clear destination, quickly become overwhelmed by competing deadlines, or passively stare at screens until the clock runs out.

At Churchie, we recognised that if we truly wanted our boys to thrive - both academically and emotionally - we needed to shift the paradigm of evening study away from mere compliance toward intentionality and metacognition. Not always easy for a teenage boy! We wanted our boarders to work smarter, not harder. The result of this vision is our refined, data-backed Prep and Study Tracker, a system designed to scaffold how boys think about, organise, and execute their independent learning.

The Architecture of Intentional Learning

The core philosophy behind our study tracker is straightforward: purpose must precede practice. Rather than allowing a boy to sit down and reactively open whatever assignment happens to cause him the most immediate stress, the tracker requires a brief, structured planning phase of two to three minutes at the commencement of prep.

Using the framework developed in our tracker, each student moves through four distinct steps every evening:

1. **Plan Your Practice:** Boys establish a priority order, explicitly classifying tasks into homework, assignment drafting, or revision study, and tagging the relevant subject area.
2. **Select a Strategy Code:** Learning is broken down into specific cognitive actions. Instead of simply "studying Science", boys select an evidence-informed strategy - such as a Quick Review (QR), Practice Questions (Prac/Quest), Flashcards (Flash), Self-Quizzing (Quiz), Brain Dumps (Brain), or Applying Teacher Feedback (Feed).
3. **Use Study Blocks:** Evening study is divided into focused, manageable sessions to build sustained stamina rather than exhausting cognitive overload.
4. **Review and Record Evidence:** At the end of each session, with the help of staff, boys evaluate their progress, ticking off completed tasks, estimating completion percentages, or rolling unresolved work into tomorrow's queue, while noting concrete evidence of what they actually produced.

This process is further anchored by four cyclical pedagogical pillars: Purpose (clarifying the goal), Retrieve (strengthening memory through active recall), Practice (applying knowledge and learning from errors), and Reflect (identifying learning gaps and planning next steps). It transforms prep from a passive holding pattern into an active laboratory of self-regulated learning.

Transforming an idea on a whiteboard into an embedded, daily boarding habit requires genuine collaboration across both the academic and residential branches of a school – we all know that. This initiative came to fruition through the dedicated expertise of the Churchie Research Centre, whose pedagogical insight and data-driven grounding provided the academic rigour behind the tool. It's one thing to print off a booklet, but does it actually have a nucleus in research?

Translating that academic theory into the energetic reality of a boys' boarding house required equal passion on the ground. Assistant Director of Boarding, Mr Nick Power, and Goodwin Housemaster, Mr Jamie Novosel, were instrumental in piloting, refining, and championing the system within our houses. By bridging the gap between classroom teachers and residential housemasters, our team ensured that the tool felt authentic, accessible, and practical for teenage boys.



Furthermore, we wrapped an enhanced human structure around this tracking tool. We reorganised our evening prep roster so that all core academic subjects - Mathematics, English, Science, and the Humanities - are supported each night by school teaching staff. These academic educators give their time during prep to work alongside residential staff, offering targeted, small-group and one-on-one intervention right when a boy encounters an academic roadblock. I'm sure all boarding staff know the gut-wrenching feeling of watching a young kid 'give up' if they can't see the solution to a problem.

Supporting Our Bush Kids: Building Skills and Self-Worth

This structured scaffolding has proven particularly transformative for our boys from regional, rural, and remote Australia. Transitioning from small bush schools, distance education, or isolated family stations into a bustling metropolitan environment can be a daunting leap. Actually, scrap that – it IS a daunting leap. Anecdotally, many of our rural lads arrive with boundless practical competence, resilience, and character, but may have developed literacy and numeracy skills at a different pace, or have had fewer opportunities to master formal study techniques.

When faced with complex assessment schedules, these boys do not lack intellect or willingness; they simply need the roadmap and the occasional gentle 'cattle prod' to build structural organisation. And no, the 'cattle prod' was only a metaphor.

Our study tracker demystifies academic expectations. It breaks down intimidating projects into bite-sized, achievable actions. And who doesn't love ticking a task off a list?

More importantly, it builds character. At Churchie, our boarding vision is not about demanding that every young man achieve straight A's or attain academic perfection. Rather, our focus is on academic rigor, perseverance, and eliminating the fear of failure. When a boy learns that stumbling on a difficult concept is simply a cue to seek feedback or run another practice question, his self-awareness grows. When he sees tangible evidence of his own progress documented week after week, his self-worth and confidence soar. We celebrate and reward that individual improvement just as vigorously as top-tier academic honours.

Measurable Impacts on Culture and Wellbeing

The benefits of this structured, supportive model have rippled across our entire boarding community. From a compliance perspective, the data speaks for itself: we have recorded a substantial drop in incomplete homework and a dramatic reduction in academic detentions across the boarding cohort.

Yet the most profound impact has been on boarder wellbeing. Academic anxiety is one of the leading contributors to adolescent stress in residential schools. When boys know exactly what they need to achieve each evening, have a clear visual tracker to manage their workload, and are surrounded by subject-specialist teachers ready to assist them, that overwhelming knot of panic dissipates. Bedtimes are calmer, evenings are more relaxed, and the perpetual dread of falling behind is replaced by a shared, collegiate culture of mutual achievement.

By doing the fundamental, everyday routines exceptionally well, we give our young men the foundation they need to feel safe and happy, so that they can truly learn. Through simple, data-informed tools and an unwavering team commitment, we are empowering our boarders to take ownership of their education - one evening at a time. ■

NB - If anyone would like any further information on our Study Planners and Trackers, please reach out to me and I would be happy to help you get it going in your schools – mike.symons@churchie.com.au

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Churchie

Creating a Heart for Boarding: *Our Journey Towards Cultural Safety*

Cultural safety is not something that can simply be written into a policy or captured in a handbook. It is something that needs to be lived, experienced and continually reflected upon. For me, the past year has reinforced that creating a culturally safe boarding environment begins with relationships - listening, learning and being willing to step beyond the familiar.

My journey towards strengthening cultural safety at boarding has taken me from the communities of Thursday Island to the heart of Central Australia, and back to our own Fenton Village at John Paul College. Each experience has challenged me to think more deeply about what it means to create a boarding community where every young person feels that their culture, identity, story and sense of belonging are valued.

Learning beyond the classroom

Travelling to Thursday Island gave me an opportunity to listen and learn in a place where connection to culture, country, community and family is deeply woven into everyday life. Spending time with community members and learning more about the experiences of our Torres Strait Islander students helped me understand that cultural connection cannot be treated as an occasional event or something that sits separately from boarding life. It needs to be part of the environment we create.



That lesson was further reinforced through my participation in Outback Camp in Central Australia. Spending time on country, listening to Aboriginal perspectives and sharing experiences with peers provided another opportunity to reflect on the responsibility we have as educators and boarding staff.

The experience reminded me that sometimes the most important learning happens when we slow down, listen and create space for people to share their stories.

For me, these experiences have changed the way I think about my role. Cultural safety is not about having all the answers. It is about developing the humility to ask better questions, building genuine relationships and creating an environment where students can see that their culture is recognised and respected.

Bringing those lessons home

The next step is making sure that what I have learnt beyond the gates of John Paul College, becomes visible within our own boarding community.

One of the most exciting developments in the works at Fenton Village is the creation of a central gathering space - what we have begun to think of as the Heart of the Village.

The idea has been inspired, in part, by the importance of gathering places such as a yarning circle: a space where people can come together, connect, listen, share stories and build relationships.

Our Heart of the Village will provide a physical meeting point at the centre of our boarding community. It will be







somewhere students can gather informally, somewhere conversations can happen, celebrations can take place and relationships can grow.

A significant feature of the space will be an artwork that tells a story of connection, country, culture and community, while reflecting the diverse experiences of the young people who call Fenton Village home. Rather than simply placing Indigenous artwork into our boarding environment as decoration, we want the process itself to be meaningful. The artwork will be developed through consultation, conversation and collaboration, ensuring that the stories and cultural elements represented are appropriate, authentic and connected to our community.

The artwork will become part of the identity of the boarding village - a visual reminder that culture and connection belong at the heart of our boarding experience.

Creating belonging for everyone

While this work has a particular importance for our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarders, the benefits extend to our entire boarding community.

Cultural safety is about creating an environment where every student can be themselves, where differences are understood rather than simply acknowledged, and where students have opportunities to learn from one another.

Our boarding community brings together students from different parts of Australia, and students from all around the world, with different cultural backgrounds and from different communities. That diversity is one of our greatest strengths.

The Heart of the Village will give us a place to celebrate that diversity, while also creating opportunities for boarders to find common ground.

It will be a place for conversations, celebrations, storytelling, shared meals, cultural learning and simply being together.

Continuing the journey

My experiences on Thursday Island and in Central Australia have reinforced something I believe strongly: you cannot create genuine cultural safety without genuine connection.

As Head of Boarding, I see my role as continuing to learn and ensuring that this learning translates into meaningful change within our boarding environment.

That means continuing to build relationships with communities, creating opportunities for our students to connect with their culture, listening to our students and their families, and working alongside them to ensure that our practices are respectful and meaningful.

The Heart of the Village is one physical expression of that commitment. But ultimately, cultural safety will be measured not by a physical space, a mural or a particular program. It will be measured by whether a young person walks into Fenton Village and feels that they belong.

That they are known.

That their story matters.

And that their culture is not something they have to leave at the front gate.

The Heart of the Village is about creating a physical gathering place - but, more importantly, it represents our commitment to creating a boarding community where connection, culture and belonging sit at the very centre of what we do. ■

AUTHOR:
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Head of Boarding
John Paul College

How do we get back to reading books?

Suggestions for our students and the adults in their lives.



You will be aware of the latest data – NAPLAN or otherwise – that shows one third of our children are not reading proficiently. That means that in a typical classroom of 24 learners, eight can't read well.

Let's take a look at adults' reading habits... Guardian Essential poll data released in 2024 reveals some concerning statistics around Australians' participation in recreational reading, that connects to wider national trends about reading rates. Two-thirds of respondents to the poll said they either did not read a book in the last 12 months (30%) or read just one to three books (35%). That's a combined total of over 60%, or approximately 13 million Australians.

We know that our literacy standards and reading rates used to be a lot higher and that reading for pleasure has been swapped for scrolling. How can 'we' (referring to all age groups) get our reading muscle back and why does it matter?

First, perhaps we need to change the way we think about reading. In a world filled with screens, notifications and doom scrolling, we can sometimes forget what a book can offer us. Reading isn't just simply about improving vocabulary, comprehension or academic outcomes. At its best, reading gives us something much more powerful: total immersion in another world.

And when you find that book ~ one that you can't put down, the one

you think about when you're not reading it, the one that changes the emotional colours of your day ~ you've struck gold.

There are thousands of extraordinary books sitting on library shelves and bookshelves, some of them where an author has spent years of their life writing it! All that imagination, experience, craftsmanship is there waiting for us.

Perhaps this is the message we need to give to our students, but also to remind ourselves as their educators, parents and caregivers. Reading doesn't have to feel like another task; it can be an experience.

For young people growing up in boarding schools, where community, connection and shared experiences are such an important part of daily life, books can also stretch their experiences far beyond their immediate surroundings.

For many of us, after years of talking about ChatGPT and what artificial intelligence means for education, many of us are ready to talk about something that feels distinctly human again.

A great book.

The calm and quiet concentration of reading. The imagination required to create the world in your mind. The anticipation of turning the next page. The characters that draw you in. The storylines that stay with you long after you've finished them.

While tech will continue to race ahead and evolve, we should certainly teach our young people how to navigate that world. However, we shouldn't lose sight of the things that technology can't replace.

David Shariatmadari, one of the judges for the Booker Prize, sums it up well, "I think people are more conscience of the rule of devices over our lives and that's just coming into sharp relief for lots of people."

So what can we do in our classrooms, boarding houses and homes?

Similar to the **'Couch to 5K**' messaging for building fitness, we can start with a **'Read to 10'** simple slogan that offers a sense of progression. Adults can ask, "Have you done your Read to 10 today?" Ten minutes a day can build a reading habit, with the end goal of reading for longer periods of time.

Other ideas include BookTok and utilising celebrities such as Luke Bateman or Dua Lipa, whose reading campaign centres around the Service95 Books Club (a global literary community).

My top advice is to let our children and students 'catch' their teachers, boarding staff and parents reading – this sends a powerful message on the value of reading. Principals, Heads of Department, admin staff and school leaders can share 5 minute video clips of what they are reading. Parents can chat with their children about what they are currently reading.

So flex that reading muscle and enjoy the life-changing benefits of recreational reading. ■

AUTHOR:
Tanya Grambower
Founder
Literacy for Kids

Welcome: New Principal



Mark Lewis
Principal
Calrossy Anglican School
Tamworth NSW

CALROSSY ANGLICAN SCHOOL – *Tamworth NSW*

Calrossy Anglican School welcomed its 17th Principal, Mr Mark Lewis, at the beginning of 2026, bringing with him more than 20 years of experience in education and over 15 years in Principal leadership roles across Queensland, New South Wales and Western Australia. Most recently, Mark served as Principal of Trinity College in Gladstone, following previous Principal appointments at Penrith Anglican College (NSW) and Swan Christian College (WA).

Mark is known for his values-led leadership and strong belief in education that forms the whole person. He is passionate about building positive culture, supporting staff and ensuring every student is known, challenged and cared for.

Since arriving at Calrossy, Mark has embraced the School's strong sense of community and the important role boarding plays in the life of the School and the wider region. While this is his first Principalship within a boarding environment, he has quickly developed a deep appreciation for the opportunities boarding provides for regional and remote families and the unique community it creates within the School.

Mark is committed to building on Calrossy's strong foundations, growing opportunity for every student, and ensuring the School continues to be a place where boarders feel at home, connected and proud to belong. ■

The Midnight Mission Statement *of Residential Life*

Have you ever wondered what truly happens in an international school boarding house long after the day students have left, the perimeter gates are secured, and the evening security lights cast their steady glow across campus? The heart of the boarding school begins to beat. Beyond the dark classrooms and lit pathways, what actually takes place inside a residential house during those night hours?

To the outside world, a school is often defined by its daytime accomplishments: academic results, university placements, pristine infrastructure, and glossy prospectuses. But behind the formal mission statements and marketing brochures, the true heart of an international boarding school emerges when the classroom lights go out, the campus turns dark, and Residential Leaders step onto a very different frontline.

Students in an international boarding school inhabit two completely different worlds within the same institution.

It begins with the visible, immediate moments - after the lights are off. Just to name a few: the wave of acute homesickness or quiet longing for a family pet; the sudden, comforting craving for a home-cooked meal; the midnight panic before an exam; or the lingering ache of a friendship fallout during the day. It extends to the silent anxieties every teenager carries when the day settles: wrestling with academic burnout, feeling misunderstood, comparing themselves to peers, or worrying about their future. And, of course, there is the relentless adolescent testing of boundaries-the strategic game of cat-and-mouse with hidden devices, the late-night sneaking into friends' rooms for shared laughter, and the natural urge to push against strict policies.

Yes, a teacher generally sees a student when they are dressed, alert, and performing within structured walls. A Residential Leader sees that same student when the mask slips off.

But the far more daunting task lies in trying to discern what is happening not just behind closed doors, but deep inside a student's mind once the lights are off. Late at night, young people face their rawest struggles with self-identity, grief (personal and family issues), mental health, and belonging, alongside the natural adolescent temptation to experiment with things they know they shouldn't. Many times, navigating this landscape requires an almost impossible balance: exercising vigilance and protecting them from harmful choices, all while respecting their dignity and privacy without becoming overly intrusive.

While academic leaders teach subjects, residential leaders shepherd lives.

Every student who enters a residential community brings a universe of unique experiences, cultural nuances, faith, fears, and potential. Pastoral care cannot be delivered via a standardized textbook or an automated curriculum. While we strive to create a "home away from home," achieving that balance is immensely complex.

"An excellent boarding school is neither too formal so that individuality is crushed, nor too informal so that propriety is threatened. It embraces those intangibles that transform a place of residence into a home." - Dr. Tim Hawkes (ABSA)

What makes this role extraordinarily intricate isn't just the uniqueness of each child - it is the unique ecosystem of their families. Every family brings its own expectations of what a home should look like! Managing this requires not only immense patience, empathy, and high-stakes communication, but also firm boundary-setting where safety and security can never be compromised.

A residential leader must balance multiple roles: in loco parentis, Accidental Counselor, Mentor, Disciplinarian, and Administrator (while keeping the well-being of the student in mind, the welfare of the institution and the community must also be considered). And doing all these in a single evening for hundreds of young people - is no ordinary task. No wonder those who have experienced leadership both in the 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM setting and in the nearly 24-hour reality of pastoral care in residential life (boarding houses) recognize an unwritten truth: one year of intense residential leadership easily equals three years in a daytime academic setting. It is truly a labour of the heart.

Furthermore, the world our students inhabit today looks radically different than it did even six years ago. Post-COVID digital saturation, shifting family dynamics, hyper-connectivity, the rapid rise of AI, and an unprecedented reliance on screens mean that residential leaders are no longer just managing dorm safety-they are navigating the fragile psychological landscapes of a hyper-connected generation.

Residential life cannot rely on "the way things used to be." Guiding and nurturing a young person today is not mere supervision - it is an active, evolving science of human care.

As educational leaders, we must ask ourselves: do our operational policies create room for authentic human care when the mask slips off, or do they merely enforce compliance?

Relationships Over Regulations: The Art of "High-Touch" Care

In residential life, we can design the most sophisticated checklists, implement rigorous safety protocols, and maintain strict compliance frameworks.

When we reduce residential life to mere enforcement, we miss the genuine meeting of human souls that pastoral care demands.

Building that human connection takes time, trust, presence, and genuine warmth. Policies alone do not transform a life. Trust, love, and relationships do.

As I learned in an ABSA workshop:

"We can have all the checklists, inspections, and compliance procedures in place, but without common sense and an empathetic heart, residential care loses its meaning. The most profound, life-changing moments for a boarder rarely happen during scheduled tutorial times; they happen in those unplanned, quiet moments late at night when a student finally feels safe enough to share their true feelings."

"People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." - Maya Angelou

The Unspoken Legacy

We are not here to judge our students; we are here to guide, nurture, and walk alongside them as they discover who they are.

This principle is the cornerstone of residential life. Long after official duty hours end, the true duty of care continues. Day in and day out, residential teams guide young humans in maintaining physical well-being, navigating digital challenges, resisting harmful behaviors, and developing self-esteem, intercultural empathy, and accountability.



An Open Letter to School Leaders and Policymakers

To every school board member, Heads of School, Principals, and policymakers: take a closer look at your residential team.

Residential leaders are not babysitters, nor are they mere policy enforcers. They are the unseen emotional anchors of the campus. They build the foundation of resilience, emotional intelligence, and integrity that enables a child to thrive in the classroom during the day - and in life long after graduation.

When the rest of the world is asleep, residential leaders are awake. Unseen by many, often unappreciated by the outside world, we are driven by a quiet, sacred commitment: when no one else was there, we were there.

The Ultimate Impact

As Aristotle noted, "Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all." The true impact of our pastoral work isn't measured on an inspection of the marksheets or on the admissions or the lack of it. It is revealed years - sometimes decades - later when an alumnus returns as a confident adult and says: "I am who I am today because of what you did for me late at night when the lights were off. You listened when I felt invisible. You believed in me when I didn't believe in myself."

When you see a compassionate, resilient young adult walk past the school gates at graduation and step boldly into the world, remember this: that strength was forged not only under the bright lights of the classroom, but in the quiet, compassionate, midnight hours of residential care. ■

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Raffles International School

AI Wearables in Boarding: *The Next Digital Wellbeing Challenge*

Boarding schools have always adapted to new technologies. The latest challenge, however, is not the smartphone in a student's pocket but the increasingly sophisticated technology they wear.

AI-enabled smart glasses, smart rings, translation earbuds, smart watches and other wearable devices offer genuine benefits. They can support learning, accessibility, communication, health monitoring and language translation. At the same time, they introduce new questions about privacy, consent and wellbeing, particularly within a boarding environment where students live, learn and socialise in close proximity to one another.

Unlike traditional devices, many wearable technologies can record, livestream, monitor location, collect biometric data or access artificial intelligence tools in ways that are not always obvious to others. In a boarding house, this creates unique challenges. Students should be able to expect privacy in bedrooms, bathrooms, changing areas and pastoral spaces. Staff also need confidence that supervision and safeguarding expectations can be maintained as technology evolves.

At Queen Margaret College, our approach has not been to ban emerging technologies. Rather, we have focused on establishing clear expectations around declaration, responsible use, privacy and consent. Recognising that many wearable devices now have capabilities that were unimaginable only a few years ago, we recently introduced a Boarding AI Wearables and Smart Devices Policy and supporting procedures. Our goal is to ensure that technological innovation does not compromise the dignity, safety or wellbeing of any member of the boarding community.

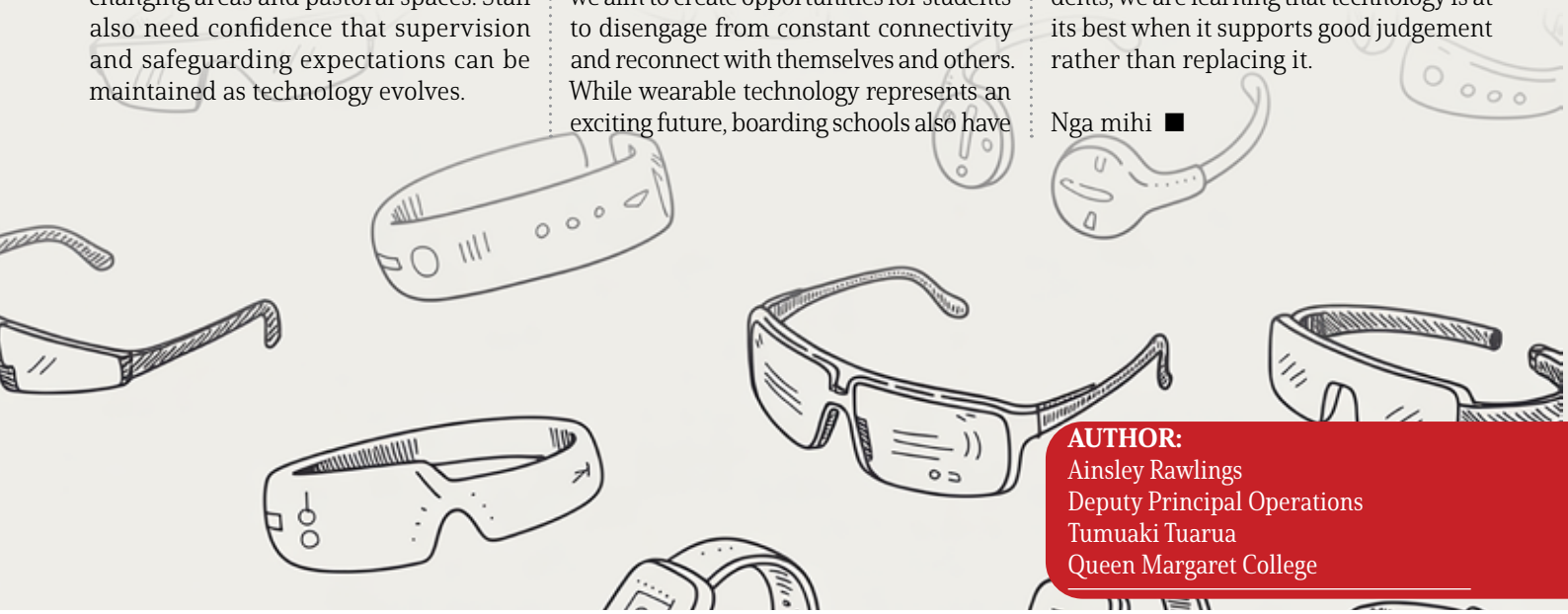
This work aligns closely with our broader wellbeing initiative, QMC Unplugged, which encourages students to develop healthy relationships with technology. Through device-free time, reading, writing, face-to-face connection and healthy sleep routines, we aim to create opportunities for students to disengage from constant connectivity and reconnect with themselves and others. While wearable technology represents an exciting future, boarding schools also have a responsibility to teach young people when to switch off, be present and embrace the benefits of an unplugged life.

As AI-enabled wearables become more common, boarding schools have an opportunity to lead the conversation. The challenge is not whether these technologies will arrive, but how we create environments where innovation, privacy and wellbeing can coexist. Ultimately, the most important safeguard remains the same as it has always been: fostering a culture of trust, respect, responsibility and good judgement.

As wearable technologies continue to evolve, how can boarding schools preserve the privacy and connection that sit at the heart of residential education while embracing the opportunities that innovation provides?

And in the spirit of transparency, it is worth noting that while no smart glasses, AI earbud or wearable device was harmed in the writing of this article, artificial intelligence may have helped organise a few thoughts along the way. Like our students, we are learning that technology is at its best when it supports good judgement rather than replacing it.

Nga mihi ■



AUTHOR:
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Deputy Principal Operations
Tumuaki Tuarua
Queen Margaret College

Thank you to everyone who attended our

2026 Regional SYMPOSIUMS


Toowoomba


Brisbane


Sydney


Cairns


Melbourne


Adelaide


Rockhampton


Armidale


Perth


Launceston


Auckland



Christchurch

and the schools who hosted us

Four Houses, One Community: *Boarding as a Living Laboratory for Leadership*



This article is the first in a three-part series written by members of the Shore Boarding staff in North Sydney, exploring the enormous potential of action research within boarding communities. Across the series, staff reflect on how engaging with research, professional learning and reflective practice can strengthen leadership, enhance professional growth and, most importantly, create meaningful change for the young people and communities we serve.

There is something uniquely transformative about leadership in boarding. We do not simply lead in classrooms, offices or scheduled meetings. We lead in dining rooms, on sporting fields, in corridors, during late-night conversations and in the quiet moments when a young person needs an adult to listen. Boarding is a community lived 24 hours a day, seven days a week. That makes it an ideal environment for leadership learning, reflection and, importantly, action research.

Over the past two years, my own leadership journey has been significantly shaped by my involvement in the Independent Schools NSW (ISNSW) Flagship



programme for 2024/2025. The experience challenged me to think about leadership not simply as a collection of skills, but as a deeply interior journey. Before we can effectively lead others, we need to understand ourselves – our motivations, our assumptions, our strengths and, perhaps most importantly, the areas in which we still need to grow.

One of the most valuable ideas I took from the experience was the notion of moving between the balcony and the dance floor. As boarding leaders, we spend much of our time firmly on the dance floor: solving problems, responding to students, supporting staff and making decisions in real time. Yet effective leadership also requires us to step onto the balcony – to pause, observe, ask questions and consider what is really happening within our community.

My Flagship project, Four Houses, One Community, provided an opportunity to do exactly that. It encouraged me to look beyond the immediate operational demands of boarding and consider how our four houses could continue to develop a stronger collective identity while retaining the individual character and relationships that make each house special. The action research process allowed me to test ideas within my own context, reflect on their impact and, most importantly, learn from the community I was leading.

This is where I believe boarding has an enormous advantage.

Our communities provide countless opportunities to observe, question, trial, reflect and adapt. We can take an idea from research or professional learning and immediately consider how it might work within our own houses. We can gather authentic feedback from students and staff. We can make changes, observe the consequences and refine our practice. In boarding, action research does not have to be an abstract academic exercise – it can directly improve the lived experience of our young people.

This approach is also beginning to shape professional learning across our wider boarding team. Two of our Housemasters are currently engaged in or have completed postgraduate study and fellowships, using their learning and action research to add genuine value within their individual houses. Other senior boarding staff have undertaken opportunities to shadow colleagues in other schools, deliberately looking beyond our own community to understand different approaches and effective practice.

This is where the real opportunity lies. Professional learning becomes most powerful when it does not simply stay with the individual who undertakes it. It becomes part of the community's collective knowledge.

Leadership development should not simply make us better leaders; it should make our communities better places. The most exciting aspect of action research in boarding is that the journey is simultaneously inward and outward. We grow as professionals, while the questions we ask, the evidence we gather and the changes we make have the potential to improve the lives of the students and colleagues we serve.

Perhaps that is the real privilege of boarding leadership: we are never finished learning, and our workplace gives us an extraordinary laboratory in which to keep learning together. ■

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Director of Boarding
Shore

Rethinking What Evening Prep Can Offer Boarders

How boarding schools can broaden access to intensive academic support during evening Prep - without expanding their boarding budget.

Evening Prep has long been one of the most valuable parts of the boarding-school routine. It creates a protected period in which students can settle into their work, develop sound habits and make meaningful progress away from the distractions of a busy school day. Boarding teams invest considerable care in creating the right conditions: clear expectations, appropriate supervision and calm study spaces.

Yet the expectations placed on Prep are evolving. Families increasingly seek personalised support for their children. Boarding staff already balance wellbeing, pastoral care, routines, safety and supervision. It is neither practical nor desirable to expect those staff members to also provide specialist assistance across every year level, subject and assessment type.

Supervision is essential, but it is not the same as subject-specific academic support. A staff member can ensure that a student is focused on a mathematics task, for example, without necessarily being the right person to unpack a difficult concept, review an English draft or help a senior student prepare strategically for an examination.

The question is not whether schools should replace their existing Prep model, but how they can extend support within it.

A timely opportunity

Boarding schools are uniquely well positioned to answer that question. Students are already on campus in the evening, already expected to study and already in an academic frame of mind. All the ingredients are there. For a day student, private tutoring can mean another layer of travel and scheduling after a full day. For a boarder, the pathway can be simpler: school, Prep, tutor.

The missing ingredient is often not time or willingness; it is access to the right specialist at the right moment. Some students will thrive independently. Others may need help with a difficult topic, an assignment, assessment preparation or study strategies. These needs vary, and schools do not have to meet each one by creating a new program.

Instead, it can become an ecosystem of academic support: a well-run Prep environment complemented, where families choose it, by access to individualised tutoring.

An additional layer, not another school program

This model is deliberately simple. The school continues to do what it already does well: provide the Prep environment, supervision, structure and expectations that allow students to work productively. Private tutoring is made available during that existing period for families who wish to access it. Families register directly with the tutoring provider, which manages matching, scheduling, communication, payments, tutor coverage and ongoing coordination.

In practice, the process is straightforward. The school communicates that the option is available. A family decides whether it is right for their child and registers directly. The provider then arranges suitable support within the Prep routine.

The boarding school provides:	The tutoring partner provides:
A structured Prep environment	Subject-specific tutoring
Supervision, routines and expectations	Individualised academic support
A safe, productive place to study	Assignment, examination and study-skills assistance
Clear communication that the option exists	Tutor matching, scheduling and family administration



For boarding leaders, the operational distinction is significant. The school does not need to recruit or roster tutors, manage absences or replacements, collect payments, answer routine parent enquiries or create another layer of administration. There is no cost to the school, because the service is privately funded by participating families rather than drawn from the boarding budget.

Importantly, this arrangement works because it respects rather than interrupts Prep culture. Tutoring should sit within the school's established expectations around attendance, conduct, location, quiet study and communication. This allows students to receive targeted help while remaining part of the wider boarding routine, rather than being removed from it. Clear boundaries also give boarding staff confidence that an additional support option reinforces Prep's purpose: purposeful, independent and increasingly capable learning.

A successful arrangement also preserves the school's autonomy. The school determines how tutoring is accommodated within its routines, while families retain the choice to participate. The provider's role is to make that option practical, responsive and well managed.

This is not an argument that schools are failing to provide enough support, nor is tutoring a substitute for excellent classroom teaching. Strong boarding schools already make substantial investments in the academic and personal development of their students. Tutoring is simply an additional, optional layer of support: one that can be particularly useful when a student needs focused time with someone who has the relevant subject knowledge.

Choice, convenience and confidence

For families, the appeal is both practical and reassuring. A trusted tutoring option can be accessed without disrupting the boarding routine or requiring a student to leave campus. For students, support is available in a familiar environment at the very time they are working on the material that needs attention. This can make it easier to address misunderstandings early, build confidence and turn a frustrating evening task into a productive learning opportunity.

For schools, the benefit is broader. A managed external support layer can strengthen boarding without asking staff to absorb another major operational responsibility. It gives families more choice, while preserving the school's ownership of its Prep culture and academic standards.

The future of evening Prep may be less about asking boarding schools to do more themselves, and more about connecting students with resources at the right time and place.

A Team Tuition's role in this model is as an enabler: managing the tutoring workforce and family-facing administration so that schools can focus on the environment they already provide so well. The result is a simple proposition with meaningful potential for boarders and their families: more academic support, less administration and no additional cost to the school.

Ready to reclaim your time, support your staff and provide families with an accessible and affordable tutoring option? Let's build your prep plan today. ■

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The two parts of you
But which one is in charge?

When you say "I can't believe I did that" or "I must do it better next time" or "I always get that wrong" who is talking to whom?

In fact it's your conscious self talking to your subconscious self, which never replies! It just takes the stick from the endlessly chattering voice in your head.

We probably think of the REAL us as the talking voice, but maybe we should think of the real us as the silent part, and it may be helpful to regard the talking voice as a distraction, to be ignored if possible. Of course, if the talking voice is saying "Don't let him wind you up" or "It would be wrong to steal that money" then it might be good to listen to it, but if you are dealing with a customer and the voice is saying "Careful, don't say x, remember to say y, what if he does z?" then it might be more of a distraction than a help.

Maybe the incredibly clever computer that silently calculates the angles for that tennis shot that 'you' didn't know that 'you' could get should be given more credit, compared to the inane voice that just says 'hold the racket head up' and then 'told you you'd miss it!'.

What is the meaning of 'Concentration'? Surely it means switching off the talking voice and letting the subconscious you get on with it?

Many athletes say that when they are "in the zone" there is inner calm in their head. The talking voice has stopped for once!

A good way to distract the talking voice is to give it something to do, for example just ask it to observe. Ask it to give a score out of ten for how much you listened rather than talked, or a score out of ten for how motivated your employees are at the team meeting, or a score out of ten for how calm you were in that difficult situation. This takes the judgement out of it and allows you just to perform.

Try it!

And of course the other thing is to feed your subconscious with good thoughts – "I am a good person" " can do this" etc. All your subconscious has to go on is the collection it has made of every thought you have had until now, so you can gradually swing it towards a positive direction by thinking only good stuff. Never think anything bad about yourself – it's all being recorded!

Onwards and upwards! ■



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Switching Gears
two places that help build me



Home is meant to be a constant, a place you always return to at the end of the day. But for a boarder, home is wherever you unpack your suitcase.

In my first week, Grandma sent me a quote, "92% of students say that their closest friendships were formed in boarding school." It was oddly specific and statistics never tell the full story. If 92% of students form their closest friendships in boarding school, what about the other 8%? When I first arrived at boarding school, it felt nearly impossible that I could ever become close with any of the strangers I was surrounded by.

Living between two places can only be described as constantly shifting gears from 'school mode' to 'home mode'. So, does this mean I have two places to call home or none at all?

For most of my first year, I struggled to find the right gear. A little like Poppy in 'Wild Child', I spent so much time resisting, convinced that boarding school simply wasn't for me. It was hard to find that balance between seizing this amazing opportunity in front of me, and grabbing it by the wheel, and grieving what I thought was a loss of home. So when I was asked, 'which do I prefer?" I felt conflicted.

At first, the answer was obvious, 'home'.

I remember one Sunday night during my first term. My phone buzzed with a message for Mum, "How's your night going?"

I stared at the screen longer than I needed to. I wanted to say I was fine and be the independent version of myself that I knew my parents would want to hear from. Instead, I typed and deleted. Then typed and deleted again. I looked at the time, and wondered what everyone would be doing back home. Life went on there, while I was both, not fully there, not fully here. I missed who I was at home, when I didn't question every reaction, every choice, every word that left my mouth. Back then, I felt certain. I knew where I belonged.

Boarding school felt like I was stuck in reverse because at home I was in a place where I didn't have to think about schedules, responsibilities, or living with dozens of girls I barely knew. I was constantly being reminded that boarding school would always feel like a detour from home.

I remember wondering when this feeling would change. At first, it was slow, like shifting out of neutral and into drive. But then the friendships and support I hadn't noticed before were suddenly there. The late-night conversations, the shared complaints about the early mornings, began to catch me off guard. I would find myself laughing before I remembered I wasn't supposed to feel at home here. The inside jokes slipped into my vocabulary without permission, and somewhere between the exhaustion and the laughter, this place stopped feeling temporary.

One evening, sitting in the common rooms, I felt the belonging that I had previouslyy longed for. Millie had burned popcorn in the microwave, and we all panicked, frantically waving our arms at the smoke detector, praying it wouldn't go off and summon the boarding staff. Our fear and adrenaline heightened the smell of the burnt popcorn. In between the coughs, I blurted out, "Do you think it will still taste fine?"

At that moment, I wasn't thinking about what my family was doing back home. I wasn't torn between two places. I was just there, surrounded by people who, despite coming from very different backgrounds, made me feel like I had finally hit full speed, like I was finally in drive.

Even though I might have been sent here against my better judgment, I realise now that boarding school was never something that was happening to me. It was happening for me.

When Grandma sent that statistic, I was terrified of being the exception. I now understand something I didn't then, belonging is built slowly, awkwardly, through shared experiences. Belonging isn't found. It's formed.

So now, when I'm asked, "Which do you prefer?" I don't feel torn. Because the question assumes that home is singular. And it isn't. The real question was whether I was willing to grow. And growth rarely feels comfortable at first.

Switching gears was never about choosing a speed. It was about learning how to drive without stalling.

I don't have two homes.

I have two places that help build me. ■

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When the Lights Go Out:
Finding My Place in Boarding

When I first stepped into boarding, I don't think I fully understood just how much happens behind the scenes to make a boarding house feel like a home.

Boarding is not simply the morning rush to get boys out of the house and off to school, or the afternoon and evening routine when they return. There is a full day of work in between — administration, planning, organising transport for appointments and sporting commitments, pastoral care, conversations with teachers, checking in with parents, responding to the little things before they become bigger things, and making sure the house continues to run smoothly.

There are the routines that everyone sees, and then there is everything that happens quietly in the background to make those routines work.



And then there is lights out.

When I first stepped into the role of Head of House in a boys' boarding house, lights out seemed straightforward. A time. A routine. A boundary.

The lights go off. The boys go to bed. The house becomes quiet.

Or at least, that was the theory.

What I have come to realise is that lights out is rarely about the lights.

It is about what happens in the moments leading up to them.

It is the final check-in after a long day. It is the reminder to brush your teeth, put your technology away and find your uniform for the morning. And, occasionally, it is the conversation that starts with, "Miss, can I ask you something?"

It is hearing laughter coming from a dorm when you know everyone is supposed to be asleep. It is knocking on a door and being met with a sheepish smile. It is reminding someone for the third time that tomorrow is going to come very quickly if they don't get into bed.

But it is also something much more important.

It is connection.

As a female stepping into a senior boys' boarding house, I was conscious that while I wasn't new to boys - I am a mum to two of them - boarding was a completely new experience for me.

I understood the noise, the banter, the endless questions, the teenage moods and the occasional chaos that comes with raising boys. What I hadn't experienced was the responsibility of caring for a group of young men who were living away from their families, helping them navigate school, friendships, independence and the many challenges that come with boarding.

I was getting to know the rhythms of the house while also getting to know the boys themselves. I quickly discovered that boarding adds another layer to the relationship between young people and the adults who care for them.

Sometimes the boys need boundaries and accountability.

Sometimes they suddenly need to tell you about something that happened at school at precisely the moment you are trying to get everyone to bed.

Sometimes they need someone to tell them, for the fourth time, that it really is time to go to bed.

And sometimes they just need someone to sit and listen.

In the quiet of the evening, they tell you something that matters.

Those moments have changed the way I see lights out.

The expectation that they are in bed and the house is quiet is important. Young people need sleep, routine and boundaries. They need adults who are willing to hold them accountable and follow through on expectations.

But they also need to know that the adults around them are there.

Boarding is an unusual environment. These boys are away from their families. They are learning to manage themselves, their relationships, their emotions, their responsibilities and their independence, often all at once.

Our job is not to remove every challenge from that experience.

Our job is to walk alongside them through it.



And sometimes, walking alongside them means standing in a hallway at 10pm, telling them for the fourth time to get into bed.

It means knowing when to be firm and when to listen.

It means understanding that behind the behaviour is a young person who is still learning.

It means recognising that the boy who is testing the boundaries tonight may actually need someone to remind him that he is safe, supported and cared for.

There is something quite special about a boarding house after lights out.

The noise gradually disappears. Doors are locked, alarms are turned on and the hallway becomes still. The day finally settles.

And sometimes, standing there in that quiet, I think about how much this role has taught me.

I came into this role as a mum of two boys, thinking I probably had a pretty good understanding of boys. What I didn't know was how different it would be to care for a whole house of them, to support them when they are away from their families, and to be part of the people helping them grow into young men.

I have learned that boarding isn't just about routines, rosters, rules and getting everyone where they need to be. It is about relationships. It is about trust. It is about knowing when to hold a boundary and when to stop and listen.

And maybe that is what lights out has taught me most.

The lights going out doesn't mean our role stops.

Sometimes, it is when the lights go out that the most important moments begin.

A quiet conversation.

A laugh from down the hallway.

A reminder that tomorrow is a new day.

A young person knowing that someone is there.

For me, lights out has become much more than a time on the boarding routine. It is one of those small moments that reminds me why I love boarding - because in the quiet at the end of the day, you realise just how much these boys are growing, and how lucky we are to be part of it.

And sometimes, when the lights go out, I realise that this is exactly where I am meant to be. ■

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Would your school *pass the payroll test?*

Getting pay right in boarding: what the law expects, and what happens when records can't show it

A boarding supervisor raises a concern about their pay. What happens next comes down to one thing: your records.

Under Australian workplace law, if an employee raises a concern about their hours or pay and the school can't produce records to show otherwise, the responsibility shifts. It's no longer on the employee to prove they were underpaid. It's on the school to prove they weren't.

WHAT OUR SURVEY FOUND
The Workforce Pulse 2026 · Citation Group

87% — are confident their payroll is accurate

18% — found a payroll error in the last 12 months

42% — have found a payroll error at some point – many only surface when someone looks

24% — error rate among medium businesses (20-100 staff) – the highest of any size group

"Every business feels confident in their payroll, but if you're not running proper checks, that confidence means nothing."

Renee Roussety, Chief Operating Officer, Citation Group
The Workforce Pulse 2026

The burden of proof sits with you

Before this provision changed, the employee carried the burden of proof. Lawmakers decided the party with the record-keeping obligation should wear the consequences of not meeting it.

If a school can't produce clean records, the employee's account tends to be accepted. "We don't have the records" is no longer a neutral position – in a dispute, it's frequently the reason an employer loses. Failing to keep compliant records is treated as a breach in its own right, regardless of whether anyone was actually underpaid.

The test worth applying to your school

Could you hand your payroll records for any staff member to a Fair Work Ombudsman inspector tomorrow and have them determine – without a single follow-up question – exactly what that person was paid, for which hours, at what rate, under which classification, and why?

If there's any ambiguity – rounded hours, no documentation of why a classification was chosen, rosters that don't match timesheets – that's where schools become exposed. Under the law, ambiguity is read against the employer.

42% of employers have found a payroll error at some point. Most only surface when someone looks.

Why boarding schools are particularly exposed

The challenge in boarding is rarely a matter of intent. It's complexity that has outgrown the systems meant to manage it. Boarding staff often span functions – a boarding supervisor who also teaches, a residential supervisor covering weekend duties across multiple houses, a casual fill-in working different shifts each week. Each arrangement carries classification and rate implications.

Year after year, award compliance and classification questions top the list of pay-related issues education employers raise with our advisors – a pattern that maps directly onto what the data confirms.



Our research found that medium-sized businesses – 20 to 100 employees – had the highest payroll error rate at 24% in the last 12 months, and 50% found an error at some point. In the education sector, 63% say managing payroll and awards is unnecessarily complex – 14 points above the all-industry average. And 59% worry about getting pay or entitlements wrong, against 43% across all sectors.

Most issues originate during onboarding, where incorrect classifications or incomplete data create downstream problems that carry through every pay cycle, and are difficult to correct later, especially if staff have moved on.

This isn't just a payroll issue. It's a legal one too.

What good record-keeping looks like

The standard isn't perfection. It's auditability – the ability to trace any pay decision from agreement to classification to timesheet to payslip, and to do so quickly. A simple self-audit is a useful starting point:

- Pick a handful of boarding staff across different role types and produce their full record chain. How long does it take? How much is manual?
- Check that each person's classification still reflects the work they're doing. Classifications set at appointment don't update automatically.
- Document who can approve timesheets and edit pay data. If the answer is informal, that's a gap.

If a problem surfaces, acting early matters. Issues found and corrected by the school are treated very differently to those uncovered in an external investigation.

The case for connected systems

Our research found that 58% of businesses say their people and pay data is fragmented across systems – and that the number of systems a business runs has no meaningful relationship to compliance outcomes. What matters is whether those systems talk to each other.

For boarding schools, the critical failure point is the gap between what was rostered and what was actually worked. Every manual transfer between a rostering tool, a timesheet, and a payroll platform is a point of failure. The stronger the connection between those three things, the easier the audit trail becomes to produce.

IF YOU DO NOTHING…

With Fair Work audits increasing and wage theft now criminalised, even well-intentioned errors can lead to penalties and reputational damage. Left unchecked, small issues accumulate into liabilities that are far more disruptive to fix under scrutiny than to catch proactively.

THREE ACTIONS FOR BOARDING SCHOOLS

1. Fix onboarding at the source

2. Run an annual payroll review

Conduct a structured annual review of awards, classifications and entitlements – including any staff whose rostered hours or residential duties have changed. Don't wait for a complaint to find the gap.

3. Connect your systems

If your rostering, timesheet and payroll processes aren't integrated, every manual transfer is a point of failure. The stronger the connection between systems, the cleaner the audit trail.

The bottom line

Boarding schools are already experts in documentation for student duty of care. The same rigour applied to payroll records puts you in the strongest possible position.

The real question isn't whether your school has ever made a mistake. It's whether, if asked tomorrow, you could show your work. ■

Citation Group

Citation Group supports education employers across Australia with HR, safety, and employment law advice. foundU, our workforce management platform, connects rostering, timesheets, and payroll in one place – so the audit trail builds itself. citationgroup.com.au

The same book, *four nights running*

The bedtime read is one of the first rituals a family loses when a child boards. It survives inside the routine a house already runs, and it does not only travel in one direction.

For years I read to my daughter over a video call. We were apart because of visa complications, and bedtime was a screen propped against a lamp and a paperback held up to it. I got it wrong for a long time, and what fixed it had nothing to do with reading well.

Boarding is not that. A boarder is safe, supervised and surrounded by people. But one thing carries across. The ritual that happened without anyone deciding anything now has to be scheduled, or it quietly stops. Benveniste and colleagues, working in 2014 with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, found that boarding strips out the informal contact, and what is left becomes formal and problem triggered. Staff in any house will know the pattern reaches further than those families.

Three things that turned out to matter. None happens at lights out. By then a Year 7 has handed the phone in, which is as it should be. The slot is the evening contact window the house already runs, and the weekend.

Slowly matters more than well

I used to perform. Voices, pace, the whole show, because I wanted the twenty minutes to be good. Wrong instinct. A child listens less for the story than for the sound of someone who is not in a hurry. Slow the reading until it feels too slow to the adult doing it. It takes no talent, which is the point.

Let the child turn the page, even out of order

In that window it means two copies of the same book, one at each end, and a library copy does the job. The child holds theirs and decides when the page turns. If they flick back three pages, go back three pages. The control is the value, not the sequence. For a boarder it works better in a quiet room than a common area, and better still if the boarder picks the book.

The ritual outlasts the content

The same book four nights running is a feature, not a failure. Fiese and colleagues, reviewing fifty years of research on family routines in 2002, separated routine from ritual. A routine carries information, this is what needs doing, and is forgotten once done. A ritual carries meaning, this is who we are, and leaves an emotional residue. Their line: "When routines are disrupted, it is a hassle. When rituals are disrupted, there is a threat to group cohesion." The evidence is correlational, but it explains the repetition.

The reader is often not the boarder

Here is the part that gets missed. ABSA's own census shows boarding begins in earnest at Year 7, and the numbers below that year are very small. So the child still young enough for a bedtime story to be a daily thing is usually not the boarder. It is the sibling at home.

Nobody counts those children, and I could not find any Australian research on them. They have lost a nightly companion, and nothing has happened that anyone would name as a loss, so nothing gets said.

This is where the ritual runs backwards. A Year 7 in the Sunday window, with the same book at both ends, can read four pages to a younger sister. Two copies is two copies a family has to find, and many of these homes are hours from a bookshop, so a house set of picture books does the same work. It asks nothing new of the roster, and it gives the boarder something to do in the family rather than something to report. A child who cannot answer how they are going can still read four pages.

Where this does not work

Thurber and Walton, writing for the American Academy of Pediatrics in 2007, found professional opinions mixed and the research scant. Scheduled calls seemed not to interfere over longer separations, though nobody had tested that in a boarding house. A 2020 study of first year university students found homesickness ran highest during video chats, and the authors refused the obvious reading: they could not tell whether the call causes the ache or the ache causes the call. Nothing equivalent has been done with boarders.

So predictable and calm beats frequent and intense, and if a child is flat for an hour after every call the answer is shorter and earlier, not longer. None of it needs a device. In the handbooks I read, the timetable already schedules reading between device hand in and lights out, and that is where this belongs. Among the coping strategies research finds actually work is picturing what the people who love you would say, and a familiar book is a way in.

The book was never the point. What a child remembers is that at a particular hour, somebody who loves them slowed down. ■

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From the Chair

Megan Krimmer

With Deep Gratitude

This time of the year in many schools across Australasia is the time when we say farewell to our boarders in their final year at school.

The emotions are always mixed: absolute excitement for the great possibilities that these incredible young people can look forward to as they leave school and embark on their next adventures; yet, at the same time, deep sadness, as these young women and men have developed strong relationships, not only with each other and the younger students, but also with boarding staff, and they will be sorely missed.

At all schools, I am sure – the deep gratitude that students and parents display towards the wonderful boarding professionals who have looked after their daughters and sons so well, is palpable. As you know – all boarding staff give of themselves unstintingly, often making personal sacrifices to ensure that the students under their care are not only well looked after, but also that they truly flourish. It can be very challenging as well as very rewarding work. As a result of the care given, these young people have developed the important characteristics of courage, resilience, empathy, compassion and kindness, and they are absolutely ready for whatever life may bring them. I would like to express my deep gratitude for all that each member of staff at every boarding school does – thank you.

I also would like to express my sincere gratitude to the ABSA team so ably led by Richard Stokes. The excellent professional learning and advice provided by ABSA is second-to-none and helps us all to ensure that we are developing into the best possible boarding professionals that we can be, so that we may, in turn, provide the best possible experiences for our students.

This year too, Richard Stokes has been instrumental in ensuring that the Boarding Standard has been updated by Standards Australia. As a result of Richard's work, the Boarding Standard is now a strong and relevant standard that provides guidance, perhaps even a framework, for all that we do in boarding. Richard has worked tirelessly on this project and the people with whom he has worked have benefitted greatly from his wisdom and expertise. Thank you, Richard.

Further, Richard Stokes together with the ABSA Board and Mark Vincent, have been working hard to refresh the ABSA Strategic Plan. Due to be finalised later this year, this document will provide helpful guidance for ABSA to continue to provide state of the art and relevant support to all boarding schools across Australia and New Zealand and beyond. I would like to express my sincere appreciation to all those who have worked on this important plan.

The end of year is always incredibly busy; however, I hope that boarding staff in all our schools are able to find time to continue to undertake the superb and reasonably priced professional learning that ABSA provides, both online and in-person. Participating in professional learning is an excellent way to end 2026 and to prepare for 2027.

I hope that 2026 has been a very fulfilling year for all members of ABSA, and I wish you a well-deserved and relaxing holiday break over the Christmas period. ■

AUTHOR:
Megan Krimmer
Chairperson
Australian Boarding
Schools Association



Your School FEATURED

WOULD YOU LIKE YOUR BOARDING SCHOOL FEATURED IN LIGHTS OUT?

We plan to feature at least two schools each edition. All you need to do, is write a brief article (400 to 1000 words) and send us some high resolution photos (300dpi).

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