

Wisdom of learning outside classroom

Outdoor education, including camps and orienteering activities, have long been offered by schools to further student development outside of the classroom, but more are incorporating sustainability as well as indigenous learnings into their programs.

Richard Stokes, Australian Boarding Schools Association chief executive, says it has become very obvious over the past 10 years that schools are paying much more attention to “educating the whole child” rather than just focusing on their academic studies.

“Most schools have worked out that there is actually more to learning than just school work,” Stokes says. “These programs offer kids an experience that takes them out of the comfort zone to learn about themselves and the world.”

In a normal year, Sydney-based Loreto Normanhurst takes all their Year 9 students to Far North Queensland where the girls not only visit the Daintree Rainforest and the Great Barrier Reef, but do community service at aged-care facilities and primary schools for indigenous children. They also spend time with indigenous elders that live in some of the most disadvantaged postcodes in Australia.

“We want them to understand nature and the environment as well as form a particular connection with Australia’s Indigenous culture,” says Libby Parker, director of mission at Loreto who runs the program. “It’s about learning outside of the classroom and what wisdom that can bring to students through the experience.”

While border closures from COVID-19 have forced the school to cancel this year’s trip, Parker and her staff have quickly created a new program in NSW to try replicate some of the experiences, including the immersion into indigenous culture.

Kincoppal-Rose Bay, also based in Sydney, developed its own immersion program

last year where students visited Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory and stayed on the remote indigenous homeland of Nyinyika to learn from the local community. The school also sends their Year 11 students every year to Bowraville on the NSW north coast where they work at the local St Mary’s School that has predominantly indigenous enrolment.

In Brisbane, Anne Tetley Jones helps run St Peter’s Lutheran College’s outdoor education program called Ironbark, where Year 9 students spend five weeks living on a 600-ha property in regional Queensland and immerse themselves in farm life. The program focuses on outdoor pursuits, farm skills, environmental awareness and community living.

“It’s about developing the whole child and giving them the skills to manage life beyond school,” Jones says.



Loreto students learning about Indigenous culture last year

“The big thing is it gets them thinking about who they want to be as people ... it’s also a great leveler.”

Elsewhere, Tudor House, the Southern Highlands campus of The King’s School, runs its outdoor education program, Kahiba, on a weekly basis, where students partake in activities from canoeing to bush furniture building, ropes courses and weekend camping trips. With the school already based on 69ha of bushland, Tim Jenkinson, Tudor House head of boarding says there is less need to take the students off-campus.

“It’s all about learning about the outdoors which has been incorporated into the curriculum,” Jenkinson says.

“It involves all students and teaches them about survival as well as bush craft.”

SARAH JONES

Border closures impact families

ROSANNE BARRETT

Boarding schools face uncertainty as they plan the 2021 school year amid ongoing national and interstate border closures.

As some families consider changing their children’s enrolments to keep them in their home state, some schools are setting up off-site quarantine facilities or keeping their boarding houses open throughout holiday periods.

Australian Boarding Schools Association chief executive Richard Stokes says the unprecedented situation is causing considerable strain on schools and families.

“As boarding school people that is causing us a lot of grief,” Stokes says.

“There is a huge number of kids in Australia who board in a different state to the one where they live, often because it is closer. At the moment we don’t have one country, we have a lot of states.

“There are lots of parents saying, ‘I don’t know if I want to go through this again.’”

Across Australia 1614 of the 20,928 boarding school students are being educated and cared for in boarding houses outside their home state.

There are 816 young people who live in NSW but board interstate, including 491 in

Queensland. There are also 408 Northern Territorians, 109 Victorians, 98 Queenslanders, 77 Western Australians, 50 South Australians, 38 from the ACT and 18 Tasmanians who board interstate.

Some families also had to decide whether to keep their children at school or take them home away from the school environment for months when state borders closed.

The variable state border restrictions have created eyebrow-raising results.

Two neighbouring families send their children to South Australia’s Westminster School in Adelaide. Both live on very remote properties. One family lives on a property near Broken Hill on the NSW side. The other lives just over the border in SA.

Principal Simon Shepherd says it had real impacts for the students.

“One of them has been able to come back to school straight away, the other has to go into quarantine,” he says. “And yet, they are neighbours.”

Stokes says there were cases where young people fell ill during the term and their parents were not able to pick them up from the school. Or students living in Ballarat schools had to drive to the COVID-19 hotspot of Melbourne to fly to Sydney, so they could then drive to their regional home towns 1000km away in rural NSW.



“It’s a real problem,” he says. “There are just 200 boarding schools in Australia with only 22,000 kids so we don’t have a very loud voice.

“We’re not talking about kids going from Brisbane to Sydney, or Brisbane to Melbourne, we’re talking about kids going from Brisbane to Lightning Ridge.”

But schools have carried on educating and caring for students.

The Worawa Aboriginal College in Victoria kept open its boarding house with about 20 girls from the usual 70-strong boarding population. The other 50 girls are learning remotely.

“We’ve had to change our entire way of operations,” principal Lois Peeler says. “The girls have been fantastic. They’re still engaged in their education and I entirely acknowledge their re-

silience and their capacity for them to do that.”

In SA, Prince Alfred College principal Bradley Fenner says their boarding house has not closed since the start of the school year.

Ahead of the June holidays, he says the school was organising homestays with families for the boarding boys. But the boys had other plans.

“The boys presented us with a petition saying, ‘We don’t want to go into home stay, we would rather stay in the boarding house because this is our home’,” Fenner says. “We talked to the staff and they were happy to keep it open. That has been a great relief for families.”

Until eight working days before the school holidays, hard border closures were in place for Queensland, SA, WA and the

Mother’s relief for daughters’ homecoming

CASE STUDY

Kate Bradshaw just wanted to see her much-loved daughters. After weeks of uncertainty, backup planning and worry, the rural NSW beef producer’s two youngest daughters Lily, 17, and Ruby, 15, will have returned from their north Queensland boarding school for the holidays.

“They are coming home and we’re relieved about that,” she says.

Australia’s patchwork of COVID-19 state and territory border and travel restrictions has

created challenges for many students and families who attend boarding schools outside their home state.

Just under half of those interstate students board in Queensland, where at the time of writing, the hard border closure with NSW, the ACT and Victoria has meant families were weighing up their options.

The Bradshaw girls were facing staying at school for the holidays, bunking down with relatives or homestays, or missing the crucial first two weeks of Term 4. This is when Year 12 stu-



Molly, Lily and Ruby Bradshaw will quarantine at home, mustering, fencing and helping on the family property

dents will have their exams.

For Bradshaw, her immense relief remains tempered by ongoing uncertainty. What if there

are more cases in NSW and the border is closed again? What if an official stops them at the border on their way from outback NSW

Integrated approach extends beyond the Worawa school classroom

When First Nations girls from around the country arrive at the Healesville campus of Worawa Aboriginal College they enter a school that is not only focused on academic education, but developing their health, wellbeing and cultural pride.

The independent boarding school offers the only all-girls education grounded in Aboriginal culture, with Indigenous knowledge embedded into the curriculum.

Principal Lois Peeler says the Aboriginal-owned and operated

school has an integrated approach to education that extends from the classroom to the boarding house for the 70 girls in Years 7 to 12.

"The Worawa student population reflects the diversity of Indigenous Australia with girls coming from Aboriginal communities across the country, there are different geographical locations, different language groups, different customs and different histories," she says.

Dr Peeler said there is a strong health and wellbeing

focus, with extensive professional development for staff who acknowledged the social and emotional wellbeing needs of students, the need for positive identity and cultural expression, awareness of intergenerational trauma, unconscious bias and racism experienced by Aboriginal people. She says the school is also proactive in its approach to health and medical services, with a school nurse, access to a female doctor and allied health professionals, clinical psychologist and wellbeing co-ordinator.

"Boarding extends to education outside of the classroom: personal development, health education, sleep hygiene, good nutrition, exercise, self-management, self-reliance and all those other matters that make us who we are," Peeler says. "We build in them the skills, confidence, ability and self-pride to walk in both worlds."

Across Australia, boarding school health programs have identified hearing and vision loss, allergies and heart conditions in Indigenous students.

A study of eight Queensland boarding schools with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people published this year found boarding schools' health supports led to increased student participation, better mental health and responsibility.

More than 3600 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students live in boarding schools around Australia.

Australian government initiatives under the Closing The Gap framework have fuelled increases in the Indigenous stu-

dent population. But it is complex. Attending traditional, mainstream boarding schools in faraway urban centres can be a huge challenge.

The report quoted an assistant principal on the difficulties for students.

"They're so far away from home in such a completely different environment," they said.

"They have come from really complex sort of traumatic communities or families where they need that support even more."

ROSANNE BARRETT

Day students say 'yes' to boarding

An increasing number of schools in major city centres are offering flexible boarding to help students and parents avoid the traffic as well as juggle the ever-increasing extra-curricular activities.

Loreto Normanhurst, a Catholic girls' school on the upper north shore of Sydney, began offering a more flexible arrangement for boarders last year after listening to parents of day students who were concerned about the travel time and extra school commitments of their children that live within an hour or so from the school.

This means students have the option to stay at the school a minimum of five days but have the choice of whether to stay over the weekend, which can help with sport on Saturday that is compulsory.

"It takes a lot of pressure off the parents," says the school's head of boarding, Kate Kovacs, who has 170 students in her charge.

"For girls who do more flexible boarding, they were doing 7am to 9pm as day girls. For some, it's more than an hour on the train to get home.

"Our school is not just open 8.30am to 3pm, we offer extra-curricular programs outside of those hours that the girls want to be part of."

She added that because 85 per cent of the boarders can't easily get home on the weekend due to distance, by offering a minimum of five days' boarding it made it less disruptive for those who have no choice but to stay over the weekend.

According to the Australian Boarding Schools Association, 69 per cent of the 21,000 of students who board in Australia are from rural and remote parts of the country, with another 10 per

cent coming from overseas.

The rest come from metropolitan areas.

The King's School in North Parramatta offers an even more flexible arrangement where the students have the option to board as little as two to three days a week, depending on their commitments.

Tim Jenkinson, head of boarding at The King's School, Tudor House, which offers boarding to children as young as Year 3, says King's had never been a 9am to 3pm school, explaining that they offer extra clubs, tutoring and sporting activities outside of the normal school hours.

He says for those students who live on Sydney's northern beaches, for example, parents and students spend much of the time driving to and from school or to sport which eats into their family time.

Jenkinson also notes that there is an increasing number of families opting for a tree change, and moving further out from the city in favour of a less hectic lifestyle.

About one third of the 450 boarders at King's come from NSW metro areas.

"We have seen the biggest growth in weekly and more flexible borders," Jenkinson says.

"Weekly boarding can be two to three days and it's that flexibility which is attracting families.

"The students also learn other skills at boarding school, including how to tolerate others and get along with people from different backgrounds, and conflict resolution.

"Those life skills are invaluable. The boarding environment is a rich and fertile ground that cultivates student growth."

SARAH JONES

Schools zero in on mental health

SARAH JONES

Looking after the mental health and wellbeing of school students has never been more important than during the pandemic, with many left feeling isolated from their friends and the school community as they are forced to study online.

Mental health and wellbeing programs have already been rolled out in many schools across Australia to help students manage their anxiety and self-esteem issues, the pressure to achieve as well as navigate the challenges that come with social media.

Even so, new research from the University of Sydney shows an expected increase in youth suicide and self-harm in Australia over the next five years, which has prompted calls for more intervention at schools.

Kirsty Walsh, head of girls' boarding at Ballarat Clarendon College in regional Victoria, says they had been "investing heavily" over the past 18 months to embed wellbeing practices into the daily life of the school which is still ongoing. This includes putting processes and technology in place to help staff monitor the students more closely and intervene where necessary.

"Schools are being made more accountable in terms of identifying, supporting and guiding students," Walsh says. "And students are more attune to mental health challenges."

Some of the school's processes include having a strict electronic device policy in the boarding house that bans social media overnight and at mealtimes to make sure the girls get a break from the screen and the "information overload" that comes with constantly being online.

Jack Wood, co-founder of tech start-up Komodo, a software platform that helps boarding schools monitor the wellbeing of students, says the lockdown to contain COVID-19 has brought student mental health to the forefront of everyone's mind.

After originally developing



The mental health and wellbeing of students is critical, an issue that led to the unique structures put in place at The Armidale School, in northern NSW

"The strength of relationships between students and teachers really goes a long way ... we are able to quickly pick up who is or isn't travelling well"

TIM KELLY
PRINCIPAL, TOWNSVILLE GRAMMAR SCHOOL

the platform to support professional athletes, last year they pivoted the business to student wellbeing after being approached by various schools to help provide a monitoring solution. The platform regularly sends out surveys to students who may feel more comfortable being open about their feelings online rather than face-to-face with a student counsellor.

"The problem is so big and so crucial that it doesn't take long

for a school to identify the need to do something beyond the normal pastoral care," Wood says.

"We have been able to pick up bullying of children simply because the school has had the platform in place."

Townsville Grammar School principal Tim Kelly says monitoring the wellbeing and mental health of students was at the centre of their pastoral care programs.

As well as having them

weeks, including mental health awareness, he says the school has a clear set of policies and procedures in place including strict protocols around the use of phones and social media on campus.

They also have staff networks in place to closely monitor students, which sees him sit down every Wednesday with a small group of children to check-in with how they are feeling.

"We are a positive education school," Kelly says.

"Wellbeing is certainly something that we have to really focus on, it's a critical issue. The strength of relationships between students and teachers really goes a long way and it's because of these support networks that we are able to quickly pick up who is or isn't travelling well."



St Joseph's Nudgee College students pass through a walled courtyard to enter the Bathersby boarding village

CHRISTOPHER FREDERICK JONES

Building a home away from home essential for boarders

ROSANNE BARRETT

Schools are building in boarding houses features to ensure that when students leave their lessons at the end of the day, they go “home”.

Incorporating residential design features with separate boarding realms, schools want their residential wings to be as homey as possible. Accommodation ranges from self-contained units for four students to large-scale boarding wings depending on the philosophy of the school.

SA's Prince Alfred College last year threw open the doors on their multimillion-dollar purpose-built boarding house.

Headmaster Bradley Fenner says the school — where boarding has been offered since it opened in 1869 — created state-of-the-art accommodation for the 150 boarders as the “best possible home for our boys”.

Fenner says the facilities must also make studying easier, with private areas and communal spaces. In the new development,

younger boys start in shared rooms and progress to singles, all with a shared ensuite bathroom.

A dozen boys reside on each level, where there is a shared tutorial room and a common room with lounges, a television and kitchen. Outside there are large courtyards, a barbecue area and outdoor pizza oven for events.

“For those who have done the transition, there was really no comparison,” Fenner says.

In Sydney, girls' school Loreto Normanhurst is planning a major upgrade of its campus including a new boarding house. Director of boarding Kate Kovacs says the accommodation is the girls' home for 40 weeks a year.

“Not only does it have to be functional it has to be a nice place to reside,” she says.

“It doesn't have to be flashy, but it does need to be able to foster a sense of community, ownership and pride in their home away from home.”

Plans for the development include breakout zones for relaxation and shared areas such as kitchens, dining areas, lounges

and TV rooms, all with plenty of light and views. There is also a strong focus on security, and facilities for parents to stay when they come to visit.

In Adelaide, the Westminster School offers self-contained cottages for girls and a purpose-built boarding house for boys, in recognition of the differences between the students.

“The school purchased the units in preparation for giving the girls more preparation for life beyond school,” principal Simon Shepherd says. “Boys are inherently different.”

The boarding precinct — distinct from the school to allow a “separation” from the classroom — also has shared recreation spaces where girls and boys can eat, play and study together.

Cox Architects' associate Brett Seakins oversaw the design for Victoria's Wesley College Learning in Residence development at Glen Waverly that reintroduced boarding to the school. Together with the school, he devised eight homes in a ring across a green space, with lines of

sight between each house and the main education zone.

“The idea was for students to be almost like a home environment where they can rely on each other and form friendships within the houses to support their learning,” he says. “The kind of grouping was more of a residential house than a boarding hall.”

For the redevelopment of St Joseph's Nudgee College boarding house in Brisbane, M3 architect Ben Vielle says the school wanted to bring four boarding wings together and create a shared culture. As a space with up to 300 boarders and staff, the development provides living areas and communal spaces behind a “castle wall”. The new development border is a walled courtyard, where the boys have to pass to enter the boarding area.

“Something we thought was important was a sense of separation from the day school so you feel like you're going to a different space,” he says. “You get the sense you're stepping into another world. That separation is important.”

Learning how to learn key to success

Sue Collister, director of boarding at St Catherine's girl's school in Toorak, Melbourne, has students log on from China to do their daily homework via video link with the rest of the boarding house.

Prior to the pandemic and stage four lockdowns in Victoria, the school's 53 boarders completed their homework at the same time every night in a supervised to semi-supervised environment.

A former history and geography teacher, Collister says that since introducing the structure when she took on the role 13 years ago, the academic results of the girls in her care had enormously improved.

“It changed us into a very academic boarding house,” she says. “The girls just know at 6.45pm every weeknight that the whole boarding house goes into prep, it just becomes part of their life. And even with remote learning I still offer our boarders the same supervision online using Microsoft Teams.”

With her students now back to remote learning because of the pandemic, Collister says it is crucial that they still feel connected and have some sort of structure, regardless of whether they are stuck overseas or on a farm in rural Australia.

She adds that while supporting girls academically was important, the school's philosophy was to look at the whole person to prepare them for life after school.

From an early age, they start career-testing students to find their strengths and weaknesses and offer vocational subjects such as animal studies and fashion that count towards the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR). Along with honour programs and extension classes, they also have a separate learning-plus department to support those with extra needs.

Australian Boarding Schools Association chief executive Richard Stokes says students often blossom academically when they become boarders because of the supervision and networks that are typically in place. “It's not just about learning,” he says. “They do well because they have so much support, resources and staff. It's also about teaching study discipline.”

He adds that education

today has become more complicated, with more subject choices than ever before.

While increased competition was the likely driver, he says that schools were also trying to offer the best curriculum for their particular cohort of student.

Hayden McEvoy, founder of A-team Tuition which provides tutoring during prep time for boarding schools, says that by giving students the right support and structure, and teaching them how to study and learn effectively, it was not uncommon to see a sharp turnaround in grades.

“It's about injecting a sense of belief and a new mindset into the student,” he says. “It empowers them and gives them the secrets and tools to succeed” regardless of a school's curriculum.

The company first piloted its program with The Southport School on the Gold Coast where they helped an unusually large group of struggling Year 7 boarders go from an average C-plus grade in mathematics to an A minus.

The early success has since seen them roll out their tutoring program in 19 other boarding schools including The Kings School in Sydney and Townsville Grammar School in Far North Queensland.

Townsville Grammar principal Tim Kelly says that because boarders make up nearly 20 per cent of their student population, with many coming from remote rural areas in Queensland where some had only ever done distance learning, the school needed to provide a “huge amount of academic and pastoral support”.

As well as the tutoring, they also offer vocational programs such as trainee apprenticeships along with more rigorous academic options including the International Baccalaureate in Year 11 and 12 which provides an alternative syllabus to the state's program. Along with doing a science and language subject, students can also study the theory of knowledge.

“We have a real commitment to a broad liberal education,” said Kelly. “Many of them will pick the IB program because they don't want to specialise just yet. They are learning about how to learn.”

SARAH JONES

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OUR
SCHOOL

WHO WE ARE

Established in 1897, Loreto Normanhurst is a leading Sydney Catholic, independent day and boarding school for girls from Years 5-12, with boarding for girls from Years 7-12. The school is part of a 400-year tradition of educating girls and is connected to a worldwide network of Loreto schools, including seven in Australia. Our foundress, Mary Ward (1585-1645), believed that, "Women in time to come will do much...". In our school, we live out Mary Ward's vision through the Loreto values of freedom, justice, sincerity, verity and felicity.

OUR KEY STRENGTHS

At our school, relationships and learning are of equal importance. The Loreto Normanhurst Student Growth Model (LNSGM) is an award-winning model of education which develops students holistically in the areas of faith, academic, community and extra-curricular (FACE curriculum). A Loreto Normanhurst education assists our students to be young women who are passionate about learning, compassionate to others and have a strong sense of faith and social direction that underpins their values to achieve their personal best and guides their decision making. We aim to encourage our students to be lifelong learners who are curious and critical thinkers with a broad vision for the future. Furthermore, the values and philosophy upon which Loreto Normanhurst is built encourages young women to become compassionate, socially responsible global citizens who are willing to act for change and make a meaningful contribution.

FLEXIBLE BOARDING MODEL

Loreto Normanhurst welcomes boarders from the Sydney basin, country NSW, interstate and Australian expatriate boarders. A full-time boarding model is at the core of Loreto Normanhurst boarding, but it also incorporates full flexibility on weekends. For country and city-based boarders alike, this means boarding all week with greater access to weekend time with family and friends. This model of boarding can also take some of the pressure off busy family life and help students meet their academic and extra-curricular commitments. The school also offers boarding families visiting Sydney the option to stay in parent accommodation located next to the school campus.

FIND OUT MORE

Join us online for our live and exclusive principal's welcome tour: October 26 and November 23.

For more information go to, loretanh.nsw.edu.au

Email: Contact the enrolments team at enquiries@loretanh.nsw.edu.au

Phone: +61 (0)2 9473 7300

Meeting the needs of modern families

Boarders provide a unique dimension and add to the richness of diversity at Loreto Normanhurst.

"Parents have told us there is a sense of friendliness, of home; that there's something really special here," says principal, Marina Ugonotti.

Sarah Ciesiolka from Wee Waa, NSW, agrees and says her family's values are aligned with the core values of Loreto Normanhurst, which ultimately led her to selecting the school for her daughters' secondary education.

"We were seeking to educate our daughters at a school that promoted independent learning and critical inquiry, with a strong sense of faith at its core," Sarah says.

"We especially valued the way that Loreto Normanhurst nurtured and attended to the wellbeing of each student and their specific needs."

Not only does Loreto Normanhurst boast impressive academic results, it also provides a myriad of extra-curricular opportunities, enabling each student to reach their true potential as wholesome and balanced young women.

Year 12 boarder, Lara Ciesiolka, affirms her family's decision for her to board at Loreto.

"I love being a part of a community where the support and care the boarders have for one another creates a homely and tight-knit environment, one where I feel comfortable to reach my full potential and be who I am."

The introduction of Loreto Normanhurst's flexible boarding model in 2018 has made it possible for Sydney-based boarders to also benefit from the boarding experience.

"As a boarder from Sydney, I experience the best of both worlds," says Emily Stockwell, Year 11 boarder.

"There is no daily travel time to and from school, the school facilities are easily accessible, my routine is extremely beneficial, and I can easily attend my dance classes and meetings for extra-curricular programs such as Future Problem Solving.

"It's also lovely to go home on the weekend and see some friends or just spend the weekend with my family."



Sydney boarder, Emily Stockwell, left, and country boarder, Lara Ciesiolka, are both involved in the opportunities Loreto offers

IN

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A leading Sydney independent, Catholic, day and boarding school for girls in Years 5-12.