

Catholic Agricultural College Bindoon is a Year 7 to 12, co-educational College for day and residential students, situated 10km north of the township of Bindoon over an hours drive north of Perth. During this year we have had the following breakdown of indigenous students:

Feb: Indigenous Students 50 – 28 Male and 22 Female
Indigenous Boarding 46 – 26 male and 20 Female

Aug: Indigenous Students 63 – 28 Male and 35 Female
Indigenous Boarding 59 – 27 Male and 32 Female

Issues Faced:

The majority of our Indigenous students come from remote and isolated parts of Western Australia. Being a rural school with a heavy emphasis on VET seems to attract a number of students who are not ideally suited to a full mainstream education. The rural setting is also ideal for many of our Indigenous students who are sometimes overwhelmed in a large city school environment. With this in mind the major issues are:

- Changes to Abstudy (State to National) have caused long delays for students entering the College and has been a deterrent to attendance. More recently the College has been funding travel in order to get the students into school.
- Many of the families have difficulty completing the forms and finding the paperwork which is required for Abstudy. Support needs to be provided to facilitate this.
- Means testing for Abstudy means that families who are earning money may still not be able to give their children the educational opportunities they would like to provide. Sending a child to boarding school from remote areas is a significant cost which many families are unable to cover.
- Home sickness – difficult to give students a break if there is no family in Perth or nearby.
- Boarders Long Weekends – The College has reduced the number of Boarders long weekends due to the cost to parents of sending students home (no funding available).
- Alternative Behaviour outcomes – very difficult to suspend students who have no means of getting off-site.
- Minimal parent support in some cases giving the student a greater sense of isolation.
- Smaller schools have limited funding and providing flexible options for students both in the short and long term is difficult.
- Accessing money to assist families who want to send their children away to school. There are a number of indigenous corporations that assist these are not always known. It would be good if these were published and the information readily available to families and schools.
- Contact with parents/guardians is always difficult particularly in remote communities access to community liaison staff who are able to facilitate communication with schools would assist both in the settling in period and also throughout the students schooling.
- Often students are sent to school and are the only person from their communities, students struggle in this situation. It would be preferable for communities to build relationships with individual schools and colleges this could be done from a central hub or in consultation between systems. Developing networks which will support the students and their families is imperative.
- Aboriginal students move schools at all times of the year. Creating stability for these young people

- Providing indigenous role models for the young people in our schools. This becomes more problematic when you are removed from the metropolitan area or a larger regional centre.

What does our school provide?

We are a small school 150 students who struggle financially and we rely heavily on government and system support. We provide.

- Medium class sizes
- ATA/Indigenous liaison support this will rise to 2.4 staff in 2016
- School psychologist (0.6FTE) and school nurse (1.0 FTE) to provide support health and wellbeing.
- Attractive VET offerings namely Agriculture, Equine, hairdressing, hospitality, nursing, building and construction, industrial skills, automotive and engineering.
- Tutoring is provided by staff on a voluntary basis.

Aspirations:

- To provide a transition programme for all aboriginal students entering the College. A house and casual staff would be necessary to do this as it would be on an as needed basis when students arrive.
- The biggest challenge as these young people often come with no money or limited funds is to provide recreational activities during the week and week-ends. Unlike city boarding schools our students are unable to go anywhere without requiring bus transport. Sport is optional but even that requires 1 to 3 hours of travel time. Transportation including buses are required to take students off-site.