

Rural and Remote Education

FAQ: Virtual secondary school

Q1 What is the virtual secondary school?

The virtual secondary school will allow students in rural and remote areas to remain in their local school and community while providing the opportunity to study specialist subjects which their home school cannot currently offer. The school will also provide a peer group of students of similar academic ability and interest.

Students will connect with their teachers and classmates through a virtual learning environment, which will include web conferencing software and DEC's virtual classrooms. Where possible, lessons will be recorded so that students can access lessons at other times.

The virtual secondary school will offer students expanded career options through innovative programs and strengthened partnerships between schools, TAFE, universities, business and employers. Mentoring opportunities and master classes will be key features of both the online and residential school programs.

Q2 Who is eligible to enrol in the virtual secondary school?

Prospective students must be enrolled in a rural and remote government school as defined by the MCEETYA Geographical Location Classification. View the **NSW Government list of schools** that meet this classification.

Q3 How will students be selected?

The virtual secondary school will be partially selective, with classes in English, mathematics and science in Years 7 to 10.

Students enrolled in Years 11 and 12 will include those students who have been part of the Year 7 to 10 selective streams. Enrolment will also be open to all students in rural and remote government schools. Where the number of applications for Years 11 and 12 courses exceeds the number of available positions, priority will be given to students from rural and remote government schools that are currently unable to offer the nominated courses.

Students in the selective stream will be chosen in the same way as students in all other selective classes in NSW government schools. Where students qualify to attend a full time local selective school and the virtual secondary school, the offer made to successful students will be determined by the order in which parents list their choices.

Students who do not qualify for entry in Year 7 will have opportunities to apply for the selective stream in Years 8, 9 and 10.

Q4 When will classes commence?

From 2015, the school will offer a mix of online and residential school classes for Year 7 to Year 11 students and will include:

- a Year 7 selective stream in English, mathematics and science
- a Year 11 cohort
- students transitioning from the Western NSW Xsel program.

From 2016, the school will be offering Year 12 classes as well.

Q5 Where will the virtual secondary school be located and how will it operate?

The virtual secondary school will not have a single physical location. A coordination location will be established and it will be staffed with a principal/PEO, executive and administration staff.

Students will not be required to travel to the coordination location with online classes being offered at specific times during the school day. Students will need to attend the residential schools/camps held in rural and metropolitan locations two times per year.

Teachers will continue to be based in their current school/location with a reduced teaching load to allow them to also teach a virtual secondary school class. They will be expected to attend the three residential schools each year, with travel and accommodation costs paid by the virtual secondary school.

Teachers will not be permanently appointed to the virtual secondary school. A pool of teachers will be selected via an Expression of Interest process open to all permanent teachers in NSW government secondary schools. Teachers in Educational Services teams and state office directorates will also be able to apply.

Applicants will be selected on the basis of their subject expertise and also their capacity to deliver engaging and innovative lessons in a virtual environment. Teachers will be provided with ongoing support and targeted professional learning.

Q6 How will the courses offered in stage 5 and 6 be determined?

For the 2015 school year, the following stage 6 courses will be offered:

- Chemistry
- Physics
- Mathematics
- Mathematics extension 1
- English Advanced
- English extension 1
- Economics
- Agriculture
- Big History (1 unit, BEC).

A prospectus/list of courses offered by the virtual secondary school will be available for rural and remote schools in early June each year. The prospectus will be widely distributed so parents can also access this information.

For subsequent years, the range of stage 5 and 6 courses offered will be refined in consultation with principals, students and parents in rural and remote schools.

Priority will be given to offering a range of languages, in addition to the courses initially offered in 2015.

Q7 Where can students, parents and schools access further information?

The school website is under construction and will be the main source of information for students, parents, teachers and schools.

In the first few weeks of the school year, orientation activities will be held for all students. Teachers will also be available for direct contact during the school year.

Q8 What support will be provided to the home school to assist teachers in supporting students?

Each school will be provided with a staffing supplement so the teacher can be released to teach in the virtual secondary school. An allowance will also be paid to the school to support resource development and other costs.

If necessary, technology will be provided and bandwidth increased in the teacher's base school to ensure effective teaching in the virtual environment.

Q9 What learning pathways are available for students?

An individual learning plan will be developed for each student in the virtual secondary school. The following scenarios provide examples of possible learning pathways.

Student scenarios

Maryam is a Year 7 student with a strong interest in science

Maryam gained a place in the virtual secondary school selective stream in English, mathematics and science and commenced classes in 2015. She studies the remainder of her subjects in her local school.

Maryam connects with her virtual secondary school teachers and classmates in regularly timetabled lessons in a virtual learning environment. She also has the support of a teacher in her local school to help her with her studies in the virtual secondary school.

During residential schools, Maryam has the opportunity to meet and work with her 'virtual' classmates and other academically able students with similar interests. She also has the opportunity to attend master classes and to link with a mentor who shares her love of science.

Ben is a year 11 student studying a stage 6 course at the virtual secondary school

Ben is interested in economics and languages and hopes to pursue a career in international finance when he completes his Higher School Certificate. His local school was unable to offer the pattern of study that would allow him to follow his dream.

Ben successfully applied for a place in the 2015 Year 11 economics class at the virtual secondary school. He enrolled in his chosen language course at a distance education centre and studies his remaining subjects at his local school.

Ben connects with his economics teacher and classmates in regularly timetabled lessons in a virtual learning environment. He also has the support of a teacher in his local school to help him with his studies in the virtual secondary school.

At the residential schools, Ben has the opportunity to meet and work with his teacher and classmates. Throughout the course, Ben also attends master classes presented by university and/or industry experts in his career area of interest.

Annalies was a Year 8 student enrolled in the Western NSW Xsel program

Annalies automatically transitioned into the 2015 Year 9 selective class for English, mathematics and science in the virtual secondary school. She continues to study the balance of her subjects in her local school, where she also has support for her virtual secondary school studies.

Annalies connects with her virtual secondary school teachers and classmates in regularly timetabled lessons in a virtual learning environment and through the residential school program.

During Year 10, Annalies will be able to choose a blend of Year 11 courses from her local school, distance education centre and the virtual secondary school.