NSW GOVERNMENT | Education

Aurora College
Annual Report

2015

AURORA COLLEGE
IGNITING NEW WAYS OF LEARNING
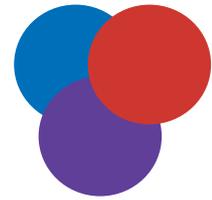
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Introduction

The Annual Report for 2015 is provided to the community of Aurora College as an account of the school's operations and achievements throughout the year.

It provides a detailed account of the progress the school has made to provide high quality educational opportunities for all students, as set out in the school plan. It outlines the findings from self-assessment that reflect the impact of key school strategies for improved learning and the benefit to all students from the expenditure of resources.

Message from the Principal

In this, the first year of operation of Aurora College, an enormous amount has been achieved.

In 2015, Aurora shared student enrolments with 45 rural and remote government schools. Aurora's teachers were located in 30 locations across the state. Together, we took important first steps to establish and lead best practice in teaching and learning in a virtual environment.

The strategic directions of the college in 2015-2017 are underpinned by the following key programs: Virtual Learners, Personalised Learning, Pedagogical Innovators, Building Leadership, Masterclass and Mentor. Progress in each of these initiatives has been enhanced by the formation of collaborative partnerships with businesses, a wide range of scientific, cultural and tertiary education institutions and with pivotal State Office units.

Locations of schools of Aurora College students (green markers) and teachers (red markers)

Ongoing consultation, development and review of the Aurora College model are being undertaken by the Aurora College State Reference Group (the Aurora SRG). Members include Aurora's senior executive and representatives from the teaching staff, parents, primary and secondary principal associations (NSW Secondary Principals Council, Primary Principals Association and NSW Secondary Deputy Principals Association), and senior officers of the Department of Education.

A successful partnership between parents, Aurora and the home school ensures that our students' educational, social and emotional needs are catered for. Aurora is committed to building relationships which foster in our students and our partners, a strong sense of belonging to both schools.

Aurora College will continue to work with the Aurora SRG and with our partner schools to inform future delivery of the curriculum and to improve the learning outcomes for all participating students.

Chris Robertson
Principal

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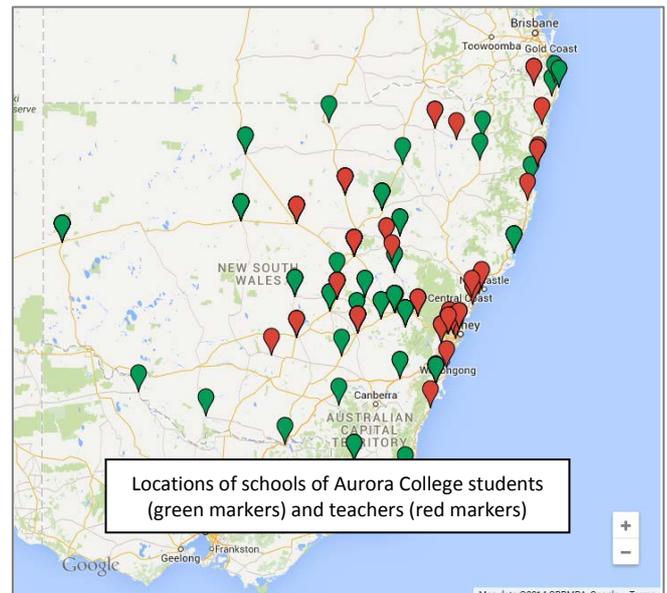
School background

Aurora College aims to provide great teaching and inspired learning in a whole new context, by allowing students in rural and remote communities to connect locally and to learn globally.

Aurora is committed to building relationships which foster in its students, a strong sense of belonging to Aurora and to their home school. Remaining in their local community, Aurora students benefit from the enhanced opportunities that come from belonging to two education communities.

Aurora college is dedicated to creating opportunities that will build each student's capacity to become an autonomous, life-long learner. Aurora College embraces the philosophy of personal best, acknowledging that each student's drive towards self-improvement in a curriculum rich in higher-order thinking provides a strong foundation for success in life beyond the school years.

Aurora's vision is to develop students who are not only at ease in the digital world, but who are empowered through their knowledge, skills and creativity to become influential contributors to the knowledge economies of this century.

Finally, the college recognises the importance of developing each student as a whole person. Aurora students have multiple and diverse passions and interests, and it is the desire of the college that students pursue these and also have a happy and balanced social life.

School context

The establishment of a virtual secondary school was a key deliverable of the Rural and Remote Education Blueprint. Through a range of actions, the Blueprint aims to bridge the gap in educational achievement between rural and remote and metropolitan schools.

Aurora College, the state's first virtual school, commenced classes on Monday 2 February 2015. Our students meet specific criteria, including enrolment in a rural and remote government school as defined by the MCEETYA Geographical Location Classification.

The college is partially selective, with classes in English, mathematics and science in Years 7 to 10. Years 7 to 10 students are chosen in the same way as students in all other selective classes in NSW government schools. With the home school principal's approval, students enrolled in Year 11 and Year 12 (in 2016) may include those students who have been part of the Year 7 to 10 selective stream. The college enables these students to remain in their local school and community while providing the opportunity to study specialist subjects which their home school cannot currently offer.

Students at Aurora College connect with their teachers and classmates in timetabled lessons through a virtual learning environment, which includes web conferencing software and a range of online information, communication and collaboration tools. Teachers and students also have the opportunity to work together at a residential school held twice per year.

Aurora College offers students expanded career options through innovative programs and strengthened partnerships with business, and with scientific, cultural and tertiary education institutions. Mentoring opportunities and masterclasses are key features of both the online and residential school programs.

Self-assessment and school achievements

Self-assessment using the School Excellence Framework

This section of the Annual Report outlines the findings from self-assessment using the School Excellence Framework, our school achievements and the next steps to be pursued. The Framework supports public schools throughout NSW in the pursuit of excellence by providing a clear description of high quality practice across the three domains of Learning, Teaching and Leading. This year, our school undertook self-assessment using the elements of the School Excellence Framework.

Our major focus in the domain of LEARNING has been on curriculum and learning. Developing learning and teaching programs that effectively differentiate the curriculum to meet the needs of gifted and talented students was a priority throughout 2015. Underpinning this endeavour was the work completed by our Learning and Support team in the development of personal learning plans (PLPs) for all students. Developed in consultation with the student, their parents/carers and the home school, the PLPs aim to increase student engagement and performance.

The Masterclass and Mentor programs are broadening the horizons of our students by providing real insights into the professional lives of organisations and individuals who are leaders in their chosen field. These programs strongly align with the school's vision for our students to connect locally and to learn globally.

Considerable effort was also devoted to achieving consistent, school-wide practices for assessment and reporting. In our first year of operation, Aurora established processes for monitoring, planning and reporting student learning across the curriculum. In 2015, Aurora students were issued an interim progress report in Term 1 and full academic reports in Terms 2 and 4.

In the domain of TEACHING, our efforts were primarily focussed on effective classroom practice. In 2015, Aurora College staff undertook significant professional learning to establish best practice in learning and teaching in a virtual learning environment. This professional learning engaged our teachers in the ongoing practice of reviewing and revising teaching and learning programs to effectively meet the needs of gifted and talented students. The mini-Certificate in Gifted Education completed by staff draws upon evidence-based research to improve performance and development. The college's ongoing association with the Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre (GERRIC) will ensure that our students continue to be engaged and challenged by the curriculum.

Explicit systems for collaboration, the modelling of effective practice and feedback to drive improvement in teaching practice were developed in response to requirements for implementation of the Department of Education's Professional Development Framework. Aurora College also sought to develop effective relationships with our partner schools by providing mentoring and support. In 2015, planning commenced for Aurora to host the Rural and Remote Conference 2016, enhancing inter-school relationships and giving staff further opportunities to engage in collaborative practice.

In the domain of LEADING, the school has been focussed on a number of areas. Integral to this process has been the work we have done with the Aurora College State Reference Group (the Aurora SRG). With broad representation, the Aurora SRG has provided many opportunities for students, parents, staff and partner schools to provide constructive feedback on school practices and procedures. In the ongoing review and refinement of the Aurora model, the college's leadership has maintained a culture of high expectations and community engagement, resulting in sustained and measurable improvements in the delivery of the curriculum.

Administrative and communication practices developed by Aurora in 2015 provide explicit information to our partner schools and wider community about the school's functioning. The school implemented a range of strategies to improve access to information by community members, including: producing two promotional videos explaining the school ethos and illustrating how we operate; establishing parent and coordinator portals in Sentral; creating Facebook and Twitter sites; and implementing a short-message system for smart devices via the SkoolBag application.

Our self-assessment process will further assist the school to refine the strategic priorities in our School plan, leading to further improvements in the delivery of education to our students.

Strategic Direction 1

Student learning and engagement

Purpose

To foster a differentiated learning environment that is engaging and personalised to each student's context and stage of development.

Overall summary of progress

Under the Virtual Learners and Personalised Learning programs, a number of key initiatives were established in 2015. Throughout the year, teaching staff were engaged in the ongoing practice of developing, reviewing and revising teaching and learning programs to effectively meet the needs of gifted and talented students.

The school established robust and reliable communication and collaboration platforms through which the online curriculum is delivered. These include learning systems: Adobe Connect, Moodle and Oliver, and learning tools: Microsoft Office 365 and Google Apps. Students and staff were supported through a range of measures, including: targeted professional learning; IT Open days in the technology support room with the Learning Technologies Support Officer; online support through the introduction of help desk software; and the establishment of a 1300 phone help line.

In 2015, the Learning and Support team commenced the development of personal learning plans (PLPs) for all students. PLPs are supporting high quality educational outcomes by identifying clear destinations for students in terms of goals for learning, pinpointing the potential obstacles that might impede them attaining their goals, and listing the necessary adjustments for students with special needs.

Aurora College successfully ran two residential school programs in Terms 1 and 4, at which students had the opportunity to meet and work with their classmates and teachers. Residential schools included lessons, tutorials, practicals, masterclasses, mentoring sessions and excursions, providing students with the opportunity to engage in high quality curricular and co-curricular activities.

Throughout 2015, the school executive worked collaboratively with the Aurora College State Reference Group (the Aurora SRG) in the ongoing development and review of the Aurora College model. This work centred largely on refining the Aurora College timetable matrix, from which partner schools are required to build part of their timetable. The 2016 matrix was developed and endorsed by the Aurora SRG as a structure that would most easily allow partner schools to plan for and support the curriculum of our shared enrolments.

Progress towards achieving improvement measures		Resources (annual)
Improvement measure (to be achieved over 3 years)	**Progress achieved this year**	**$582,938**
Percentage increase in the retention of students	• Exit survey conducted with students and/or their parents • Curriculum structure data collected from 136 current and potential partner schools • 2016 timetable matrix developed, following consultation with students, parents, partner school principals and State Reference Group members • Suite of support materials developed for partner schools. Timetabling workshops conducted by Edval and Aurora College at 11 venues across the state • Position of Aurora College Coordinator funded in each partner school to support the social, emotional and academic needs of students	$335,155
Virtual Learners and Personalised Learning initiatives contribute positively to overall levels of student satisfaction and engagement with the curriculum	• Communication and collaboration platforms established and supported • Masterclass program established and mentor program commenced • Residential schools successfully conducted in Terms 1 and 4 (100% of students surveyed for the first residential school and 91% for the second said they enjoyed the program) • Development of personal learning plan for each student commenced • Funded partner schools to deliver Science Day program	$247,783

Next steps

In 2016, Aurora College will continue to develop and assess the impact of key initiatives of the Virtual Learners and Personalised Learning programs. The Mentor program, in particular, will undergo considerable expansion in 2016 with the completion of the mentoring resource kit and a second phase trial.

Following a successful trial of the iSee 3-dimensional virtual learning spaces, this technology will be rolled-out for use by staff and students. The school will also conduct a trial of a new learning management system. Both technologies have the potential to significantly improve communication and collaboration between students and teachers.

The first residential school to be held outside Sydney will take place in Canberra in Term 4, 2016. The school will also select a suitable regional venue for one of the two residential schools to be held in 2017.

In 2016, the Wellbeing Action team will further develop our orientation program to better assist students in transitioning to the online learning environment. It will also work to enhance students' study skills, resilience and mental wellbeing.

Following the development of the Student Representative Council (SRC) Constitution, the SRC will be formally established in 2016 to facilitate leadership and decision-making by all students in the school.

Aurora will also continue to work with the Aurora SRG and partner schools to review and refine aspects of the operation of the school and the delivery of the curriculum.

Strategic Direction 2

Staff learning and engagement

Purpose

To establish and lead best practice in learning and teaching in a virtual environment by encouraging and supporting all staff to be innovative teachers and to assess and critically use established and emerging technologies to this end.

Overall summary of progress

In 2015, Aurora College engaged all staff in ongoing, reflective and evidence-based professional learning that focused on the continuous improvement of teaching, learning and leadership practice and learning outcomes of students.

Under the Pedagogical Innovators and Building Leadership programs, Aurora College staff undertook and delivered professional learning which supported the achievement of: school learning goals, system requirements and individual goals, as outlined in personal development plans (PDPs).
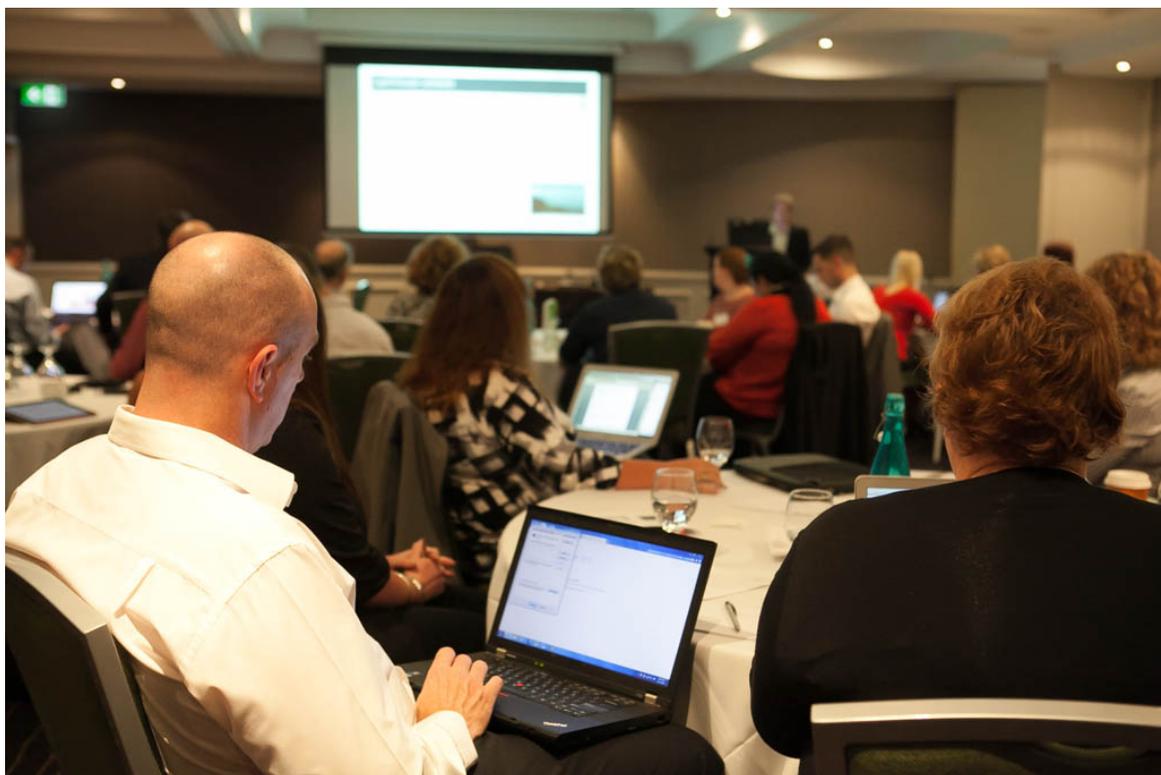
Dedicated professional learning meetings were held throughout the year and regular staff meetings included a standing item where the hosting faculty shared an example of their professional practice. The school also established a professional learning hub within the learning management system to capture and share the learnings from all professional development conducted within the college and at external events attended by staff.

A significant investment by the school was made in Term 4, with all current and newly recruited teaching service staff completing the mini-Certificate in Gifted Education course run by the Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre (GERRIC) at the University of NSW. The successful completion of the course by staff is the first phase of an ongoing association with GERRIC which will enhance the ability of our teachers to cater to the needs of gifted and talented learners.

Progress towards achieving improvement measures		Resources (annual)
Improvement measure (to be achieved over 3 years)	**Progress achieved this year**	**$42,455**

Learning and teaching programs show evidence of whole school and individual teacher professional learning	• Conducted needs analysis survey of professional learning throughout the school
	• Delivered professional learning aligned to school goals, system requirements and teachers' professional career aspirations, including through:
	   o regular teacher professional learning (TPL) meetings in virtual learning environment
	   o school development days
	   o mini-Certificate in Gifted Education (completed by 100% of teaching service staff returning in 2016)
	   o induction conference for newly recruited teaching staff for 2016
	   o executive planning conferences (in Terms 2 and 4)
	• Commenced the integration of all TPL in learning and teaching programs
		$40,817

At least 50% of staff demonstrate educational leadership by sharing their expertise with the broader education community	• Commenced planning to host the Rural and Remote Conference 2016 for classroom teachers and school leaders • Commenced planning for state-wide HSC study days in virtual learning environment for students in rural and remote government high schools • Provided mentoring and expertise to NSW public schools. (30% of staff conducted professional learning sessions on an aspect of their work with Aurora College at local, regional or state-wide conferences)	$1,638

Next steps

In 2016, Aurora College will continue the development of teaching and learning programs which integrate the learnings from whole school and individual professional learning programs. External audits of faculty learning and teaching programs by Head Teachers and curriculum advisors will commence in 2016.

The major focus of this work will be guided by a continuing association with the Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre (GERRIC). Teaching staff will work with GERRIC consultants and State Office advisors in the design of units of learning which specifically target the needs of gifted and talented students.

The extent to which these initiatives impact positively on student engagement will be measured and assessed in subsequent years of the 3-year School Plan.

Aurora College will co-host the Rural and Remote Conference 2016. The conference, to be held at Mount Panorama, Bathurst on 17 and 18 May 2016, will bring together teachers and leaders from across the state. It will provide an opportunity to celebrate the achievements of rural and remote educational communities and a forum to discuss the challenges and opportunities that exist today and into the future. Aurora College staff will share their expertise with the wider educational community by presenting at this and other conferences.

Community engagement

Purpose

To offer students opportunities to expand career and post school opportunities through innovative programs and strengthened partnerships with business and scientific, cultural and tertiary education institutions.

Overall summary of progress

In 2015, Aurora established and nurtured effective partnerships with a range of businesses and with scientific, cultural and tertiary education institutions. These organisations partnered with Aurora to establish the Masterclass and Mentor programs. Mentoring opportunities and masterclasses have become key components of the online and residential school programs.

The Masterclass program emphasises to our students the relevance and importance of the curriculum in a wide range of human endeavours. This program highlights the links between what students learn in the classroom and what is applied in the workplace. In 2015, wide varieties of masterclasses were delivered and were evaluated very highly by students and teachers.

The Mentor program aims to encourage self-confidence and resilience in our students and to enhance their career planning and long-term academic outcomes. The program was successfully piloted in 2015, linking students with mentors from Microsoft Australia and the University of Sydney. A key partnership was established with the Australian Business and Community Network, which resulted in workplace visits for Year 7 students at the two residential schools this year.

Each student received a laptop device for use in their Aurora College studies at home and at school, courtesy of our technology sponsors, Microsoft Australia and Hewlett-Packard. This wireless-enabled technology allowed our students to connect and collaborate with classmates and teachers located across the state.

The Aurora College model gives gifted and talented rural and remote students the opportunity to work with peers of similar ability and interests, overcoming the sense of intellectual isolation that many experience, whilst also remaining in their local community. This gives the students the benefit of the enhanced opportunities that come from belonging to two education communities and also enables their social and emotional needs to be nurtured in supportive and familiar surrounds.

In our first year of operation, Aurora demonstrated a commitment to building strong relationships with our parents and caregivers. These relationships were facilitated and nurtured by open lines of communication, including telephone calls, emails and video conferences. Working as partners in the education of their children, parents/caregivers received regular formal and informal progress reports and collaborated with staff in the development of personal learning plans. The school will continue to build these relationships, recognising the benefits to rural and remote communities that flow from keeping families together, by allowing students to connect locally and learn globally.

Progress towards achieving improvement measures		Resources (annual)
Improvement measure (to be achieved over 3 years)	Progress achieved this year	$4,235
Percentage increase in the number of businesses and institutions partnering with Aurora College, including in the provision of masterclasses and mentoring	• Established partnerships with 14 businesses and institutions in the provision of masterclasses and mentoring • Mentor program pilot completed, linking 14 students with mentors from Microsoft Australia and University of Sydney • Laptop devices distributed to all students, courtesy of Microsoft Australia and Hewlett-Packard	$688
Masterclass and Mentor programs contribute positively to overall levels of student satisfaction and engagement with the curriculum	• 24 masterclasses conducted online and 8 at the residential schools • On average, 95% of students who participated in the masterclasses rated them as 'good' or 'excellent' and 92% reported that they found the sessions enjoyable • Delivered first masterclass for parents: *Think you know?* • Developed mentor training program and commenced development of mentoring resource kit.	$3,547

Next steps

Aurora College will continue to increase the number of businesses and institutions partnering with the school in the provision of the masterclass and mentor programs. Both programs will be important components of the online and residential school programs in 2016 and beyond.

In 2016, the next phase of the Mentor program will be delivered with the completion of the mentoring kit. This resource will then be trialled and evaluated in a second pilot of the mentoring program. The college's recently completed 3-dimensional virtual learning spaces will be utilised to connect students with mentors in a safe and versatile environment.

The extent to which both programs contribute positively to overall levels of student satisfaction and engagement with the curriculum will be measured and assessed in subsequent years of the 3-year planning cycle.

Mandatory and optional reporting requirements

Student information

It is a requirement that the reporting of information for all students be consistent with privacy and personal information policies.

Student enrolment profile

Aurora's first cohort comprised 95 male and 70 female students in Years 7 to 11.

Student attendance profile

Attendance data of all Aurora College students resides with their home school. Aurora College collects and retains separate attendance data records for each of our classes.

Workforce information

Reporting of information for all staff must be consistent with privacy and personal information policies.

Workforce composition

Position	Number
Principal	1.0
Deputy Principal(s)	1.0
Assistant Principal(s)	0.0
Head Teacher(s)	3.2
Classroom Teacher(s)	7.6
Teacher of Reading Recovery	0.0
Learning and Support Teacher(s)	0.4
Teacher Librarian	0.4
Teacher of ESL	0.0
School Counsellor	0.0
School Administrative & Support Staff	2.0
Other positions	1.0
Total	16.6

The Australian Education Regulation, 2014 requires schools to report on Aboriginal composition of their workforce. In 2015, no Aurora College teachers identified as Aboriginal.

Teacher qualifications

All teaching staff meet the professional requirements for teaching in NSW public schools.

Qualifications	% of staff
Undergraduate degree or diploma	100%
Postgraduate degree	26%

Professional learning and teacher accreditation

Significant amounts of professional learning were undertaken by Aurora College staff in 2015. As described in Strategic direction 2, this was and will continue to be, a focus area of the school.

Financial information

Financial summary

Aurora College currently does not receive funds from the Resource Allocation Model.

The Department of Education allocated over $8 million over four years to establish and operate the state's first virtual school.

Aurora College operates with fixed funds from the Rural and Remote Education Blueprint budget.

Further details concerning the statement can be obtained by contacting the school.

NAPLAN

In the National Assessment Program, the results across the Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 literacy and numeracy assessments are reported on a scale from Band 1 to Band 10. The achievement scale represents increasing levels of skills and understandings demonstrated in these assessments.

The tables below show the percentage of students who achieved a result in the top 2 bands for NAPLAN testing in 2015 at Aurora College and in all NSW government schools.

Year 7

NAPLAN Test	Aurora	NSW govt.
Reading	91%	27%
Writing	44%	15%
Spelling	88%	36%
Grammar & Punctuation	85%	30%
Numeracy	88%	26%

Year 9

NAPLAN Test	Aurora	NSW govt.
Reading	86%	22%
Writing	29%	12%
Spelling	79%	26%
Grammar & Punctuation	71%	18%
Numeracy	100%	25%

The *My School* website provides detailed information and data for national literacy and numeracy testing.

Higher School Certificate (HSC)

Students at Aurora College will sit for the Higher School Certificate examination for the first time in 2016.

Parent/caregiver, student, teacher satisfaction

Each year schools are required to seek the opinions of parents, students and teachers about the school.

Input and feedback from all key stakeholders was sought and received by the State Reference Group (the Aurora SRG) throughout 2015. The Centre for Educational Statistics and Evaluations also conducted separate surveys and student focus groups as part of the overall evaluation of the Rural and Remote Education Blueprint.

Key stakeholders expressed:

- support for the work being undertaken by the college with the Aurora SRG and partner schools to plan for and support the curriculum of each student
- an expectation that the ongoing refinement of the Aurora model produce outcomes which continue to support the delivery of a high quality curriculum.

Separate surveys of students and staff relating to the Masterclass, Mentor and Residential school programs indicate a high level of satisfaction and engagement.

Data collected from all sources will continue to inform the ongoing development and delivery of key programs.

Policy requirements

Aboriginal education

Aurora College is committed to improving the educational outcomes and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students so that they excel and achieve in every aspect of their education and training.

In 2015, Aurora College commenced the development of personal learning plans (PLPs) for all students. Developed in consultation with the student, their parents/carers and the home school, the PLPs aim to increase student engagement and performance.

PLPs are supporting high quality educational outcomes at Aurora College by:

- identifying clear destinations for all students in terms of goals for learning
- pinpointing the potential obstacles that might impede them attaining their goals
- listing the necessary adjustments for students with special needs.

At the first residential school held in Sydney in Term 1, all students explored the history and environment of Sydney Harbour from an Aboriginal perspective with a visit to Clark Island. Here students enjoyed a traditional welcome by Aboriginal dancers and then learned about:

- the history and traditional uses of sites along the Sydney coastline
- contemporary issues affecting Indigenous communities
- important milestones in Aboriginal political history and the people behind them.

Multicultural Education and Anti-racism

Aurora College is committed to providing opportunities that enable all students to achieve equitable education and social outcomes and participate successfully in our culturally diverse society.

Throughout 2015, the school developed teaching and learning programs focused on developing the knowledge, skills and values for participation as active citizens in the 21st century. Our teachers ensured that *Learning across the curriculum* areas, including *Difference and diversity* and *Intercultural understanding* are embedded in units of learning.

Throughout the year, Aurora promoted positive community relations through effective communication with parents and community members. The college's regular e-newsletter, *The Auracle*, celebrated the many diverse rural and remote communities we serve, through the regular features *Connect locally, learn globally* and *Spotlight on.*

The staff at Aurora College is committed to the eradication of racism in our society by promoting acceptance of Australia's cultural, linguistic and religious diversity, challenging prejudiced attitudes and ensuring that sanctions are applied against racist and discriminatory behaviours.

In 2015, the college commenced the development of policies to maintain a cohesive environment, in which all members of the school community can participate in the learning programs and life of a school free of racism.