

# Ready, Set, School 2009

A report to school communities in Western NSW



Academically students across Western NSW have excelled in 2008. The national test results show that the amount of improvement in learning outcomes between key assessment points for Western NSW students is often the best in the State.

Our year's highlights also include fitting out every secondary school with the best interactive technology available through the NSW Government's Connected Classrooms Program.

In 2009 we will be embedding our successful classroom programs as well as introducing new initiatives to meet ongoing challenges.

*B.A. McDiarmid*

Carole McDiarmid  
Regional Director

### Academic Performance

The introduction of the Best Start Kindergarten Assessment in 2008, coupled with the Regional Early Literacy Assessment program, is providing teachers of our youngest students with detailed information that assists them meet the specific learning needs of young children. In general, the academic improvement of students from Kindergarten to Year 3 is exemplary.

In 2008 students in Year 3, 5, 7 and 9 participated in the first National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy. Across Western NSW over 90% of students are performing at or above national minimum standards in all categories except Year 9 literacy where 86% of students are at or above the minimum national standard.

The teaching and learning programs introduced over the past five years are improving academic standards across the region. In some areas, especially Bourke and Broken Hill, this improvement has been dramatic, particularly in literacy.

In 2008, 893 Higher School Certificate courses were delivered across 50 locations in Western NSW to over 1,200 students. 161 candidates were named as Distinguished Achievers collecting a total of 269 band six (above 90%) results.

### Selective High School Provision

Applications have been strong from students looking to secure one of the thirty places available in the first Western NSW Selective High School program, xsel.

These students will sit the Selective High Schools test in March 2009 with successful students commencing the program in Year 7 in 2010.

xsel will connect students from across the region into a selective strand, covering English, mathematics and science using a suite of sophisticated technology as well as face to face teaching.

This is an exciting opportunity for Western NSW to provide new opportunities to gifted and talented students in their own communities.

### Connected Learning Communities

Cross school delivery of senior studies is now well established in many communities across Western NSW.

Denison College in Bathurst, E2 in Orange, Molong and Blayney and the Warrumbungle Learning Community all produced their first HSC graduates in 2008.

In Broken Hill the Reach Across Secondary Program offered joint Year 11 courses for the first time in 2008.

### Sports Academies

The Girri Girri and Gambirrang Sports Academies support 215 students and have achieved improved student attendance, retention, engagement, attitude, confidence and behaviour.

#### Western NSW Region HSC All Rounders (Band 6 in at least 5 courses)

Inga Topolnicki, Lithgow High School

Rebecca Ainsworth, Dubbo College Senior Campus

Oscar Aitchison, Kandos High School

#### Western NSW Region HSC Top Achievers

Rosslyn Wythes, Orange High School  
2nd in State, Dance

Amanda Gravitis, Dubbo College Senior Campus  
3rd in State, Retail Operations Examination

Jordan Sawyers, Mudgee High School  
12th in State, Mathematics



Importantly, academy members have connected to their local school and community and are developing skills which are building community capacity.

### High potential Aboriginal students

In 2008 a culturally sensitive assessment method identified high potential Aboriginal students in the Dubbo area.

This program helps ensure there is equitable access for Aboriginal students to schools' gifted and talented programs.

Over 100 Aboriginal students were profiled using the Coolabah Dynamic Assessment model developed by education consultant Dr Graham Chaffey. Ten students were selected to participate in an academic camp where students undertake a range of challenging reading, writing and maths tasks.

Dr Chaffey reported an overwhelmingly positive response by all children and parents involved.

Profiles for all assessed children are given to schools to assist classroom teachers develop appropriate individual programs.

A team of assessors has been trained to allow the gradual expansion of this program across the region.

### Connected Classrooms

More than 50 schools in Western NSW, including every secondary school, now have an interactive classroom with video conference and interactive whiteboard technology with broadband access speeds among the highest in Australia.

Progressively, every school in Western NSW will be equipped with an interactive classroom over the next two years.

Additionally there are over 150 video conferencing units in schools creating learning opportunities and collaboration tools for students and teachers alike.

This technology opens up exciting opportunities once reserved for a few lucky individual students. For example;

- Lithgow and Wellington High Schools participated in an astronomy lecture with the University of Sydney's Dr Andrew Hopkins.
- Tottenham Central School followed the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race which recreates a historic Alaskan supply route.
- Numerous schools have participated in NASA's Digital Learning Network linking students with US aeronautical experts.

Video conferencing is also used to connect experienced HSC markers with teachers and students for study days in a variety of subjects including biology, science, maths and English.

### Early Childhood Education

Western NSW Region is committed to early childhood education.

In 2008, a partnership was established with Families NSW to develop a regional Early Childhood Education Strategy and fund the position of a Director of Early Childhood Education.

Phase two is building and planning for connectedness in communities and ensuring there is a clear commitment to early childhood education from birth to eight years among all service providers.

Already there has been a significant shift in how some communities are planning for the best outcomes in early childhood education.

- The Dareton Early Childhood Education and Development Plan is improving meaningful interagency cooperation to help educate families and community on the value of creating a positive learning environment for children birth to eight years.
- A number of communities including Dubbo, Wellington, Narromine and Trangie, have created 'transition teams'. These teams and schools' involvement in the Communities for Children project help ensure the progression into Kindergarten is successful for children and their parents.
- A shared arrangement with Baradine Central School will allow the community pre-school to operate in an appropriate facility that was not previously available.
- In Ivanhoe and Wilcannia government departments and local agencies with responsibility for children's services are now meeting regularly with a commitment to enacting the Early Childhood Education plan for their communities.



### Trade Training Centres in Schools

Three school clusters in Western NSW Region have received funding from the Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations to open Trade Training Centres in 2009;

- Eastern Tablelands Trade Training Centre (Lithgow High School, Oberon High School and Portland Central School)
- E2 Skill Trade Training Centre (Orange High School, Canobolas Rural Technology High School, Molong Central School, Blayney High School and Anson Street School)
- Reaching Across Secondary Program (Broken Hill High School, Willyama High School, Menindee Central School, Ivanhoe Central School, Wilcannia Central School)

A further eight school consortiums including Dubbo, Nyngan/Cobar, Parkes/Forbes, Peak Hill/Tullamore/Trangie, Duneedoo/Coolah, Bathurst and Mudgee have applied for funding in round two with announcements expected in February 2009.

These centres will provide industry standard facilities for courses including hospitality, metals and engineering, construction and primary industries.

In partnership with TAFE, students will complete Certificate III qualifications.

### Positive Behaviour for Learning

Positive Behaviour for Learning is a process that establishes school wide behaviour standards to create an effective learning environment. It is a process being progressively implemented in Western NSW Region schools to help create high quality learning environments.

Nearly 40 schools in Western NSW Region are at various stages of implementation and are reporting improved student performance academically and socially.

### 2009 priorities

Western NSW Region has developed a new regional plan to meet the challenge of delivering a robust, quality and meaningful education to all students in Western NSW.

The plan is based on six priorities set by the NSW Department of Education and Training Office of Schools; Literacy, Numeracy, Student Engagement and Retention, Aboriginal Education and Training, Teacher Quality and Connected Learning.

By channelling resources into priority areas schools will receive support to meet local needs, particularly improving education for secondary students in rural and remote communities.

Classroom teachers will receive high level professional development tailored to specific school needs. Our aim is to strengthen teacher capacity to improve student performance. Our resources have been realigned to provide more specific support to schools in areas of need.

Significant changes to the way we deliver education are already emerging through the increased access to and use of technology in classrooms.

Western NSW is well positioned to face the challenges of educating our children to take their place in our 21st century world.

For more information  
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