

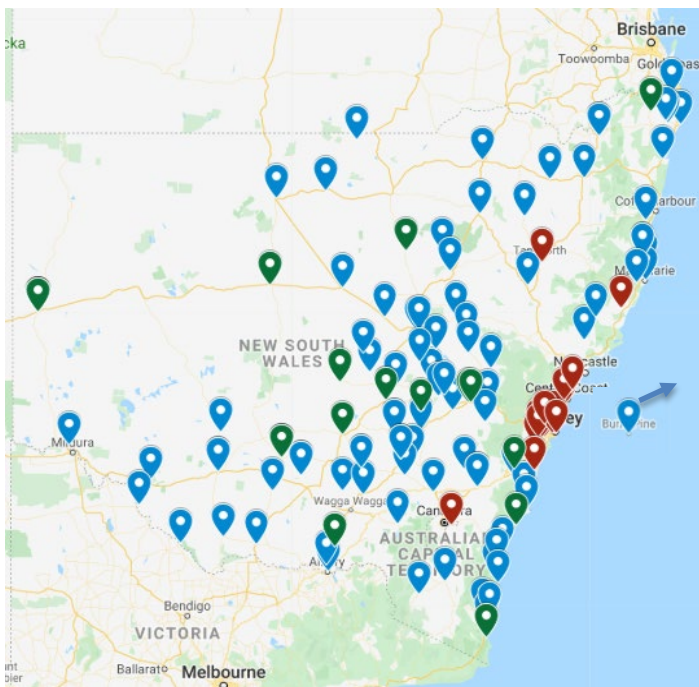
Opportunity class

Fact sheet



Aurora College – Igniting new ways of learning

- Aurora College, the state's first virtual school, commenced classes in 2015. The school was a key deliverable of the [Rural and Remote Education – a Blueprint for Action](#). Aurora College is a gazetted, 'stand-alone' school.
- Aurora provides a mix of online and residential school classes. Students connect with their teachers and classmates in timetabled lessons through a virtual learning environment, which comprises web conferencing software, a learning management system, and a range of cutting-edge online communication and collaboration tools. The school also operates one of the state's first fully digital school libraries.
- Aurora offers selective classes in English, mathematics and science to gifted and talented Year 7-10 students from rural and remote areas across NSW. Students are chosen in the same way as students in all other selective classes in NSW government schools. Year 11 and 12 government high school students in rural and remote communities may apply to study one or more subjects with Aurora College.



- In 2021, Aurora College shares students (blue and green markers) with more than 140 rural and remote schools. Aurora's teachers (green and red markers) are located in 34 locations across the state. Most are based in their local school with a reduced load so they can also teach an Aurora class.
- Aurora's shared teachers are selected through an EOI process and are chosen on the basis of their subject expertise and their capacity to deliver engaging and innovative lessons in a virtual environment. All Aurora teachers complete the GERRIC mini-Certificate in Gifted Education course as part of their induction into the college.
- Aurora's coordinating office is located at the Lindfield Learning Village. It is staffed with a Principal, Deputy Principal, School Administrative Manager and Learning Technologies Support Officer. A number of the executive and teaching staff are also located at the coordinating office.

A virtual opportunity class

- In 2017, a working group was established to investigate whether the approaches used by Aurora College could be used to establish a virtual opportunity class in areas of rural and remote NSW where there is currently no opportunity class provision. The working group has broad stakeholder representation. Representatives of the NSW Primary Principals Association and the Department's High Performing Students Team are key members of the Aurora Opportunity Class Pilot working group (the AOCP working group).
- The AOCP working group developed a proposal to conduct a small-scale pilot of a virtual opportunity class provision for Stage 3 high potential and gifted students in rural and remote schools. The pilot was complementary to and built upon the success of the current opportunity class provision in rural and remote areas of the state.
- Phase 1 of the pilot (46 students from 21 schools) commenced in Semester 2, 2018, and concluded at the end of the 2019. Phase 2 of the program (46 students from 21 schools) commenced in Semester 2, 2019, and concluded at the end of the 2020 school year.
- An evaluation of the program by the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (CESE) confirmed that the success of the pilot program was built on accomplishments that have flowed from the Aurora College model.

Endorsement of the Aurora model

- The AOCPP working group developed a comprehensive business case that:
 1. verified the need for a virtual opportunity class provision in rural and remote areas of NSW
 2. detailed options for an operational model which recognises the needs of both Aurora College and the partner school, and complements the current opportunity class provision in rural and remote NSW.
- The Deputy-Secretaries School Operations and Performance and Educational Services approved the conversion of the pilot program to an ongoing provision. On Friday 28 February 2020, The Minister for Education and Early Childhood, The Hon. Sarah Mitchell, MLC, announced “the NSW Department of Education, through the work of Aurora College, is adopting the ongoing provision of a virtual opportunity class for Years 5 and 6 students across rural and remote NSW.”

How will students be selected for the virtual opportunity class?

- Students will be chosen in the same way as students in all other opportunity classes in NSW government schools. Parents and staff should visit the Department’s website <https://education.nsw.gov.au/public-schools/selective-high-schools-and-opportunity-classes/year-5> for further details.
- To be eligible for enrolment, students must also be enrolled in a NSW Government school which is classified as rural and remote. Students at schools with opportunity class provisions, or at schools within the drawing areas of existing opportunity class provisions, will not be eligible to apply for entry into the virtual opportunity class.
- The first intake of Year 5 Aurora students was in 2021. These students comprised Aurora’s first Year 6 cohort in 2022 and there will be a new intake of Year 5 students in this, and in each subsequent year.

How will Aurora and the home (partner) school work together? What will students study?

- When a student enrolls in Aurora they become a shared enrolment between Aurora and their home school. In this educational partnership, both schools must plan for and support the curriculum of each shared student.
- The operational model of Aurora College is based on face-to-face, real time lessons. This model requires each partner school to build part of their timetable from the common timetable template. The NSW Opportunity Schools Placement process does not require parents to have the approval of the home school principal when accepting a place in an opportunity class.
- In each partner school, Aurora funds the release of a suitable teacher to fill the role of Aurora College Coordinator (ACC). The ACC adds an important layer of support for the educational, social and emotional needs of our high potential and gifted students. The ACC is an important advocate of Aurora College in the partner school and in the local community.
- The virtual opportunity class curriculum has a STEM-focus, delivered through an inquiry based learning approach. Students study the content of the Mathematics and Science and Technology syllabuses. Aurora College has responsibility for teaching, assessing and reporting in these areas of the curriculum. The home school delivers the balance of the curriculum.
- A residential school in term 4 gives students the opportunity to meet and work with their peers and teachers. The college provides supervised bus transport to and from the residential school. The program includes lessons, tutorials, master classes, mentoring sessions and excursions. Transport and accommodation costs are heavily subsidised by Aurora College. Application for financial assistance by families in need may also be made to the Aurora Student Assistance Scheme.
- Aurora College offers students expanded career options through innovative partnerships with business and with scientific, cultural and tertiary education institutions. Master classes are key features of both the online and residential school programs, giving students access to people who are leaders in their chosen field.
- Further information on partnering with Aurora College in Stage 3 will be provided in a suite of support documents on the partner school page <https://aurora.nsw.edu.au/partner-schools/resources-for-partner-schools/>. Please contact Chris Robertson (Principal) or Serena McLean (Assistant Principal) via telephone on 1300 287 629 or email at auroracoll-h.school@det.nsw.edu.au.