



CREATING ARMIDALE'S  
**FUTURE SCHOOL TOGETHER**

Respectfully \* Inclusively \* Creatively

## Frequently Asked Questions

*This version of the Frequently Asked Questions was updated on 17 July 2017*

### Combining the schools

#### **Why combine Armidale and Duval High Schools?**

The decision to consolidate the two schools was made by the NSW Department of Education based on its commitment to provide engaging, relevant and personalised learning opportunities for every secondary public school student in Armidale. A feasibility report on keeping both schools found that sharing the funds to renovate the existing aging infrastructure, particularly in relation to Armidale High School, would not provide the same high quality facilities that a total re-build will provide.

The projected Year 7 to 12 enrolments at Armidale High School and Duval High School show only moderate growth over the next fifteen years. Truly effective 21st century learning and teaching is more difficult in 20th century buildings and a decision was made to invest in providing new, state-of-the-art facilities rather than attempting to maintain buildings that are no longer best able to provide for our students' learning needs. Consolidating the schools onto one school site will allow for the delivery of an expanded curriculum by specialist teachers with enhanced transition pathways for students in further education and employment.

#### **How much is it going to cost?**

The budget allocation of \$65 million reflects the broad scope of works needed to build modern education facilities that meet future teaching needs for a consolidated high school. The specific cost break-up for the project is yet to be done, as the detailed planning process is only just starting.

#### **Is the Department of Education combining the schools to save money?**

No. Over the longer term, a \$65 million investment in a brand new school is a more strategic use of government funding than maintaining two aging facilities. The new school will be staffed and funded in line with the same staffing and funding procedures that apply to all public schools in NSW. The department will not save money, instead there will be opportunities for more effective use of resourcing, wider choice of curriculum offerings for students and the ability to improve specialist facilities to support student learning opportunities within the new school.

Given that over 95% of the additional 163,000 students entering NSW public schools by 2030 will be in Sydney, and that our local population is not likely to expand in that same period, it would not have been surprising if the Government had decided to invest more in metropolitan school projects. The fact that such a large amount of money will be invested in a regional setting support the fact that the decision is based on the educational needs of our local students, rather than as a cost-saving measure.

**Why can't the school be built on a new site, somewhere else in Armidale?**

This was considered and it was determined that there were no sites large enough in a suitable location. The Armidale High School site offers 18 hectares in a central location.

**What will happen to the school farm at Armidale High School?**

As the new school will be constructed on the current school site, there will be little or no impact on the land currently used for agricultural programs.

**Having only one public secondary school reduces choice in Armidale. What will happen if students are bullied or expelled?**

If parents have made a choice between the two high schools in the past, it was usually based on either subject choices or wellbeing issues.

The new school will provide a much larger and more diverse range of subjects from academic extension courses to vocational education courses. The number of subjects offered will be greater than the current combined offerings from the two schools. There will be no need to pursue an alternative educational setting as no other school in Armidale will cater so broadly to the needs of students.

In meeting the needs of today's learners, the new school's educational programs will be developed in partnership with students and parents. This will ensure that each student experiences a personalised, meaningful and purposeful educational pathway to ensure their engagement. It is highly likely that the wellbeing needs of individual students will be catered for using a model that involves every teacher being a mentor for a group of 10-15 students for the duration of their high school education.

Students are rarely expelled from public high schools in Armidale. Meeting the individual learning needs of students should ensure their engagement at school and reduce the likelihood of behavioural issues that might lead to expulsion.

## Planning and consultation

### **Who and what is driving planning for the new school?**

Planning is being driven by the Project Reference Group (PRG), made up of the Director Public Schools NSW Northern Tablelands, principals, students, Parents and Citizens Association representatives of both Armidale High School and Duval High School, and representatives from selected key stakeholder groups. Engagement with parents, students, staff and the wider Armidale community will provide the group with information that will form the basis for planning the new school. The Department's assets unit will take the information gathered and work with the architects to design a school based on identified needs and expectations.

The school will be designed "from the inside out". Teaching models and practices that best meet the needs of 21st century students will inform the creation of spaces that support personalised, integrated and connected learning.

### **How long is the planning process?**

Between July 2017 and July 2018, a dedicated project officer from the schools, supported by a communications company, will carry out an extensive engagement with the local community to ensure all stakeholders have an opportunity for input into the new school. During this time there will be a dedicated website, information booths in shopping centres, focus groups, interviews, telephone surveys and regularly published answers to frequently asked questions.

### **How can people have a say?**

There are many opportunities to have a say in planning the new school, including online surveys, forums, focus groups and interviews. The [Have Your Say](#) page on the website is the first port of call.

### **Will the students be involved in planning the new school?**

Absolutely. Input from students from both high schools as well as the partner primary schools will be a very important aspect of the planning process. The PRG will include student representation.

### **Will the planning process be transparent?**

Yes. We will report outcomes from engagement activities regularly through the project website, the project newsletter, and the school websites, newsletters, and social media.

### **How will the new school be designed?**

Through the establishment of a Project Reference Group (PRG) the NSW Department of Education will prepare detailed school designs through a comprehensive planning process. The PRG will include the Director Public Schools NSW, Northern Tablelands, principals, students, Parents and Citizens Association representatives of both schools, and representatives from Armidale Regional Council. The two schools are managing an extensive community engagement process so that the school and wider communities can have input into the overall vision for the school. One of the key

strategies is to encourage broader community access to school facilities throughout NSW through joint use agreements. Through the planning process we will talk with stakeholders including Council, performing arts organisations, sporting organisations, and youth support agencies..

## **The new school**

### **What will the new school be like?**

The new school will be purpose-built, with facilities to rival any school in NSW and possibly Australia. These include state-of-the-art flexible learning spaces, specialist subject facilities for science and technology, recording and performance facilities, and sporting facilities. The new school will be based on best practices in teaching and learning, including integrated learning methods, personalised learning, support for gifted and talented students, real world teaching and learning, and student ownership of learning pathways. The school will offer significantly expanded curriculum and delivery models, with the capacity to integrate vocational learning. We will expand and improve wellbeing support for students, reinvigorate our teaching practices, and involve parents and carers as partners in education.

### **Will it be a ‘super school’?**

No. The term “super-school” applies to very large schools, commonly with thousands of students. The new school population will be around 1200 students when it begins operating in 2020. This is not unusual in a NSW school. In 2000, Armidale High School had a population of around 1030 and in 2007 Duval High School’s population was around 850. In terms of school size, the new school will not be significantly larger than has been experienced in Armidale in the past.

### **Will class sizes increase?**

Class sizes are determined by the agreement between the Department and the NSW Teachers Federation and as a result, class sizes from Year 7 to Year 10 will remain at 30 students or less. Preliminary and Higher School Certificate class sizes may experience some variation depending upon student subject choice. However, these are expected to average around 15 to 20 students.

### **What will the new school be called?**

After engagement with the community we will provide a range of possible school names to the Department of Education. The Minister for Education will, under the powers invested in him through the Education Act of 1990, make a final decision on the name of the school.

### **Will the new school be environmentally friendly?**

Yes, this will be a major consideration in the planning process. The new school will be sustainably construction with consideration given to the efficient use of resources including energy, water, materials, and products. The new school will incorporate measures such as natural ventilation and passive thermal comfort, LED lighting and

solar PV systems, water efficiency measures, and the use of low impact products and materials (such as low volatile organic compound paints).

The grounds will be developed with a value placed on natural and cultural heritage, to ensure healthy ecosystems, as well as facilitating learning spaces. Landscaping will use local, native trees where possible to provide shade and wind breaks.

### **What will be the new uniform?**

Decisions about the new uniform haven't been made. Interested parents, students, staff and community members will be invited to work with the Parents and Citizens Associations, to design the new uniform. We envisage there will be a transition between old and new uniforms in 2019 and 2020.

## **Timing and transition**

### **When will the new school be built?**

Construction of the new school will begin in 2019 and it will be ready for occupancy in 2020 or early 2021. During 2019, Armidale High School students will temporarily relocate to the Duval High School site.

### **How will Duval High School cope with the influx of students in 2019?**

Additional temporary classrooms, staff rooms and bathroom facilities will be installed at the Duval High School campus to accommodate the additional students and staff from mid-2018. These buildings will be placed in locations that minimise the loss of playground space.

The movement of students from the Armidale High School site to the Duval High School site may be managed in a transitional manner, allowing for year groups to move onto the site at the most appropriate time with the greatest support. For example, Year 11 students may start at the Duval High School site from Term 4, 2018, when their HSC studies commence. All other year groups may commence as a consolidated student body on the first day of the school year in 2019.

### **What support will in place to help students manage the change?**

The principals of both schools, in consultation with staff, students and parents, will ensure that the relocation of all students will be carefully managed and planned well in advance. Transition programs will ensure that students become familiar with their peers and staff from the other campus, and with the new learning environment.

Work has already commenced on this in each high school through Positive Behaviour for Learning programs. Regular formal and informal conversations in each school and in partner primary schools will be supported through student wellbeing programs. Carefully planned activities will provide a safe environment for students to express their concerns and wishes, and these will be managed in a sensitive and timely manner to ensure that students are feeling listened to, informed and well-

supported. Some of these activities may be developed and led by student leaders from the high schools with younger high schools students and those from partner primary schools.

### **How will the schools support Year 12 students in 2019 when the two schools combine into one at DHS?**

Supporting Year 12 students in 2019 will be a very high priority. The students' teachers will stay the same during the move onto the new site. We are planning a transition process where senior students from both schools will start to study and socialise together at Duval High School prior to the move, so that students get to know each other and are familiar with the new learning environment. Where classes are small in each school, there may be opportunities to combine the classes so that there will be two teachers available to deliver the course and support the students in a team-teaching model.

### **How will students with special needs be supported when they move from Armidale High School to the Duval High School site in 2019?**

Supporting the smooth transition of students with special needs onto the Duval High School site will be a very high priority. We are planning a transition process where students will be taken regularly to Duval High School to meet staff and students, and become familiar with their new surroundings. This will start some months before all students move onto the one campus.

### **Will some students choose to go to private schools instead?**

The percentage of students in public schools is increasing across the state. Parents are seeing that the standard of education in the public system often exceeds the outcomes achieved by students in non-government schools. Some parents may choose to enrol their children in smaller private schools in Armidale during planning and building phases because they are concerned about perceived disruption. We encourage parents considering this to discuss it with their school principal.

## **Student wellbeing**

### **How will the new school look after student wellbeing?**

Student wellbeing will continue to be a priority for the new school. We are fortunate that both schools are strongly committed to Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL), creating a school culture based on the belief that respect and personal responsibility are fundamental to educational achievement and wellbeing. PBL will play a key role in preparing students for the consolidation and for managing post-consolidation settling issues, and for planning long-term wellbeing systems within the new school. Supervision and management of the playground will be particularly important and where necessary, additional professional learning will be provided to staff to ensure the playground remains a safe place for all.

Students will not become lost in the larger school setting. Personalised support will be provided to ensure that each student has at least one adult who they can access quickly for support. Students with disabilities will benefit from new facilities that better meet their educational, physical and social needs.

### **Will students be overlooked in a much larger school?**

An analysis of student wellbeing in schools in NSW with enrolments between 1100 and 1200 shows, without exception, that there are far fewer suspensions, both long and short, in these larger schools. This would suggest that the larger schools, which provide a more diverse range of educational opportunities for students, are more able to engage students in personalised learning pathways that ultimately prevent wellbeing issues associated with disengagement.

### **What other wellbeing services will be provided?**

The new school will provide a framework of support for wellbeing services including trained dedicated staff, a full time counsellor, the Social Worker in Schools program, and a Learning and Engagement Advisor, who supervises Learning and Engagement Officers. Staff will know all students and their families, will have respectful relationships, and will have greater flexibility in their work roles. The school will collaborate with external agencies to provide a link for students, parents and carers to provide services that can support their needs.

### **How will bullying be managed?**

Bullying is ongoing intimidation or harassment of one individual by another or a group of others. Bullying will not be tolerated in the new school. The school wellbeing programs will demand high standards of behaviour from all students and swift action will be taken against individuals who engage in bullying behaviours. General student wellbeing will be managed using a range of initiatives under the Positive Behaviour for Learning banner.

We are investigating the management of bullying by schools of a similar and bigger size to learn about effective practices. These will be considered and modified to suit the unique context of our new school.

## **Staff job security**

### **Is there job security for the teachers in both schools?**

Yes, no permanent teacher will lose his or her job as a result of the consolidation process. A special staffing agreement will be developed between the Department and the NSW Teachers Federation that ensures job security in these circumstances.

### **What will happen to the roles of the two principals?**

The new school will operate with a different classification to the existing high schools, which means a new principal for the combined school will need to be

recruited and appointed at the new classification level. How this will be done is yet to be determined.

**Are office staff, general assistant and farm assistant positions secure?**

Yes. No permanent non-teaching staff member will lose his or her job as a result of the consolidation.

**How will long term-temporary employees be affected?**

Long-term temporary employee contracts will remain in place during 2017 and as negotiated for 2018. Suitably qualified temporary employees will be in demand during the school planning and construction phase as no permanent positions will be filled through the normal staffing procedures until the new school is operational.

**Will the schools risk losing experienced teachers?**

No teachers in either school have indicated that their retirement plans have changed as a result of plans to consolidate Armidale High School and Duval High School. Indeed, two teachers are planning to delay their impending retirements so that they can participate in the planning process and experience working in the new school.

## **Tradition and heritage**

**How will the traditions and heritage of each school be preserved?**

Suitable recognition of each school's history is a very important aspect of the planning process and the project team is committed to ensuring that the heritage and legacy of both schools are honoured. Current and past students, staff and parents will be invited to work together to identify aspects of each of the school's traditions that need to be incorporated into the new school. Respect will be shown for school archives, honour boards and other significant items and these will be housed in the new school in an appropriate location.

## **Partnerships**

**They're saying that the school facilities will be shared with the local community. How will that work?**

One of the Department of Education's strategies is to encourage broader community access to school facilities through joint use agreements that bring mutual benefit. During the planning process we will identify opportunities for joint use agreements such as outdoor and indoor sporting facilities, and performing arts facilities. The department has held preliminary discussions with a number of bodies, including Council, NSW Basketball and the Police Citizens Youth Club.



**What types of community organisations might the school partner with?**

New partnerships will be created and existing partnerships will be strengthened as learning programs are integrated and connected with real world learning opportunities. This will particularly be the case for vocational education programs. These partnerships will include links with local industry, retail outlets, entertainment venues, tourism and hospitality venues.

It is highly likely that the school will also partner with local and regional sporting and cultural and performing arts organisations and that the school facilities will be used by the broader community.