Welcome

Welcome to the 2014 academic year. I trust that you and your family had an enjoyable summer break.

There is a flurry of activity as the arrangements for a new school year are bedded down. Being a provision which straddles Eastern and Western divisions, some adaptability is required of xsel students and staff for the first few days as our partner schools establish their timetables and convey that information to me. Because students and teachers return at various dates through weeks 1 and 2, we offer students learning experiences through Moodle which allow asynchronous access to curriculum throughout this period. The xsel timetable of synchronous lessons (synopps) is released as soon as possible but we always expect a series of further iterations as schools revise their arrangements. A special welcome to students and parents joining the xsel community this year; please feel confident to contact us in the xsel office if there are matters of concern to you.

I reported late last year that the xsel office is relocating to Dubbo College Senior Campus. This week that move draws a step closer with electrical contractors preparing the site for the connectivity we require. Here’s a glimpse …

All xsel stakeholders will be provided with up-to-date contact details when they change.

You will recall that 2013 saw the beginning of significant structural changes in the ways local schools are supported by the DEC. These changes continue to take effect this year. Barbara Bannister this week was able to attend a conference in Wagga which outlined the central features of that support. Read her report in this edition. Among those changes, as part of a rural and remote education strategy, was an undertaking to develop a more broadly-based virtual school with a selective offering. It is under development through 2014.

At student and parent level, smaller changes in xsel are underway. We are investigating the possibility of replacing the excellent but very heavy textbooks used in xsel mathematics and science with downloadable digital editions. Mrs Bannister is working with IT and the publishers. We await developments. Other than the obvious advantages of saving trees and our children’s spines, this change also makes textbooks much more current, flexible and entirely in keeping with a virtual education provision. Nevertheless, recent experience tells us that students still prefer their English texts as hard copy!

There are changes too among xsel staff. We welcome Ms Smith (Dubbo Delroy) and Mr Stelling (Denison Bathurst) to the science team; Mr Lockett (Dubbo South) and Mrs Simeonidis (Denison Bathurst) to the English team; Mr Howard (Cowra) and Mr Hunt (Nyngan) to mathematics. In late breaking news at the end of 2013 Mrs Fellowes (English, based at Mudgee) took up a role as Head Teacher English at Gulgong HS which sadly required her to leave us. Mrs Bannister begins a long period of leave to complete post-graduate studies from Week 3 to the end of Term 2. We are currently in recruitment for her relief.

Term 1 residential school is not far away: February 26 – 28. Parents are urged to respond to Ms Winters’ message about travel arrangements, dietary and health matters in the timeframe requested.

Pauline Freeburn
Teaching, Learning and Technology
The Educational Services conference I attended last week was informative and important as the model covers all NSW public schools. Meeting the other members of the team was a highlight as we work with people who cover around 75% of the state. Staying in university college accommodation had some unexpected highlights...

The conference agenda covered topics from pre-service teacher training through to senior school curriculum – it was a very big two days. The keynote address by Deputy Director General of Education, Mr Greg Prior was a great plenary of the changes we have seen implemented over the last two years. The Local Schools Local Decisions initiative was discussed as was the Great Teaching Inspired Learning. My understanding of the two arms of educational services, Learning & Leadership and Learning & Engagement became clearer as the time progressed.

I came away with an even greater appreciation of the work our local school Principals do—so this week a bouquet to all those hard working men and women who lead your local bricks and mortar school.

Textbooks 2014
We are still in discussions with our textbook provider as we grapple with the many technology changes that are afoot. There are some changes just around the corner (maybe as soon as Term 2 this year) so whatever we do needs to be sustainable. In the meantime, staff has access to new texts online to ensure they meet the new syllabus implementation guidelines and students have access to last years’ texts on Moodle as a reference. This will change as we lock in arrangements that are technologically sustainable and I thank people for their patience throughout this process.

Timetables & Science Practicals
Students are to be commended on the way they have communicated timetable information to Ms Freeburn and for being so proactive in chasing up who their science practical teacher will be and when that lesson will take place in the week. These communication and organisation skills are useful in all areas of life and develop the skills of independence in a “safe risk taking” manner. The development of skills to enable learning, such as organisation and time management is one of the best kept secrets we have.

Farewell for now
This will be my first and last newsletter item for the semester. You may recall I am to take some leave to allow me to complete my doctorate (or at least approach completion!). The working title of “Virtual Provisions for Gifted Students in Rural & Regional Areas” gives a clue to the subject matter I have been investigating for a while now, and hopefully an understanding of the need to continue this work. I will still see students and staff in some form over the time I am on leave and I very much look forward to this.

Barbara Bannister

Assessment Schedules Years 7 –10
Assessment Schedules Years 7—10 are available on Moodle for download. Parents will receive these files through weeks 3 and 4.

Planning for success in high school
Each year in high school brings new academic and personal challenges for parents and their teens. For example, if your child is commencing Year 8 or 10, they’ll need to start thinking now about the electives they want to choose later in the year.

This year-by-year guide will help you navigate the challenges and decisions your child will face as they commence Years 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12.
Important dates for your xsel diary

2014 xsel Residential Schools

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<th>Term</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Term 1</td>
<td>Wednesday 26 February 2014</td>
<td>Friday 28 February 2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>Term 2</td>
<td>Wednesday 4 June 2014</td>
<td>Friday 6 June 2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>Term 3</td>
<td>Wednesday 20 August 2014</td>
<td>Friday 22 August 2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>Term 4</td>
<td>Wednesday 5 November 2014</td>
<td>Friday 7 November 2014</td>
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2014 NSW Government School Holidays

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<tr>
<th>Holidays</th>
<th>Arrival</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Autumn Holidays</td>
<td>Monday 14 April 2014</td>
<td>- Friday 25 April 2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>Winter Holidays</td>
<td>Monday 30 June 2014</td>
<td>- Friday 11 July 2014</td>
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<td>Spring Holidays</td>
<td>Monday 22 September 2014</td>
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<td>Summer Holidays</td>
<td>Monday 22 December 2014</td>
<td>- Monday 26 January 2015</td>
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School development days occur at the beginning of Terms 1, 2 and 3 and the last two days of the school year. Check with your local school, as schools may vary some of these dates.

Absences from School

Students are reminded to advise your teachers of commitments that will cause you to be absent from school or miss your xsel classes. This includes activities such as sports carnivals, excursions and local events.

Please give your teachers advance notice whenever possible.

In cases of illness or unexpected absences, parents should advise the xsel office directly. Email advice to xsel@det.nsw.edu.au is preferred.