

Reforming secondary education – Sanderson Middle School

The Northern Territory Government is committed to delivering on its vision to provide:

- An **excellent and equitable** secondary system that supports all students to achieve.
- A **guaranteed standard of local secondary school provision**, and a pathway to NTCET completion for all students, regardless of geographic location.
- A **model of delivery that is differentiated**, and informed by student and community need and industry pathways.
- An engaging learning design that **guarantees core literacy, numeracy and work readiness skills and drives improvements in student attendance and wellbeing**.
- A **shift away from middle schools** as a key NT government election commitment

Our reforms will build the aspirations and skills of young people so that their secondary schooling sets them up for future careers and meets the needs of the Territory.

What is the proposed future design for secondary education at Sanderson Middle School?

The proposed future design for Sanderson Middle School is to transition to full comprehensive school (years 7-12) with academic and VET pathways along with a specialist industry, trade and technical annex focussed on high priority industries for senior secondary students (years 10-12).

Transitioning to a full comprehensive school and establishing a new, connected trade training facility will provide the following benefits:

- ensure students in the Sanderson priority enrolment area have a local secondary school they can attend from year 7 to 12. This will reduce transition points and enable greater continuity of learning and relationships for students and teachers;
- provide specialised vocational training, offering excellent pathway options for Sanderson families and facilities that can be accessed by students in the greater Darwin region regardless of home school;
- provide students with more seamless and focused pathways to post-school education and training;
- provide career pathways and development opportunities for staff.

How are we planning for this change?

There is significant detail and planning needed to prepare for the future of secondary education in Darwin.

We are currently engaging with parents, students and staff to obtain feedback on the proposed future design. At the end of Term 1, we will collate this feedback to enable government to make a decision on the future design.

By June 2025, all students, parents and staff will know:

- the finalised future design for secondary education in Darwin, including Sanderson;
- the plan to support students to transition into the new schools;
- priority enrolment zones for new secondary schools; and
- approach to managing staff changes and opportunities for staff to transfer to different schools

In Semester 2, 2025 further detailed planning will occur to ensure students, staff and school communities are ready to begin the transition to the future state of secondary education in Darwin.

From Term 1, 2026, changes will begin in a sequenced and carefully managed way, ensuring students and staff are supported. For most schools, this would include the transition of one year level from 2026, for example year 9 students at middle schools would start year 10 at the expanding school in the first year. These changes will be managed to minimise disruption for students. The full transition to the new design of secondary education in Darwin will be completed by 2028.

Throughout this exciting but significant change process, the Department of Education and Training will provide the appropriate supports for schools, students, teachers and communities to ensure a smooth transition process.

How are we engaging with the school community?

Engagement with Sanderson Middle School staff and school community will run over the next several weeks. This will enable parents, school staff and students to provide input to help shape the future design of secondary education at Sanderson and Darwin more broadly.

The Department has commenced engagement with the Sanderson Middle School community through a school council meeting on Monday 24 March 2025 and a staff meeting on Tuesday 25 March 2025.

A short survey has been developed to capture as many perspectives as possible. This survey is available until 16 April 2025 at <https://forms.office.com/r/YMvADrz3K6?origin=lprLink> or through the QR code:



For a copy of the *Review of Secondary Education in the NT* or more information on the plan for delivering secondary reform, visit www.education.nt.gov.au/secondary-education. Alternatively, if you would like to be in touch about the change email secondaryreform.doe@education.nt.gov.au.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. What are the benefits of moving away from middle schools?

Through consultation with teachers, parents and students, the *Review of Secondary Education in the NT* found that the middle school model in the NT isn't maximising outcomes for students. Moving to comprehensive schools will reduce the transition points for students and support greater continuity of relationships and learning. It will provide teachers with wider professional opportunities and provide more opportunities for schools to specialise.

Q. What pathways will be offered to students in Darwin, Palmerston and Alice Springs?

All comprehensive schools in Darwin, Palmerston and Alice Springs will provide the full Australian Curriculum (year 7-10) and a core range of NT Certificate of Education and Training subjects and pathways (year 10-12) that will set students up to pursue post-school education, training and jobs.

Schools within each region will work together to identify specialisations and approaches to working as a network of schools to ensure all students can access a wide range of pathways regardless of their home school. The focus of individual schools will be released alongside the final school design in mid 2025.

Q. How will priority enrolment areas change with the shift away from middle schools?

All students in Darwin, Palmerston and Alice Springs will have access to high quality government secondary education and a wide range of pathways, regardless of where they live.

Providing flexibility and options for families will continue to be an important part of secondary education in the Territory. There is no proposal to change the current priority enrolment policy where families and students are able to pursue opportunities and pathways at schools outside the area that they live.

Q. Will additional funding be available to support this change?

In 2024, the Northern Territory Government signed the *Better and Fairer Schools Agreement* with the Commonwealth Government, providing a significant funding uplift to schools from 2025 to 2029. The funding uplift under this agreement will support the transition to the new secondary system.

Q. How will teachers be supported to prepare for teaching new subjects and year levels?

The shift away from middle schools provides our teachers with exciting opportunities to diversify the year-levels and subjects they teach and deepen the connections with students from 7-12. Professional development will be provided to current middle school teachers to prepare for teaching NTCET subjects, and to support current senior secondary school teachers to enhance their understanding of middle years' teaching and learning approaches.

Q. Will there be investment in infrastructure to support the change away from middle schools?

The Department of Education is currently working with the Department of Logistics and Infrastructure to assess existing facilities at middle and senior secondary schools and to identify any minor or major works that would be required to deliver comprehensive school education. This may include upgrades to science facilities and new facilities for technical specialisations.

Reforming Secondary Education – Darwin Region overview

The Northern Territory Government is committed to developing a system of schools in Darwin that work together to ensure:

- Excellent and equitable secondary pathways
- Continuity for students from years 7 to 12
- Access to broad and specialised pathways for all students
- Support for school leavers to transition to further education, training or employment
- Flexibility and options for students
- Schools and pathways that support future population growth
- Professional opportunities for teachers

What is the proposed future design for schools across the Darwin region?

The proposed future design for schools in Darwin is:

- **Dripstone Middle School** will transition to a full comprehensive secondary school (years 7-12)
- **Nightcliff Middle School** will transition to a full comprehensive secondary school (years 7-12)
- **Darwin Middle School and Darwin High School** will be combined to create a new comprehensive school (Years 7-12)
- **Sanderson Middle School** will transition to full comprehensive school (years 7-12) with a specialist industry, trade and technical annex focussed on high priority industries for senior secondary students (years 10-12)
- **Casuarina Senior College** will remain as a senior school (years 10-12) with a specialisation in higher education pathways for high demand professions (for example, teachers and medical professionals).