



Education

Great combo: New England Girls' School connects with optical and wireless technology

New England Girls' School (NEGS) wanted to improve network access across a campus spread over 40 hectares of parklands and landscaped gardens near Armidale, in regional New South Wales. But better access was just the beginning. Anywhere, anytime wireless connectivity freed teachers and students to reinvent the learning experience at NEGS and create a virtual learning community.

Laying the foundation

NEGS had laid the backbone for its new network in 2003, connecting the school server with teacher areas in several buildings via fibre optic cabling.

Now NEGS wanted to extend connectivity to eight more outlying buildings, including the school's riding school, early childhood centre, school hall and several student boarding houses, and in early 2004 it approached Allcom for advice on network infrastructure.

Secure, reliable connectivity

Allcom used Cisco technology to connect the wired and wireless parts of the network.

Cisco Catalyst switches are the key, intelligently directing data traffic across the network for fast, reliable service. Cisco Aironet 1300 Series Wireless Bridges mounted on the exteriors of six buildings complete the picture, enabling the school's assembly hall, early childhood centre and riding school to connect wirelessly to the cable infrastructure.

This affordable design offers secure, reliable connectivity, and can be simply modified or extended to meet changing needs. It also supports the 802.11b/g standard, which means data transfer is lightning fast at speeds of up to 54 Mbps.

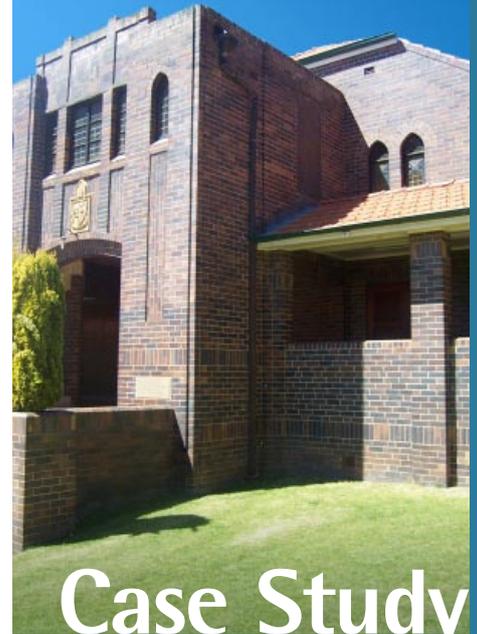
And with wireless connectivity comes freedom – now any authorised wireless devices within range can connect to the campus network. And that started a small revolution at NEGS.

The freedom of working wirelessly

NEGS issued its 40-strong academic team with wireless-enabled laptops so they could access a specialised management database that tracks NEGS's 340 students. This important tool offers timetable information and other reporting capabilities, and is used to mark the roll, check student and school records and locate students on campus.

Once mobile, NEGS teachers began exploring the potential. Before long, they were communicating online in real time with iChat, and sharing files using simple drag-and-drop functionality. With better access to the Internet, teachers also have more opportunity to develop professionally – exchanging teaching practice, ideas and resources with colleagues around the world.

NEGS's Manager of ICT Support, David Rose, says, "Our most technophobic staff are totally won over. Some had never touched a computer before, but wireless really turned things around. Now they're learning more every day."



Case Study

New England Girls' School

The challenge

To build a complete networking solution for New England Girls' School to connect outlying buildings and communal areas in the school's 40-hectare grounds

The solution

Cisco Aironet 1300 Series Wireless Bridges

Cisco Catalyst switches

The benefits

Students and teachers are free to work wirelessly all over campus, creating a virtual learning community

Lightning fast, reliable access to the school's server and the Internet, with 802.11b/g standard connectivity

Virtual classrooms integrate technology into student learning experiences, opening up innovative approaches

Enhanced professional development opportunities via online resources

Boarders feel at home, thanks to email contact with family and friends

The secure, cost-effective solution is simple to modify or extend as needs change



About Allcom

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“ Our wireless network is everywhere. Now teachers and students carry their laptops all around the grounds, and you come across people working all over campus. It has changed the way we do things. ”

David Rose, Manager ICT Support, New England Girls' School

The virtual classroom

As teachers spread their digital wings, more and more students also connected to the school network, which is great, because the school's 240 boarders come from all over the world, and email is a fantastic way to stay in touch with family and friends back home. Moreover, laptops were fast replacing pen and paper as NEGS moved toward virtual classrooms.

"We have very high laptop use in senior school – over 80% in year 10 and increasing from there to 100% in year 12," says David Rose, "and more junior students are getting laptops now because parents recognise how much they get out of them."

With growing laptop use, digital dialogue between students and teachers took off. The school community now uses Moodle, a free Australian course management system to help educators create online learning communities. What's more, teachers can post discussion forums, course information, assignments, messages and grades, and can hold live chat or personalised sessions with students.

Campus-wide, technology was fast becoming integral to curriculum.

Reinventing learning

David Rose says, "We chose Allcom because it offered Cisco technology and experience – and we're very happy with the result. With system life-expectancy of 10 to 15 years we know our infrastructure is ready for all the things we'd like to do in future. We can now put our library catalogue online and investigate IP telephony to help boarders stay in touch."

Anywhere, anytime access to the school network freed NEGS to reinvent itself as a virtual learning community. As David Rose says, "Our wireless network is everywhere. Now teachers and students carry their laptops all around the grounds, and you come across people working all over campus. It has changed the way we do things."