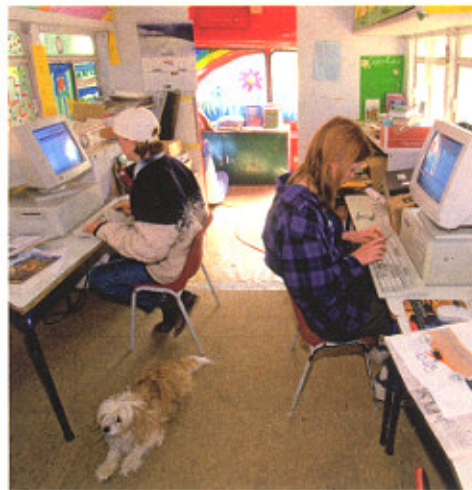


School in the Australian Outback



More than 90% of the population of Australia live on or near the coast but there are people whose homes are in remote parts of the country called the Outback or the Bush. When we say remote, we don't mean 50 to 60 miles from the nearest town. Australia is a huge country and some cattle stations and farms are more than a thousand miles from the nearest public facilities. So what do people do if, for example, they need a doctor? Well, they call the Flying Doctor Service. It has around fifty planes which fly almost 4 million kilometres every year.

But what do kids do if they live thousands of kilometres from the nearest school? It's a serious problem! Boarding schools are expensive. But the kids have to learn, so what do they do? They go to the School of the Air. This is not a school in the sky! It's a school that uses radio to teach. It was started in Alice Springs in the 1950s to help kids who live in the Outback. Today there are several schools of the air in Australia. The one in Alice Springs has almost 130 students who live in an area of more than one million square kilometres. For decades lessons were given by two-way radio. But now students have a state-of-the-art broadband system. Teachers have a video and web camera as well as a whiteboard. Students have web cameras, too. So many, who had only heard their teachers in the past, can now see them. And what's more important, they can hear their classmates and take part in discussions with them.



The students have a timetable. Every week they have half-hour lessons with teachers from all subject areas. Materials like books, videos and equipment for Science are sent by post. Students must supply their own stationery and they must do homework regularly. They send this to their teachers who give them a mark and send it back. Twice a year students are interviewed and a progress report is given to parents. All students are visited annually by a teacher. They also have a support teacher, who they can contact if they need help.



1 Kids in the Bush

Think about what you have learnt about the Outback. What do you think life is like for kids there?

2 The texts

a) Read the texts. What do you find out about:

- the Flying Doctor Service?
- the School of the Air in Alice Springs?
- two-way radio?
- the broadband system?
- homework at the school?

b) Start a mind map about the Outback.

3 More about the Outback

Write a short text about the pros and cons of living in the Outback. Use the Internet or the library to find more information.

Where is it?
What is it like there?
What do people do there?
Which animals live there?
What tourist sights are there?
...?

4 Your turn

Choose ONE of these activities.

1. A performance: Imagine you are a student of the School of the Air. A partner interviews you about your life in the Bush. The others in the class write notes and then ask more questions.
2. A discussion: Think of a statement, e.g. "The School of the Air isn't as good as a real school." Plan and hold a discussion on the statement.