

History Timeline



1944 Miss Adelaide Miethke, a member of the Council of the Flying Doctor Service (FDS) of South Australia, suggests the idea of using two-way radio to give educational talks to children in the outback. Discussions between Mr RG Pitts (Director of the FDS service in Alice Springs), Mr L Dodd (Assistant Supervisor of Education in the Northern Territory), headmaster of Alice Springs Higher Primary School) and Miss Adelaide Miethke pursued the early development of the School of the Air, the first of its kind in the world.

1950 After a long wait for special communications equipment, a trial program begins. Teachers at Alice Springs Primary High School volunteer to conduct radio lessons. A landline is laid from the Flying Doctor base to the Hartley Street School. Teachers take turns to present the specially prepared scripts to outback children with the help of radio staff at the flying doctor base.

1951 On 8th June the School of the Air was officially opened at the Flying Doctor Base. Mr. Kissell of the Alice Springs Primary Higher School is the leader of the broadcasting team. At first lessons are a one-way affair, but soon a question and answer time was added to the end of each broadcast. Sometimes a microphone was taken into one of the classrooms at the school and the outback children could listen in to specially prepared lessons or dramatisations. Three half-hour sessions were broadcast each week.

1953 Miss Molly Ferguson takes over as leader of the broadcasting team.

1954 The School of the Air now operates from the current Anzac Hill High School site in a purpose built broadcast studio with an observation area. Miss Molly Ferguson becomes the sole teacher for School of the Air.

1955 The first "get-together" week is held in May with 30 children attending aged from 5-15 years. The Get-Together is held at the Alice Springs Higher Primary School during the school holiday break. Miss Molly Ferguson is awarded the MBE for her work at School of the Air. She retires to get married.

1956 Mrs Margaret Stiller becomes the School of the Air teacher. Two extra radio sessions are added to help the secondary students and closer links are made with the correspondence work. The school library gets underway and books are posted out to students.

1957 The first excursion for School of the Air students. Mrs Stiller with 4 other adults takes 18 students to Adelaide for 3 weeks.

1958 Mrs Nancy Barrett is employed to replace Mrs Stiller who has to retire due to ill health.

1960 Mrs Barrett embarks on the first official 'patrol'. She uses her own car and is away for a week at a time visiting as many stations as she can in one direction, spending half a day at each and staying at a different station each night. The 'patrols' were so successful that the Commonwealth Government went on to provide the vehicles and the expenses for future patrols.

1967 Mr David Ashton becomes the School of the Air teacher. He goes on patrol four times a year for 1-2 weeks each time.

1968 School of the Air moves to the Flying Doctor Base, it is located in a demountable here until 1977. A second teacher, Mrs Judy Hodder is employed to take the younger children and to provide relief for the teacher on patrol. Students are still receiving and returning work to the South Australian correspondence school where it is marked before being returned to the students.

1974 Alice Springs School of the Air becomes completely autonomous. It is now the correspondence school for Central Australia. All families are given transceivers and the school now has its own frequencies. Correspondence work is sent out to students, marked and returned from Alice Springs. There are now enough students to have a teacher for each class. Patrols are made by the class teachers to each of their students once a year.

The first supervisors' conference is organised by Mr David Ashton and is attended by 25 supervisors.

1975 The School of the Air logo is designed by Mrs Val Whalen, ASSOA teacher & librarian.

1976 The first aerial patrol takes place. In 1991 a quarter of all patrols are carried out by air.

1977 Operation begins from our current location here in Head Street although teachers still had to travel to the RFDS base for radio broadcasts.

1978 Official opening of the Head Street school. The radio broadcasts are made from the specially built studio. There are now 13 teachers at the school and 3 administration staff.

1979 Alice Springs School of the Air is issued with its first patrol vehicle, a 4WD Toyota Landcruiser.

1980 The library trailer takes the mobile library to the students, however this had to be discontinued after it was deemed not viable.

1983 Prince Charles and Princess Diana visit the school.

1985 The first "In school" week was held. This was organised by Mrs Eileen Kennedy for her year 3 class. It was so successful that it has become an annual event for all classes.

1988 Margaret Thatcher visits the school. The Bicentennial Quilt is made to commemorate the bicentenary of Australia.

1991 40th birthday celebrations with Mr Christopher Brocklebank, artist in residence.

1992 A trial program for indigenous students is held. A major radio upgrade is commenced. The preschool to Year 3 course preparation is completed. Satellite televisions via Imparja are trialed. Toshiba laptops are trialed with the senior classes. Under principal Mr Ed Boyd, communications technology takes off and becomes a major focus from 1992 onwards.

1993 Quick-mail is introduced. New phones and a facsimiles are installed. Four computers are made available to students in years 6 and 7.

1995 An extension is completed providing the Head Street building with a new visitor centre, a larger teacher preparation area and more storage space. Computers are made available to students in years 4-7.

1996 The new Visitor Centre is officially opened.

1999 Mr Tony Richards is employed to set up internet access, email and web services (MOASS) to School of the Air families. The use of email becomes an important communications tool, especially for older students.

2000 The Alice Springs School of the Air intranet is online. Queen Elizabeth II visits the school.

2001 Alice Springs School of the Air celebrates its 50th birthday. Christopher Brocklebank is the Artist in Residence. The 50th Birthday Mural Wall is officially publicised. Steve Bobos (Principal) engages in discussions with the Federal Government on the provision of an alternative to radio for the delivery of live lessons. Dr William Newman recruited to evaluate and drive the move to alternative technologies.

2002 The Federal government provides 14.4Million in the form of the National Communications Fund 44 (NCF44) to Optus to provide the One Touch Interactive service to Distance Education Schools in NSW and the Northern Territory. The first roll out of Interactive Distance Learning (IDL) began, using satellite & broadband technologies.

2003 The school coins the term IDL (Interactive Distance Learning) which encompasses the technology and associated pedagogies assorted with real time distance teaching using the new technologies. Main radio studio converted to an IDL Studio; radio lessons continue to second studio with radio and IDL lessons happening as the same time as IDL classes (via broadband satellite internet).

2006 At the beginning of the year the school changes to a Northern Territory developed product, REACT (Remote Education and Conferencing Tool) in all studios. In December the last radio lesson is delivered.

2007 The Education department develops it's own proprietary satellite network (STARS).

2008 What was the 2nd radio studio is transformed into a 2nd IDL studio.

2011 The School celebrates 60 years of operation.

2012 In June, Dr William Newman is charged with the establishment of a Middle Years Program offering years 7, 8 and 9.

2014 Third studio is opened.

2019 Fourth studio is opened.

2020 During COVID lockdowns, Alice Springs School of the Air is called upon by many schools around the world to help develop their remote learning capabilities.