

No set classes & exams at new school

There will be no timetabled classes, no exams and no ATAR at the end of year 12 for students at a new independent high school in Sydney's west.

Instead, students at the new CathWest Innovation College, with campuses in Mount Druitt and Emu Plains, will complete two terms of set projects before developing solutions to their problems, building portfolios to apply to university or having the choice to pitch ideas directly to businesses.

"By term three, students will be constructing their own projects and working with teachers and mentors within the college and across industry," the college's principal Cathy Larkin said.

"Our students will certainly be assessed throughout their projects and on the basis of their portfolios but they won't have to sit through the three-hour tests that even I sat 40 years ago."

A number of Sydney public schools have also replaced ATAR pathways with project-based programs in recent years as more universities embrace alternative entry methods.

CathWest is expected to open next year with about 150 students across years 10 and 11 and will eventually cater up to year 12.

For India Wilcockson, 14, who is in year 9 at Xavier College, moving to CathWest will mean an end to the classes she dreads.

"There are some days when I don't like my subjects and I don't want to go to school, but at CathWest you can do what you're passionate about all the time," India said.

"I also like the idea of doing schooling in a non-traditional way. At most schools, teachers lecture and some people struggle in class, but there it'll be more hands-on.

"Having mentors is something that intrigues me too, you can have one-on-one personal time."

India said she plans to work on something related to writing, music or drama.

Teachers and school leaders will help ensure students' projects meet the NSW Education Standards Authority's course requirements for a range of

non-ATAR subjects, for which students will ultimately be able to gain an HSC.

The school has also begun building partnerships with universities to enable students to gain entry on the basis of their portfolios.

"Rather than beginning with the syllabus, we'll begin with the student and we'll have as many learning pathways as we have students," Ms Larkin said.

Ms Larkin said the school, which is being built at the location of two trade training centres, will look very different to the schools that most people are familiar with.

"We're doing a complete refurbishment ... we're effectively gutting the science rooms and they'll become our makers space with state-of-the-art innovation technology and the classrooms will become design studios where students will do their original work," Ms Larkin said.

"At the front, instead of a student reception, there will be a student-run cafe, a hairdressing salon and a retail outlet, because those are all vocational subjects that we'll offer ... students and staff will share all the same facilities. There won't be a staffroom and I won't have an office."