Hurlstone Agricultural High School
Learning from home

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation

Learning from home journey

Getting ready for disruptions to face-to-face teaching

- Transitioned all staff to a single learning management system that they could access from home
- Surveyed students to assess their technology access and loaned out school devices as required
- Commenced teacher lesson observations that focused on how to use online learning tools

Learning from home

- 99% of day students and 80% of boarders learnt from home from 24 March 2020
- Live online lessons were audio recorded and all resources posted online for students unable to attend live lessons
- Staff chose whether they worked from home or school, with the majority electing to work from home

Transition back to face-to-face teaching

- All staff (with the exception of high-risk staff) and Year 12 students returned to school full time from 11 May 2020
- Years 7 to 11 day students attended school one day per week between 11-22 May 2020
- All students and the majority of boarders returned to face-to-face teaching full time from 25 May 2020

Challenges to overcome

Ensuring equity and wellbeing for a diverse student body: The school has a number of students from rural areas and low-SES backgrounds who might have had difficulty accessing online learning from home.

Continuing to deliver regular and high-quality explicit teaching and feedback: The school had no existing roadmap for delivering regular, high-quality explicit teaching and feedback to students in this new learning environment.

Ensuring teacher workloads remained manageable: Learning from home meant regular tasks took much longer than usual as teachers needed to learn how to use online tools and devise new ways to deliver effective teaching and learning.

School context

Hurlstone Agricultural High School is an academically selective, coeducational boarding and day school in south-west Sydney. The school sits on approximately 90 hectares, which includes a fully operational farm and dairy. It has almost 1,000 students, including 42 boarders from rural and remote areas. The school has a FOEI[1] of 48 and around 90% of students come from a language background other than English. Hurlstone Agricultural High School prides itself on preparing resilient, resourceful, critical and creative thinkers who strive to make a difference in our rapidly changing world.

1   Family Occupation and Education Index – a school-level index of educational disadvantage with a mean of 100 and a standard deviation of 50. Higher values indicate greater levels of need.

Prioritising a whole-school approach to student equity and wellbeing

Hurlstone Agricultural High School's immediate priority was to ensure student equity and wellbeing so all students continued to feel known, valued and cared for while they were learning from home. The school achieved this by:

- Conducting a survey to review access to technology and loaning devices so all students could learn from home. Flexible learning options (such as being excused from attending online lessons in real time) were also provided for students who could not engage in live online learning due to reasons such as limited internet access and/or family circumstances.

- Finding innovative ways to engage with students and maintain positive student-teacher relationships. Some teachers created videos to maintain connections with their students (see appendix). Other teachers used GIFs as a way to touch base with each student every lesson. Students were asked to send one GIF by the end of the lesson that represented how they were feeling and teachers followed up with any student who indicated they were unhappy or overwhelmed.

- Using regular student surveys to identify and address equity and wellbeing issues. For example, one survey showed that some students felt anxious and uncomfortable engaging verbally in online lessons. To reduce student anxiety, teachers set up virtual spaces so students could select whether they would participate in lessons verbally or in writing.

- Teachers and SLSOs[2] checking in with students regularly to see how they were managing and to identify any barriers to learning. Staff recorded their findings in a whole-school wellbeing data set. The data highlighted patterns in student behaviour across subjects, such as not attending online lessons or not submitting work on time, and was used by school leaders to identify which students needed more support and in what areas.

Providing all students with regular opportunities for high-quality explicit teaching and feedback

Hurlstone Agricultural High School developed initiatives to ensure all students could access high-quality explicit teaching and feedback while learning from home. The school's approach involved:

- Teachers creating 'demonstration' videos that focused on new and previously learned content (see appendix). These videos explained to students why they were learning something new, how it connected to what they already knew and what they were expected to do, as well as providing worked examples. Teachers also created videos that focused on specific areas students were experiencing difficulty with.

- Timetabled 'live' lessons being audio recorded and posted online for students to access at any time. This ensured students who could not attend live online lessons did not miss out on listening to valuable teacher explanations and class discussions. It also allowed students to re-listen to teacher explanations as many times as needed, to develop a better understand of the lesson content.

- Teachers using Turnitin[3] as a written and verbal feedback tool for both formative and summative assessment. Specifically, teachers used Turnitin's 'feedback studio' to provide students with timely, specific and actionable feedback they could use to improve their performance and achievement.

- Teachers encouraging students to ask questions using the chat and instant messaging functions within Microsoft Teams, Google Classroom and Edmodo.

Drawing on collective expertise to build capacity and reduce teacher workload

The shift to learning from home required teachers to rapidly change their way of working. Teachers at the school engaged in regular, meaningful collaboration with their colleagues to develop competence and confidence in delivering remote learning. Teachers collaborated by:

- Sharing resources to promote greater consistency and higher quality resources. To encourage teachers to share and develop resources together, the school moved all staff to a single learning management system (Microsoft Teams) they could access from home.

- Participating in regular lesson observations both in person during the preparation phase and virtually while students were learning from home. Teachers felt this was valuable for sharing professional knowledge and reflecting on how online learning could be implemented effectively in their setting.

- Establishing new intra-school communities of practice where teachers across a variety of faculties came together virtually to improve teaching and learning across the school. For example, 'Monday moments' involved teachers from different faculties sharing a success story, and teachers spent 'Friday flip flops' discussing how to improve teaching strategies that had not worked well. Attending and participating in the sessions was voluntary, and they were recorded and shared for any teacher unable to attend.

2   Student Learning Support Officer
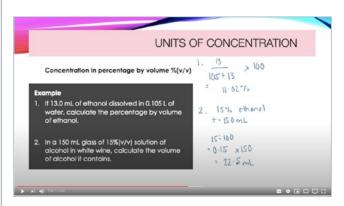3   Turnitin is an internet-based program

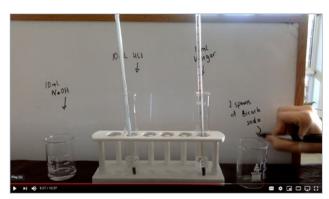### Maintaining connections with students using videos

> "Teaching and learning can only continue when there is an equal regard for student wellbeing."

Paul Pittas, Head Teacher Instructional Leadership

Explicit teaching using videos

> "Collaboration and community is so important right now, and that interrelational trust becomes even more critical. We need to be able to work together to bring the potential of every child forward."

Christine Castle, Principal