

A graphic for 'Ed. week 2020' featuring a large white circle containing a smaller light blue circle. The text 'Ed. week 2020' is written in bold blue font inside the light blue circle. A solid dark blue circle is positioned to the left of the white circle. A curved line of red dots arches over the top right of the white circle.

**Ed.
week
2020**

Learning together through COVID-19 Case Studies

Information has been updated as at July 2020.

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Introduction

Learning Together through COVID-19 is a collection of stories showcasing how some schools in NSW continued delivering high quality education during the remote learning period.

The experience of learning from home makes the Education Week theme 'Learning Together' particularly relevant, this year.

These stories demonstrate how school staff deployed innovative practices to maintain connections with students and smooth the transition from face-to-face teaching to remote learning, all the while ensuring no student was left behind, regardless of their circumstances.

For example, teachers are now better equipped and more confident using technology in teaching, and are collaborating with other teachers more than ever before on class content and teaching practices.

The pressures applied by COVID-19 leveraged the state's collective education intelligence to overcome the many roadblocks thrown up by remote learning.

Issues that initially appeared as obstacles have turned into stepping stones to both greater collaboration, more creativity among teachers and students, and greater teaching specialization.

Some of the new practices adopted by schools aimed specifically to ensure every student remained known, valued and cared for during a time of high anxiety for our school communities.

Across the state, students collaborated on tailor-made digital platforms, and communicated with peers and teachers via video conferences. Parents and carers worked with their children and teachers by accessing new 'Learning from Home' hubs and attending virtual assemblies; while schools ensured the wellbeing of their students with a range of solutions including Wellbeing Wednesdays, Mindful Mondays, and by reaching out to global experts for guidance about how to stay safe during the pandemic.

Many of the new practices introduced by schools during the remote learning period are still in place now that students have returned to school, and some can be scaled up to further support our students.



Video, robots and drive-bys join the new line-up at schools

The NSW Department of Education has focused on three key objectives in its response to COVID-19:

- Ensuring continuity of quality education
- Ensuring every student is known, valued and cared for in our schools
- Keeping schools safe and clean.

However, some of the great work done by NSW schools during the remote learning period has the potential to transform current teaching practices to better leverage technology and digital initiatives.

New methods, new roles

For example, new and innovative teaching practices were developed and new roles created in response to remote learning.

Responses ranged from initiatives such as school librarians conducting drive-through borrowing sessions at Sydney's **Carlton South Public School**, to the creation of an Instructional Leader for Digital Learning (ILDL) at **Chatswood Public School** to ensure consistency of approach and upskilling of all teachers.

In this last case, the ILDL officer also identified which of the remote learning practices could be used once schools returned to face-to-face teaching. Chatswood's ILDL officer created videos for teachers and parents about how to use Google Classroom and other digital platforms, and provided translations in three languages to ensure everyone understood what was required.

Floraville Public School in Lake Macquarie created a Home Learning Liaison Officer (HeLLO) to help parents through the learning from home period, showing them how to access services and resources online, helping them solve problems that arose because of home learning, and checking that parents and carers had what they needed during this difficult time.

The school's HeLLO officers were able to focus on the families who needed the most support, while still looking after the needs of the entire school community.



Video stars

Another theme to emerge from remote learning was the power of video to engage students and spark their imagination and enthusiasm. Schools have been using video as a teaching or homework tool for some time, but it was leveraged more heavily – and to greater affect – during the remote learning period.

For example, at **Carlton South** teachers developed a central website where all of the school's instructional videos could be accessed. The video conferencing tool Zoom was also incorporated across all years so teachers could connect with their students in a live, virtual environment.

At **The Ponds School** in Sydney's Hills District, staff created a weekly TV show – Bunji TV – that broadcast a range of information for students, including weather reports, a word of the day, and a story read in English and another language. The program is now hosted by students.

Telepresence robots were also used to keep students connected and engaged with school, and virtual assemblies and music engagement lessons were filmed and available to watch on a private YouTube channel.



Access for all

Equity of education was a key consideration for many schools during remote learning.

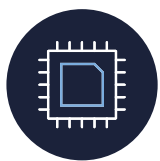
At **Chatswood Public**, EAL/D, Mandarin and Korean lessons were included in daily online lesson sequences.

At **Carlton South**, Learning Support staff, Student Learning Support Officers and English as an Additional Language or Dialect staff created home learning packs to cater for individualized learning needs.

In light of the vital role played by **The Hunter Signing Choir** in keeping students with hearing losses connected, the Choir organisers arranged a zoom performance.

The choir is made up of Public School students from the Hunter region who are deaf or hard of hearing, ranging from Year 1 to Year 12, and provides opportunities for students with a hearing loss to access the performing arts. It promotes positive self-esteem and develops communication skills.

These students – often the only hard-of-hearing student at their school – rely on coming together once or twice a term for a rehearsal or performance. So, choir members were ecstatic to see each other and to be able to perform.



Digital differentiation approaches



Case Study 1 – GyMEA Technology High School

Remote learning proves to be a catalyst for change

In the face of the greatest disruption to education in decades, the lessons learnt during the remote learning period about technology and students' ability to work independently are shaping how students will be taught in the future.

An “anywhere, anytime” approach to teaching and learning adopted by GyMEA Technology High during the remote learning period epitomises the transformation underway in NSW schools.

Technology was already providing students at the school in Sydney's south with a host of opportunities to engage and be inspired, says GyMEA Tech's principal, Peter Marsh.

But the challenges of remote learning have further entrenched the use of technology in the curriculum, and in homework and assessment, he says.

In-house digital tools developed by the school meant teachers could easily and regularly track student engagement and progress, while students and parents could access a reporting portal “anywhere, anytime” to check on the student's performance.

The result, says Mr Marsh, is wider collaboration among teachers at the school; greater feedback for students and their families about a child's performance, and; in conjunction with quality face-to-face teaching, new learning management systems that are making it easier for students to reflect on their progress and set learning goals.

“Communication and connection with home is a crucial part of student learning and engagement,” says Mr Marsh.

“While there is a need for formalised reporting home each semester, giving parents and students ongoing, clear insights into progress at school through continuous reporting will have greater impact for all students,” he says.

“With so much information collected at school, parents can get a better picture of their child's wellbeing and academic progress.”

“A collective approach to online learning by our staff and their commitment to retain the valuable lessons we learnt during remote learning is something we are very proud of.”

Peter Marsh, Principal, GyMEA Technology High School, Metro South

As it became clear the COVID-19 pandemic would impose remote learning on schools, GyMEA's executive team consulted its entire staff about the best way to proceed. Early on, students and families were told what learning from home would entail, and how they could receive support.

“Our staff worked together to produce the learning materials for their students across courses and across faculties to ensure the expectations and messages we were sending to our community were consistent and clear and that the learning packages we delivered were of quality and benefit to all of our students,” says Mr Marsh.

The school developed a new whole school, continuous formative assessment and homework program around learning platforms Moodle and Google Classroom, vodcasts, and a Remote Learning Markbook developed in-house that tracked every student's engagement and progress.

Junior school students received weekly learning packages that included a set number of targeted, online activities that students worked through at their own pace.

Senior students continued with the syllabus via vodcasts produced by Gymea's teachers, which mapped to online tasks such as quizzes, practice exam questions and draft exam essays.

Drawing from data collected by the school's Remote Learning Markbook, individualised emails were sent to students and parents about students' progress, every week.

Parents will eventually be able to access the data being collected by Gymea's online Student Task Tracker by using individualised logins.

The new practices have worked so well that Gymea Tech has retained them now that it has returned to face-to-face teaching.

The new formative assessment strategy has created a culture of high expectations for academic achievement and engagement, says Mr Marsh.

"We are continuing to see our students engaging more regularly in quality home study, which is supporting their classroom learning, and we are able to track the effects of this for students, teachers and parents through weekly formative performance data."





Case Study 2 – Sylvania Heights Public School

Lessons learnt during COVID-19 are changing face-to-face teaching

There's no one-size-fits-all solution to remote learning, as Sylvania Heights Public School quickly learned during the remote learning period.

When teachers at Sylvania Heights Public School sat down to tailor their teaching to suit remote learning, they quickly realised their first solutions might not be their last.

Monitoring of student progress and feedback from parents, carers and students prompted teachers to continually revise and refine the tools and techniques they were using.

Highly differentiated teaching practices were deployed to address different ability and engagement levels among the students. On the online platform, students were grouped according to their reading and comprehension competency.

Students were provided with a mix of live video teaching, pre-recorded lessons and independent tasks. But as the remote learning period continued, teachers realised student learning outcomes would only improve if they were provided with differentiated instruction.

So, live video sessions were designed to cater for different ability levels within subject areas, with more assistance provided to some students and more challenges given to high achieving students. This ensured that all students were able to access the curriculum at their point of need whilst working from home. Having smaller groups participating

in Zoom lessons allowed a higher level of student interaction, tailored more to their individual needs.

Students only had access to their group's lesson, which meant they were focused on their own learning rather than worrying about what other students were doing.

Zoom links enabled students to log in and ask quick questions about the weekly timetable or to check their understanding of a task. They also had access to separate whole-class video sessions where they could talk to their peers.

The school is now planning to use the student responses to working in this way to improve existing teaching practices. For example, many students found the self-paced, independent aspect of remote learning very rewarding.

Teachers at Sylvania Heights will continue to use online platforms to provide differentiated tasks within their classrooms. The class teacher will, for example, work with small groups while other students work from Google Classroom on assigned tasks.

Homework will be designed in a similar way.





Case Study 3 – Tuggerah Public School

Going 'straight to video' to combat COVID-19 disruption

When one Central Coast school looked for ways to ensure it could continue to provide quality education for its students, it found a solution where everyone could be a star.

Earlier this year, the Principal, teachers, and teacher aides at Tuggerah Public School introduced instructional videos to help students and parents cope with learning from home.

Since then, videos have become embedded in nearly every aspect of life at the NSW Central Coast school, from classroom teaching and homework, to school assemblies, staff and community communication.

Videos dealing with all key learning areas – from maths and spelling to art, music and cooking – have been produced and uploaded to the school's website.

Children can pause or replay the videos at any time to practice what they have learnt, or reflect on new information.

Originally made to help children and parents at home, the videos are now being used in the classroom for differentiated learning and everyday teaching practice.

For example, when a teacher is working with one group of students in class, another group can work independently with the help of an instructional video.

Videos have also been integrated into homework, and parents can watch the material to understand what their child is learning.

The videos have super-charged students' imagination, teaching them how to shoot and edit video, and how to create story boards.

With the return to face-to-face teaching at school, students can still access videos from home to learn languages, receive art or music instruction, or to improve their literacy and numeracy.

With so much of the school work moving to online platforms, staff at Tuggerah Public were careful to also cater for children who couldn't engage online. Family and carers were able to "drive by" the school to safely pick up and drop off work for their children and staff hand delivered work to students' doorsteps.







Using technology to improve connectedness and collaboration



Case Study 4 – Baulkham Hills North Public School

One-stop shop for home learning becomes a family affair

As busy parents and carers struggled to come to grips with their children's remote learning, one school found a solution that let each family do it "their way".

When teachers at Baulkham Hills North started reorganising the school curriculum around remote learning, they quickly realised students would struggle without the support of their families and carers.

But how to best engage parents who themselves were struggling with the massive changes to home and work life created by COVID-19?

The solution was a Learning from Home Hub that parents and students could easily access from the school website.

Every family has had its own challenges to overcome during the remote learning period, but the Hub meant they could access the school's Learning from Home program in a way that suited them.

The site included a veritable cornucopia of useful materials: 'how to' guides about online learning programs; daily schedules and links and documents for the week's lessons for each grade; engaging and interesting online rollcall; wellbeing check-ins; live-streamed weekly assemblies; downloadable offline work packs and library resources; fitness activity

videos, EAL/D language learning activities and translated information for parents, and; a page of links to encourage enquiry-based learning projects.

The Hub helped students feel connected with the school while they were learning from home, thanks to daily roll-call videos, live-streamed assemblies and messages from staff and students.

For students logging in to the Hub, their day began on an upbeat note with a video created by Baulkham Hills North's very own 'Crazy Librarian' and her special guest teachers, which also acted as a prompt for students to mark the roll.

The school continues to use the Hub as a learning resource for students and families. Parents and carers can access it from any web browser to check in and assist their child remotely with their school work.

The Hub's popularity is clear from the weekly traffic to the school website's home page, with unique page views exceeding 2000 during the remote learning period compared with about 280 per week previously.





Case Study 5 – Blairmount Public School

Students and family engagement key to successful remote learning

One Sydney school has piggy-backed on its existing technology skills, and strengthened relationships with students' families to continue delivering high quality education.

Long before COVID-19 created virtual classrooms in NSW schools, teachers at Blairmount Public School, in Sydney's south west, had integrated digital technology into the school curriculum.

The primary school's students were already familiar with platforms such as Google Classroom and Seesaw when remote learning was introduced at Blairmount earlier this year.

But the school knew that wasn't enough to ensure all of its students would continue to receive quality education; it had to make sure the children could access digital devices and Wi-Fi at home, and that parents and carers felt comfortable supporting their child's virtual education.

To that end, the school lent 190 tablets to its students, and Blairmount's two Assistant Principal Pedagogy coaches contacted those families who hadn't yet engaged with the remote learning platforms to ask if they needed technological support.

Help was offered via phone, video conference calls or in person at the school.

Teachers monitored their students' progress, and provided feedback via text or voice recordings on the online platforms, and over the phone, which helped them tailor work for each student.

That preparation meant all of Blairmount's students had access to high quality learning opportunities during remote learning.

With teachers in constant contact with families, discussing students' learning and checking how parents and carers were coping, relationships between families and the school were strengthened for the future.



Case Study 6 – Gunnedah South Public School

When the virtual world becomes part of the normal school day

Gunnedah South Public School's embrace of digital learning didn't stop at the classroom door: everything from school assemblies to music performances is now online.

At Gunnedah South Public School, in north-west NSW, students are so connected and engaged with their schoolwork you could almost forget COVID-19 had turned teaching and learning upside down.

Student achievements and birthdays are celebrated at virtual school assemblies developed by the student leadership team, and students have access to their own classroom channel, joining daily 'meet nows' to share work and receive feedback with classmates and teachers.

There is a virtual school library where students can talk to the librarian, browse online book shelves and explore online exhibitions, and even a playground channel where, under teacher supervision, students can chat with their classmates.

Conscious that no child should be left behind because of the disruption to school life, Gunnedah South Public's Aboriginal Education Team created an online space where all students could connect with each other, and a 'Word of the Week' video is released that celebrates the local Gamilaraay language.

Students with musical talents took part in the Gunnedah Online Music Eisteddfod Channel, while budding artists participate in an online art competition.

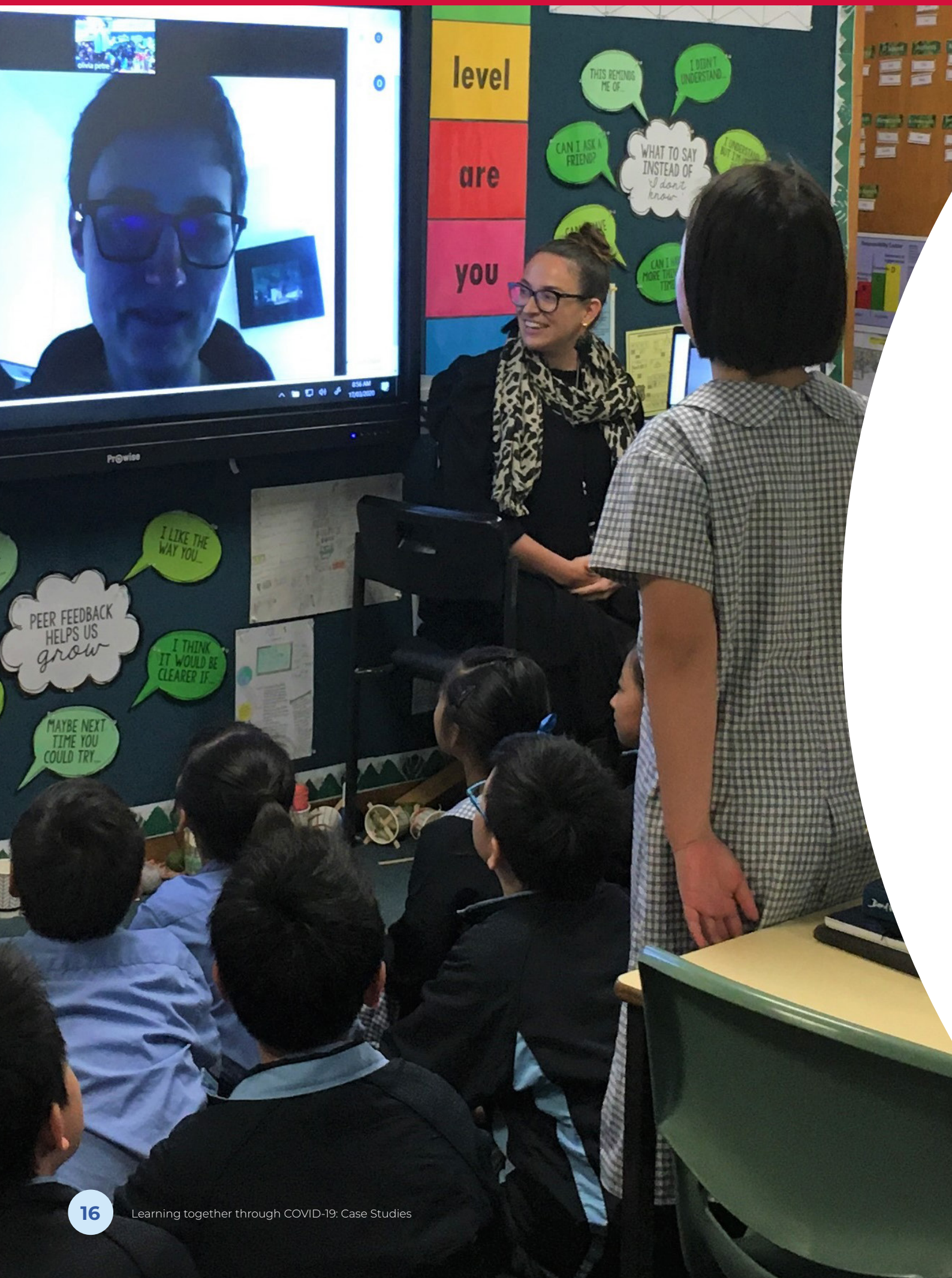
The school with the support from the P&C bought more than 400 laptops, and customised all 617 laptops to ensure every student had access to its online platform on an even playing field. It also provided USBs to children who didn't have access to Wi-Fi so learning could always happen.

All of these online learning platforms have enabled the school's teachers to adopt a tailored approach to regular classroom activities. High-achieving students, for example, are challenged with Extension Maths and Writing Channels, while other students are given additional support via individualised online lessons.

Teachers have developed step-by-step instructions to guide students through online learning platforms, and have designed self-explanatory, engaging and relevant lessons to make the online learning experience as smooth as possible.

Gunnedah South's online revolution has even extended to school planning and administration. The school team remains committed to every student having access and success with schooling, no matter the location.







Case Study 7 – North Rocks Public School

An exciting global partnership helps ease COVID-19 anxiety

Students from one Sydney school are exploring their role as global citizens thanks to a unique collaboration with the World Health Organization.

As they watched their students become increasingly anxious about the spread of COVID-19, teachers at North Rocks Public School decided to reach out to the World Health Organization (WHO) for guidance.

In a video conference held earlier this year with a technical officer in WHO's Department of Mental Health and Substance Use, Dr Katrin Seeher, the students were able to ask questions about the virus and express their concerns about its spread.

Their teachers had encouraged the students to share their concerns so the WHO could help other children around the world who were feeling the same way.

Dr Seeher and her colleagues had been gathering information from students around the world about how they felt about the virus, which was then addressed through the children's book, *My Hero is You*, developed by WHO and other UN agencies as part of, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Reference Group on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings.

The book which has been translated into 120 languages can be found on the UNICEF website (<https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/my-hero-you>) and has been shared worldwide.

Over 1,700 children, parents, caregivers and teachers from around the world have shared their stories about how they are coping with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Dr Seeher reassured the North Rocks students that feeling anxious and stressed was a normal emotion and not one only felt by students. She also clarified some of the misconceptions held by the students about the virus, and discussed ways in which everyone could keep themselves and their families safe.

In the wake of that discussion, North Rocks asked its students to create comic books that explained to students elsewhere how to keep themselves physically and mentally healthy during the pandemic. Some of these comics were shared with Dr Seeher and her colleagues.



Supporting community connections



Case Study 8 – Abbotsford Public School

A blanket solution irons out the wrinkles in remote learning

Some schools are injecting a bit of old-fashioned fun into a curriculum increasingly dominated by computer-based learning.

Abbotsford Public School is literally wrapping its students in learning with a school badge challenge with a difference.

During remote learning, children undertook activities from Active Learning Packs designed by their teachers. The school felt it was important to acknowledge the fabulous parent/school partnership, which was being undertaken to support students continuing their learning and created a list of tasks that all students could complete at home.

The students at the Sydney primary school are awarded achievement badges each time they complete one of the tasks in the challenge. With their parents' help, the children iron the badges onto school blankets.

The initial idea behind the challenge was to foster partnerships between teachers, and students and their families during the remote learning period. During a complex period in parents' lives, the school wanted to support parents' in acknowledging that activities being undertaken in the home were important in helping to develop the social/emotional needs of their child.

The challenge includes 20 tasks, such as building with Lego, caring for a pet, gardening or learning about astronomy.

The tasks range in complexity, allowing all children from Kindergarten to Year 6 to become involved. They are completed at home with support from parents.

Parents report enjoying helping their children learn about the world, and are pleased that not all of the curriculum is tied to computer learning, with their children spending time outside, for example, to earn a 'Bird Watching' badge, or helping in the kitchen to earn a 'Cooking up a Storm' badge.

Abbotsford Public School students now have a memento of their remote learning that will help them reflect on what school looked like and how they stayed connected with their peers and their teachers during the remote learning period.





ABBOTSFORD
PUBLIC SCHOOL





Case Study 9 – Cumnock Public School

One schools' Covid-19 response a simmering success

In rural areas, 2020 will be remembered for the dual challenges of drought and COVID-19. But as the efforts of one small school have shown, rural communities know how to rally during tough times.

Parent volunteers play a vital role preparing lunches for students at Cumnock Public School, which has a large proportion of low-socioeconomic and Indigenous students.

But social distancing restrictions put in place in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic put an end to that help, and the school canteen was closed.

Keen to help alleviate the financial pressure in the local community and ensure its students continued to eat well at school, Cumnock PS instituted “Friday Feasts”, a program that incorporates nutritionally balanced meals into the school curriculum.

It was a whole of school solution, with years 5 and 6 students helping to brainstorm, budget, source, prepare, dice, cook, mix and serve their fellow students with delicious meals every Friday.

The little chefs took inspiration from international dishes, cooking fried rice, mini quiches, nachos and pastry scrolls, and even trying their hands at a delicious Japanese savory pancake called Okonomiyaki. Everyone looked forward to seeing what was on the menu each week.

The program's benefits stretched beyond filling empty tummies during the school day: the children learnt to cook easy and delicious meals that they could take home to their families. A “Friday Feasts” recipe book was collated and illustrated by the children, supporting their numeracy and literacy skills.

Students enjoyed cooking delicious, healthy meals at home, and parents were so impressed they asked that the program continue for the remainder of the year.

The school is now planning to also develop a sustainable vegetable garden.



Case Study 10 – Fairfield High School

Language need not be a barrier to remote learning

Schools everywhere have been disrupted by COVID-19 but you can double that disruption when there is a large number of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

The Intensive English Centre (IEC) at Fairfield High School in Sydney's south-western suburbs provides intensive English language instruction, and welfare and settlement support to newly-arrived migrant, refugee and international students.

The students come from as far afield as Vietnam, South America and Africa, and from war-torn nations such as Iraq and Syria. Their schooling disrupted by war and migration, their lives marked by trauma, these students face significant disadvantage when it comes to learning English and other subjects.

To cater for the unique needs of IEC students, Fairfield High has created a tailored Remote Learning Guide for the children and their families to ensure continuity of learning and equitable access to education.

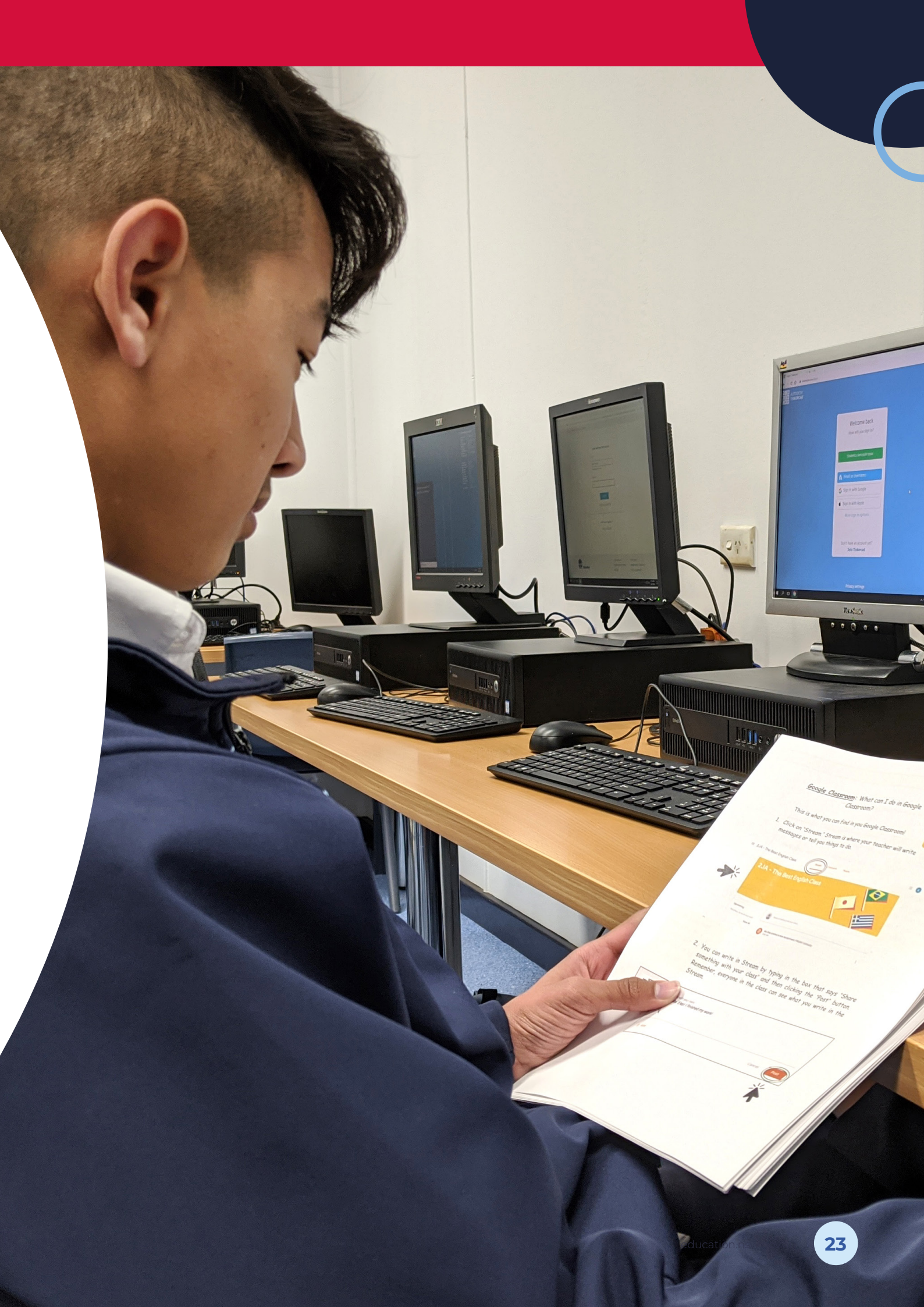
Instructions that are usually only available to English-speaking students have been translated into various languages and collated into one, easily accessible document.

For example, a detailed bilingual English-Arabic guide helps newly-arrived refugee students navigate the school's remote learning platform.

The guide provides students with useful step-by-step instructions in English and Arabic on a range of topics including: how to use school email; how to join and use the online platform; how to use the student's own language on the computer; and general advice about the rules and guidelines for online learning.

The guide has boosted students' engagement and confidence, and in some cases, for the first time, parents who can't speak English have been able to help their children with homework because the instructions are in their own language.

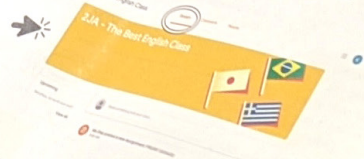
Teachers are using the guide as a teaching strategy to further develop English language-based activities, creating quizzes and comprehension exercises that complement existing teaching programs. It is also an effective tool for face-to-face lessons.



Google Classroom: What can I do in Google Classroom?

This is what you can find in your Google Classroom!

1. Click on "Stream". Stream is where your teacher will write messages or tell you things to do.



2. You can write in Stream by typing in the box that says "Share something with your class" and then clicking the "Post" button. Remember, everyone in the class can see what you write in the Stream.

Share something with your class

Post





Engaging learners through video



Case Study 11 – Punchbowl Boys' High School

COVID-19 prompts a total digital transformation at Punchbowl

One school's innovative use of technology for learning and engagement has proved popular with teachers, students and their families.

An online robotics and engineering club is just one example of how Punchbowl Boys' High School in Sydney's western suburbs has leveraged technology in ways that will continue in a post-pandemic world.

The school uses high-quality video to update its community about various developments; it has invested in a fully-equipped film room for students, and; it has launched a series of EdTalk videos where teachers and students share their experiences with the rest of the school community.

The talks tackle a wide range of topics, such as online learning, critical and creative teaching at home, flexible learning spaces, and student voice.

Averaging over 700 views per episode across student, P&C and alumni networks via Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, the EdTalks have been so effective in fostering student and teacher engagement that they will continue as a regular part of the school communication system.

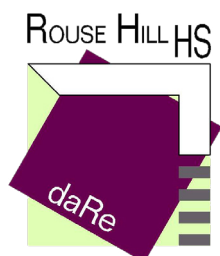
Virtual Assemblies were used also to recognise and celebrate student achievement and enable parents, caregivers and other community members to attend.

The school website was transformed into a single hub that connects all of Punchbowl Boys' online communications, attracting up to 1000 views per week at the height of the pandemic.

Even the school newsletter went online, and included high-quality videos, photo galleries and social media posts.

Inspired by Australian school teacher Eddie Woo, best known for his online mathematics lessons published on YouTube, Punchbowl Boys' adopted the Flipped Classroom model. All of the school's teachers filmed a five-minute lesson to familiarise students with online learning. These video tutorials were shared via email and on social media platforms.

The school also developed its own YouTube Channel hosting video tutorials, EdTalks, updates from the school's principal and deputy principal, and from the library and other faculties. Student voice projects are stored on the channel too for all of the community to enjoy.



Case Study 12 – Rouse Hill High School

Virtual reality helps keep traditions and school community alive

Some school traditions are worth keeping hold of even in the toughest of times, like student recognition and teacher-parent nights.

Award nights have long been a powerful way to reward students for their hard work and achievements, and to share those achievements with the broader school community, and parents and friends.

But when COVID-19 pushed students into remote learning, at first it seemed almost impossible to continue with this great tradition.

Unwilling to cancel important school events, Rouse Hill High School in Sydney's Hills District decided to take its assemblies online to keep the community connected during the pandemic.

Pre-recorded video messages from the school's principal and year advisors celebrating student achievements were played in each classroom, and students were presented with certificates of achievement. Photos of the award recipients were then posted on Facebook to spread the good news about their achievements.

The school also turned to the virtual world to continue with parent-teacher nights, which had become more important than ever due to the extra load on student shoulders thanks to remote learning, and the stresses associated with social distancing and virus testing.

Parents could book a timeslot to join a Zoom meeting with teachers to discuss their child's progress.

When it came to the school's most senior students, the traditional Stage 6 Subject Selection evenings were replaced with a series of subject-specific video links designed by expert teachers to tell students about the requirements for each subject.

Students could book interviews online to talk to head teachers about their subject choices or submit questions via Google Forms.

Thanks to its decision to combine the traditions of the past with today's technology, Rouse Hill High has emerged from remote learning with its school community intact.







Case Study 13 – Waratah Public School

Videos create a bridge between school and home learning

One preschool's decision to focus on joint STEM projects during the remote learning period has given birth to a bunch of budding scientists.

"Don't try this at home" is a well-worn mantra for many a TV presenter. But that's exactly what Waratah Public School told its young students to do during the remote learning period.

The Newcastle school wanted to encourage its students to be "little scientists" who investigated and hypothesised, and then collected, recorded and interpreted data.

To that end, many of the school's Learning from Home projects were designed as joint STEM projects to expand children's thinking, make real-life connections and learn new ways to think about and solve problems.

During the remote learning period, teachers created a series of videos explaining and demonstrating science experiments. Children and their parents and carers could watch the videos at home, repeat the experiments and then share the results with their teachers via photos or videos.

The videos helped create a bridge between previous face-to-face learning at the preschool and remote work done by the children during the pandemic. There was regular contact with families about what the children were learning, and the videos helped the children follow a regular learning routine.

Providing children with plenty of time to carry out the experiments, and repeatedly exposing them to the same types of experiences allowed them to experiment and solve problems independently and build their knowledge and understanding.

Since resuming normal schooling, Waratah's teachers have noted the children are working together more closely to explore STEM ideas and concepts, and are asking questions at every opportunity about how and why things happen in certain ways.



Supporting wellbeing



Case Study 14 – Canterbury Boys' High School

Mindfulness initiative restores sense of calm amid COVID-19 storm

One Sydney school is nurturing its students' physical and mental health by asking them to stop, breath, and look after themselves.

The switch to remote and digital learning during the COVID-19 pandemic has thrown up lots of innovative teaching methods.

But concerns that heavy reliance on technology could also harm children's physical and mental health prompted Canterbury Boys' High School in Sydney's Inner West to look for ways to keep students physically active, boost their emotional and psychological wellbeing, and support their relationships with family and friends.

The school decided to introduce 'Wellbeing Wednesdays', an initiative that encourages students to reduce the amount of time they spend on digital devices, become more active, and strengthen relationships with their families and other people.

Physical activities could be as simple as walking the family dog before or after school, or walking around the block during class break. Students are encouraged to try new things, such as reading a book from a genre they've not previously explored, learning to mediate, or starting a daily journal.

'Wellbeing Wednesdays' also encourage students to spend time with their families – gardening or cooking together – and to create connections outside of their family and nurture existing friendships.

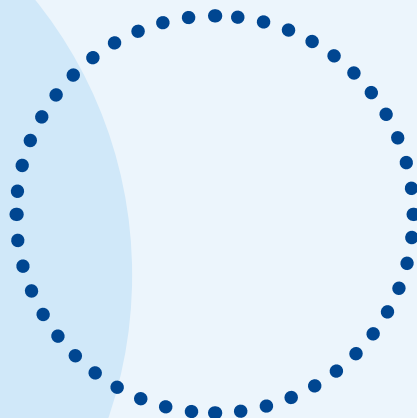
Mindfulness applications have now been added to Canterbury Boys' classroom repertoire, incorporating 'brain breaks' to help students focus on their lessons, and to help reduce stress.

Parents, students and teachers have overwhelmingly adopted 'Wellbeing Wednesdays', prompting the school to continue the initiative until students can fully re-engage in sport and other group activities.

The school has also created a special council of staff, school student leaders and parents that meets online fortnightly to discuss issues and challenges faced during the pandemic, and how to address them.

This COVID-19 Council makes sure the community voice is heard, the school community is kept safe, and concerns are promptly acted upon by the school.





Your Wellbeing Is Important To Us!

Being a teenager is difficult no matter what, and the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is making it even harder. With school closures, we know that you are going to miss everyday moments like chatting with friends and participating in class. We also know that it might be more difficult than usual to take care of your mental health and overall wellbeing.

As your allocated Sport periods will be replaced by Wellbeing periods, we have designed some lessons to help you de-stress and focus on your own develop to help you to be the best person you can be!

General Instructions:

Each week you will be provided a **NEW** lesson that focuses on your Wellbeing. To access your lesson every Wednesday, you will need to 'click' on the link provided for that specific date.

Here, you will be asked to make a 'copy' of the Google Doc. This will allow you to:

- Change the name of the Document
- Save it in your Google Drive
- Fill in the Doc with your responses as necessary
- You will need to work through the tasks at your own pace and follow the links provided (where necessary) to complete each of the activities.

Lesson:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1uY2uBdVmx0g8BUSA07e5c22NKRy03pko0evG4e/copy>

- Wednesday 20th May 2020
- **Focus** - Gratitude

Lesson:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1XyY0K8L0YrAv0B0Kv6GmK6#qj00N8s01HC4dc0x>

- Wednesday 13th May 2020
- **Focus** - Mindfulness

Lesson:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/13jzyg0B8d5A40R27cTetouUKdMm-W74p0bA0nN6/copy>

Request a Wellbeing Check In

By filling out this form, you are requesting to be contacted by your Year Adviser, Deputy Principal or the School Counsellor at Greystanes High School. You want them to call and touch base with you to see how you are travelling and to offer support.

Please note that this form is for Greystanes High School students only and that it may take up to 24 hours for the phone call to be made. The information that is collected from you will **ONLY** be used to best inform the individual making the call and then will be deleted.

* Required

Your Name *

Your answer

Email Address @education *

Your answer

Student Year *

- ☐ 7
- ☐ 8
- ☐ 9
- ☐ 10
- ☐ 11
- ☐ 12



Case Study 15 – Greystanes High School

A little TLC can make all the difference in tough times

Ensuring the wellbeing of students is important in the best of times, but has taken on even greater urgency during COVID-19.

COVID-19 has shone a spotlight on mental health, with students worrying about what the pandemic will mean for their education now and in the years ahead.

Learning from home, combined with the daily challenges of social distancing and virus testing, can be distracting and draining for students, especially senior students.

To respond to this challenge, Greystanes High School in Sydney's western suburbs has developed a Wellbeing website that delivers care and ongoing support and mentoring for students at the school.

The website features a self-referral system that allows students to use an online form to request a wellbeing check-in phone call from the school.

Experience shows students feel more comfortable requesting assistance via an online medium rather than making the request in person to a year adviser, deputy principal or a school counsellor.

Greystanes' referral system was instituted when remote learning began in NSW and it is still being used by students now that they have returned to face-to-face learning at school.

Another key feature of the school's pastoral care is its 'Wellbeing Wednesday' lessons, which were introduced as student anxiety levels soared in recent months.

These lessons and tasks encourage students to reflect on their experiences during COVID-19, develop resilience in the face of challenges and setbacks, and look after their physical and mental health.

'Wellbeing Wednesday' has been so popular with the school's students that staff have decided to continue the program throughout Term 2, this year.

'Mindful Mondays' are also being trialled across the whole school.



Great practices across all schools

Wide range of high quality submissions showcase the NSW Education System

Submissions across school sectors highlighted the dedication of teachers to ensuring the continuity of learning and wellbeing of all students during COVID-19

The submissions highlighted some of the particular challenges that schools had to overcome including:

- The loss of opportunities for conversations between students and staff between classes or in lunch breaks as students learned from home
- Disruption to the standard structure of a school day impacting on student learning
- Prohibitions on large gatherings impacting on student subject selection and careers information evenings
- Monitoring student welfare and wellbeing outside of school grounds.

Some of the new or changed practices that schools developed to help face these challenges were:

- organising new online systems which created a schedule but informal platform for teachers to provide feedback and mentoring to students outside of specific classes
- providing clear routines and redesigning lesson and assessment plans for the remote learning environment
- virtual events such as careers and subject selection evenings, including virtual meetings with parents
- cross-disciplinary engagement to support students including linking with social workers and the use of schools as community hubs to support the whole school community through the high stress periods of COVID-19.



Say hello

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