



St Philip's Christian College DALE and SPCC DALE Young Parents

# Resilience of learners during COVID-19

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Despite there being a significant disruption to the typical education model during COVID-19 we experienced resilience in our students that exceeded our expectation. As a school for students with diagnosed mental health disorders and teen parents you could presume that our students would have had greater difficulty with the notion having to adapt to the constant changes that COVID-19 brought with it, but we saw relationships built and perseverance through the uncertainty.

As a set of special schools, we knew that wellbeing had to be at the forefront of all of our decisions and plans for our students, staff and families of our community. We knew that eventually school would get back to the 'normal' mode of educating students but that we could potentially have a bigger issue getting our students to reengage if the 'learning at home' experience worked better for them, or if the disruption caused a significant adverse emotional response and as such prohibited them from returning. We predicted that we may see an increase in school refusal, and an increase in drop-out rates. Our mission was to be on the front foot of this in pursuit of prevention.

Our school, like many, provides students with safety, structure, consistency, belonging and social context that they do not, or are unable to obtain

in any other setting. We knew that some of our families would struggle to match the learning and support that our school provides, but we also knew that some of our families could also offer some things that school could not in such a stressful and uncertain time and we needed to work together to achieve the best outcomes for students.

*Learning!*

## FOCUS ON WELLBEING AND BUILD CONNECTION

- between families and the school
- between teachers and students
- between students and their peers
- between staff
- between leadership and our school community

We were already poised on this journey of focussing on wellbeing through our research and implementation of responsive classroom practices, contextually reformed into the **DALE Day** structure, which we were able to pick up and modify for the purposes of home-based learning. Our research and implementation of the **Collaborative and Proactive Solutions (CPS) model**, was also a foundational structure we were able to use to springboard into this new 'normal' with the identification and solving of problems creating barriers for our students.

## Learning 2

### ESSENTIAL IS A MEANINGFUL WORD

As a group of special needs and special assistance schools, we needed to remain open for those students not only of essential workers, but also of those who we were essential for. We needed to provide opportunity for continued education and wellbeing support for those who continued to attend school because it was essential for them to attend, and those who were self-isolating at home. For this purpose, we launched into a dual delivery mode of education – in-class education able to be accessed from home via online platforms including iLearn and Zoom.

*Flexible learning options* had always been on our agenda to assist those students whose mental health prevented them from attending school full-time, but COVID-19 saw this advance into the present instead of the future focus it has previously been afforded. We set about purchasing cameras and lapel mics to assist teachers deliver their classes in the dual delivery mode. We upskilled staff in online learning management systems and assisted parents on this journey also.

## Learning 3

### WELLBEING IS KEY

The focus on *Social and Emotional Learning* during this time saw an increase in student engagement with the wellbeing activities held online, and for those who were unable to access the Zoom links, they participated by sending in photos of themselves doing the same activities, which were shared with classmates. This collective comradery was powerful in the building of learners who were connected to their teachers and peers and as such engaged like we had not expected.

We also became conscious of the need to maintain connection despite access to technology as some of our students were unable to access the online platforms. This saw the introduction of:

- Education packs: printed booklets, maths and art supplies, loan computers
- Wellbeing packs: Zones of Regulation print outs, colouring in, activity calendars

These were picked up from school or delivered to families by our staff. Our staff made weekly phone calls to families to ask how they were going and if the school could do anything to assist. This link between home and school was vital to the maintenance of connection and assisted parents and carers to feel heard and supported during the home learning experience.



## Learning 4

### STAFF WELLBEING MATTERS

Staff wellbeing was also pivotal to the success of building resilient learners during COVID-19. Staff became the *core link* between students and school and their commitment to the dual delivery mode learning was essential.

Ways to support staff during this time included:

- open and transparent communication
- setting up home offices with the provision of desks and chairs from school
- self-care reminders
- practicing gratitude
- provision of time
- engagement in whole-school fun challenges

## Learning 5

### HOME AND SCHOOL RELATIONSHIP IS VITAL

During this time relationships forged between school and home which was integral to the building of resilient learners. Based on trust and *authentic connection* the relationship between our school and the families we cater for became stronger during the pandemic. Students returned during Term 2 with a renewed appreciation for face-to-face learning and their social and professional relationships within the school context.

The resilience shown by our students during the pandemic exceeded our expectation and proved that they could persevere through adversity to learn and develop their skills in coping, flexibility and adaptability. Their re-engagement with face-to-face learning has been successful and one that was unexpected in such an uncertain time.

We are appreciative of the learnings we have made and have taken many silver linings out of the experience. Our students, despite their ongoing difficulties grew in ways we did not expect and we are forging ahead with these new discoveries into 2021 with the maintenance of our focus being on wellbeing and building connection with our community.