

Al Noori Muslim School

Digital practices to support learning

July 2021



Acknowledgement

This case study was commissioned by the Association of Independent Schools of NSW as part of a broader study to investigate teachers' effective and inclusive digital pedagogies, as well as emerging digital practices during and after the period of remote learning.

Research Team

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Introduction to the research project

The 2020 remote teaching period highlighted the need for educators to develop a broad and inclusive set of digital practices to support student learning. Their approaches needed to enable learning across formal spaces (physical and virtual) such as classrooms and learning management systems, as well as home learning environments. Educators also needed to cater for the needs and circumstances of all students, including those with additional needs, and those with home technology access or connectivity limitations.

This case study is part of a broader research project seeking to understand teachers' effective and inclusive digital pedagogies, as well as emerging digital practices during and after the period of remote teaching. It is seeking to uncover effective digital practices, and the factors that influenced their successful implementation. Together these will assist in informing next practices with digital technologies across a range of diverse school contexts.

The research is guided by the following key question:

What digital learning practices have teachers used to support learning practices, in ways that are flexible, accessible and promote student agency and wellbeing?

Methodology Overview

- **Case Study approach** – five NSW independent schools.
- **Data collection** – Term 4, 2020 and Term 1-2, 2021.
- **Data sources:**
 - interviews with school leadership, lead teachers, and teachers from various disciplines
 - focus groups with small groups of students
 - short online survey of students across at least one cohort in each case school (min. 100 students).
- Ethics approval: UTS HREC ETH20-5354 - Parental permission was sought as part of the formal research ethics process.
- Data collected through a mixture of remote and face to face connections.

In addition to the qualitative data collected, the research also utilises a quantitative survey instrument across AISNSW schools to gain additional insights into teachers' digital pedagogies, and other AISNSW priority areas: supporting student wellbeing, digital equity and inclusion during the remote teaching period.

- Selective, co-educational Muslim school
- Kindergarten to Year 12
- Enrolment: approx. 1900 students
- 98% from a language background other than English.

Source: www.myschool.edu.au.

About Al Noori Muslim School

Al Noori Muslim School was the second case study in this project, with data collected during Term 1, 2021.

Data were collected through a focus group with two key members of the leadership team, five focus groups (three with teachers, and two with students), and a student survey of 638 students. Artefacts including sample student work and school policies were also collected.



Al Noori Case Study Data Collection

School leader focus group:

- 30 minute focus group with two school leaders, the Head of School Operations and Performance, Joumana Dennaoui, and the Welfare Coordinator, Badiah Jalloul.

Teacher and student focus groups:

- 30 minute focus group with two secondary Human Society and Its Environment (HSIE) teachers;
- 30 minute focus group with a secondary science teacher and a secondary maths teacher;
- 30 minute focus group with a secondary English teacher and a secondary maths teacher;
- two 30 minute focus groups, each with ten secondary students from Year 8 to Year 11.

Note: Two teachers were also subject coordinators (Maths and English)

Student survey:

- 638 students from Years 5-12

Research Findings & Insights

The main aims of the school during the remote teaching period were to provide stability and consistency for teachers, students and their families. Visible leadership provided reassurance and staff were encouraged to continue a focus on academic outcomes. Community wellbeing, staff collaboration and enhanced collegiality were emphasised. The school provided resources and extensive technology support for teachers and families, and leaders developed guidelines supporting a uniform approach to online teaching and learning across the school.

Digital learning practices were designed to avoid disruption to students and teachers. These approaches aimed to replicate campus-based practices, typically promoting whole-class, synchronous online interaction and engagement. Staff displayed extraordinary commitment to provide individual remedial support to students before, during and after school. Post-lockdown, the remote teaching period positively influenced fresh ways of supporting staff collaboration, and new blended and peer learning approaches.

School priorities for the remote teaching period

Leveraging digital practices.

At the end of 2019, the school embarked on the Designing for Deep Learning program with AISNSW. As a result, the school had begun to leverage digital practices to support learning and had launched Microsoft Teams within the school. Therefore, in early 2020, when a move to remote learning was required, the school was in the early stages of using updated digital learning practices.

Providing visible leadership.

A priority for the school was to provide visible leadership and stability in a time of uncertainty due to COVID-19. It was important to reassure the school community so that everyone felt safe while maintaining as much consistency of learning as possible. The leadership remained visible to teachers, students and the school community. A calm approach was adopted by school leaders, aligned with part of the school ethos to 'live in the present moment'. School leaders listened to the community and paid attention to their concerns, spending substantial time on the phone reassuring parents. The school quickly developed a working from home policy, which included all the requirements, checklists and tips for the students, and this was emailed to parents.

Providing digital resources and leadership support.

The staff were provided with all the required technology to livestream classes from home. This included laptops and iPads if necessary. This level of resourcing as well as the extensive communication and visible leadership helped ease teachers' anxiety. While teachers were working from home, the school leaders were always at school and social distancing in their offices. The teachers knew that if there was any issue they could go to the school to speak to the leaders. As one school leader said: **"just knowing that they've got someone that they can rely on and then all the [ICT] resources [provided by the school]"** was helpful in reducing teachers' stress levels and therefore supporting teachers' wellbeing.

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(School Leader)

Key factors affecting remote teaching practices

Collegiality and teamwork enhanced connection and supports.

All participants reported collegiality and teamwork among the teaching staff and leadership team as a major factor supporting their success in the lockdown and beyond. This approach was viewed as contributing to a strong school community and endorsed by the school leadership during the lockdown to create a positive staff mindset. As one teacher indicated: **"... the best message from the school [was], that we're in this together, we help each other. I think that together we did get through it in a positive way."** (HSIE teacher, Focus Group)

"We used the hashtag 'we are all in this together' so I think we're also proud that we didn't do it alone. We connected."

(Leader, Focus Group)

"We used the hashtag 'we are all in this together' so I think we're also proud that we didn't do it alone. We connected." (Leader, Focus Group)

Connected and collaborative approaches were modelled and supported by school leaders and subject coordinators. Teachers regularly archived and shared resources, such as lessons and exams, through Microsoft Teams. This open sharing allowed consistency between classes across cohorts, and also helped reduce staff anxiety. Teachers commented on this approach: **"No-one was isolated as a teacher so at the teacher level we had the idea that we need to work together not only at a faculty level but interfaculty as well."** (English teacher, Focus Group)

"If we help each other and we work as a team it's so much easier, it's consistent but also reduces that anxiety associated with the online learning because I think teachers and students together were quite anxious." (Subject Coordinator, Focus Group)

Preparation for remote teaching enabled a smooth transition.

Before mandatory remote teaching began, the school embarked on a trial with half of the student population working from home at a time. Doing so gave the teachers an authentic opportunity to practice with Microsoft Teams while ensuring all students received the same lessons. This preparation helped when the mandatory remote teaching period occurred. There was no need to run training sessions for the students, although a training video was available on the Microsoft Teams platform. At the beginning of the remote teaching period, a rotating roster was introduced so that some teachers taught from school and some from home.

"If you had an issue then he'd come in and help you. So what made the transition easy is that we had a lot of support"

(HSIE teacher, Focus Group).

Effective technology support reduced challenges.

During the remote learning period, teachers used their own laptop or a tablet device supplied by the school. Students used a range of devices, including their own phones. Teachers and school leaders praised the daily support provided by the school during the remote learning period in relation to the technology needs of both teachers and students. This support ranged from addressing the hardware needs of some staff and students, to assisting with home connection issues.

Part of the rationale for support provided was to reduce staff anxiety during the remote learning period, allowing them to focus on teaching. About half the staff were able to be on campus during the lockdown and were regularly visited by the IT Coordinator: **"If you had an issue then he'd come in and help you. So what made the transition easy is that we had a lot of support"** (HSIE teacher, Focus Group).

“So as a school approach the executives just made decisions, as coordinators we came to an agreement, and then we filtered that down to teachers to make sure that it was the same for all. That meant that the students knew what to expect.”

(Subject Coordinator, Focus Group)

Support by peers enhanced a collegial approach to building technology-based skills.

Peer support with technology was provided through after-school Microsoft Teams training sessions. Some faculties, such as Maths and Science, had already used Microsoft Teams before the remote learning period. Selected teachers were able to act as peer tutors to less confident staff in these sessions. These peer-led sessions enhanced staff collegiality and helped to build: **“a more inclusive, helpful, supportive school environment for us.”** (HSIE teacher, Focus Group) Although technical assistance with Microsoft Teams was the primary goal of these sessions, online pedagogies were also discussed. This developed an **“understanding of how to use Teams as a form of communication with students and to teach”** (HSIE teacher, Focus Group).

Maintaining similar routines to face to face learning minimised disruption.

To assist with consistency and continuity, the decision was taken to follow the school timetable during the remote teaching period. This required all students to attend classes via Microsoft Teams. A timetable of online synchronous classes was scheduled for students that was closely aligned with their normal, pre-remote learning school timetable. To make it easier for students to remember when lessons were beginning and ending, there was a slight modification to timing so that lessons began on the hour or half hour. The consistent approach to the delivery of ‘live’ lessons by all teachers through the Microsoft Teams platform helped students to effectively engage during the remote learning period.

“So as a school approach the executives just made decisions, as coordinators we came to an agreement, and then we filtered that down to teachers to make sure that it was the same for all. That meant that the students knew what to expect.” (Subject Coordinator, Focus Group)

A common approach to the choice of educational technologies was promoted by the school to minimise the need for teachers and students to learn and implement new technologies and practices. The secondary school chose to use Microsoft Teams, One Note and Microsoft Forms as their platforms of choice for online teaching. The primary school adopted slightly different technologies, using Class Dojo and Microsoft Teams for communication and sharing between teachers. Adopting a uniform approach worked well, and according to discipline leaders, ultimately benefited students.

“I think also it was good, we were doing the same thing. We made the decision we were all on Teams, we were all doing Teams meetings and then it was easy for the students. It’s not like the student had to worry about what this teacher expected and what that teacher expected, it was consistent.” (Subject Coordinator, Focus Group)

Effective digital practices during the remote teaching period

Developing understanding of online etiquette.

Teachers addressed foundational online learning expectations and etiquette before the remote learning period. For example, the English department were conscious that online learning was a new context for many students and there was a need for students to be educated in online etiquette and how to participate in online learning spaces: **“I just instructed the teachers to begin the process of setting up the Teams ... and also just posting expectations and etiquettes that we expect online.”** (English coordinator, Focus Group)

“As time went on, we asked ‘how are we going to make sure they’re actually doing the work?’ So we utilised Teams as an assessment area where you can actually use the workbook... This really gave accountability ... we could give them feedback as well.”

(HSIE teacher, Focus Group)

Implementing strategies to monitor learning and provide feedback.

“As time went on, we asked ‘how are we going to make sure they’re actually doing the work?’ So we utilised Teams as an assessment area where you can actually use the workbook... This really gave accountability ... we could give them feedback as well.” (HSIE teacher, Focus Group)

One of the issues that concerned teachers was not knowing whether the students were actually engaging effectively during lessons. They were particularly worried about students who might fall behind and need remedial work after the remote learning period. Teachers developed a range of strategies to overcome this challenge:

- Class Notebook to assign tasks to students. This provided accountability for the students, and allowed teachers to track learning and provide timely feedback.
- General feedback for the class was also given in the Chat area of Microsoft Teams. “That was one of the best strategies to make sure that number one, they were paying attention in class and number two, they knew the work.” (HSIE teacher, Focus Group).

Modelling whole-class interactive learning from face-to-face approaches.

Teachers aimed to engage students in online learning through Microsoft Teams in a way that was modelled off face-to-face teaching approaches. This included leading whole class discussions, exercises and exposition work. Teachers reported on their use of questioning to develop concepts and encourage interaction during Microsoft Teams lessons. These questions initiated a traditional I-R-E type of interaction (Mehan, 1979), that is teachers would initiate (I) the question, students would respond (R) and then teachers would evaluate the response (E).

A number of specific strategies were adopted:



Mirroring - “I would be writing as I’m speaking and the students. ... like they would do in the classroom - they were also writing into their exercise books. My mic would be on, as would theirs, so it almost felt like they were in class, so it was a very engaging lesson. They were talking to me, and we would answer questions together.” (Maths Teacher, Focus Group)



Multiple devices - “I would reach their questions using my second device and answer them verbally for them from the chat. So by having my laptop, my phone and my iPad ... my laptop would be open with the chat in front of me and my iPad is what I’m writing on as I’m talking to them. So I can see the chat, and I’m writing at the same time. I’d verbalise what I was saying and answer their questions... It was really productive and effective. The students said that it’s like we’re in class, there’s no difference at all. If they asked a question I’d stop, so it almost felt like I was writing on the board, and I was there with them, and they really engaged with that.” (Maths teacher, Focus Group)



Annotations - “So I would actually show them my screen during the Teams class, I would share the PowerPoint slide. Now usually in class I would annotate everywhere on it through discussion, through input from students, prompting them through questions. We would annotate all over it, so they’d develop a more in-depth understanding. The only way I could annotate online was by using the comments feature where I could just annotate what I’d usually annotate on the board.” (HSIE Teacher, Focus Group)



Online chat function - “So we would be mirroring the PowerPoint and usually you’d annotate it like you do in class. ... I make them [students] type the notes and that’s what they did, and they typed it in the chat.” (English Teacher, Focus Group). Students would also use the chat feature in Microsoft Teams to take notes or print out the annotated document for their records and further notetaking.

“So all of my lessons during COVID were recorded. So if a student struggled with any particular topic, they were able to go back and re-watch those videos.”

(HSIE teacher, Focus Group).

Providing individual remedial assistance and feedback.

Teachers were concerned about students being ‘left behind’ and invested extra time offering individual remedial support. Teachers used a variety of different strategies to provide support.

Recorded lessons and archives were perceived as useful for this purpose, and were also beneficial to students who had limited access to Wi-Fi or to devices at home. **“So all of my lessons during COVID were recorded. So if a student struggled with any particular topic, they were able to go back and re-watch those videos.”** (HSIE teacher, Focus Group).

Some referred to specific sections of these recordings in their teacher-led remedial work with students, while others, including one of the Maths teachers, used Microsoft Teams to individually assist students: **“Every student has their own page and so I was able to communicate with students privately.”** (Maths Teacher, Focus Group)

Teachers provided generalised feedback in Microsoft Teams after analysing responses to diagnostic surveys in Maths and HSIE: **“A survey that I assigned on Teams had questions about where students struggled the most. ... I later used the information provided by students to make sure that they were actually up-to-date ...”** (HSIE teacher, Focus Group)

Students also used the Microsoft Teams platform for further clarification and support of their learning: **“constantly posting [on MS Teams] just to make sure that they understand the content as well.”** (Maths teacher, Focus Group)

The school instituted before and after school voluntary sessions for students to discuss their progress and ensure that they received the same level of feedback as they normally would at school. The teachers saw the benefit of this individualised support, with one of the HSIE teachers indicating that “during the one-on-one session, you would go through the student’s essay, and you would say this part’s great, this is what you have done well, and here’s how you can improve on it. It was all about that one-on-one communication”.

Enabling student-led activities.

HSIE teachers reported on a student-led, authentic learning approach, involving students finding and sharing newspaper articles on a contemporary issue to upload and act as stimulus for class discussion and debates. One HSIE teacher said he found this strategy helpful for the case study essay component of the syllabus: **“I feel that when it comes time to write these case study essays in the HSC, it’s actually come from what they’ve learnt outside rather than what I tell them. So Microsoft Teams has enabled me or allowed me to do that with them.”** This approach transitioned into a blended learning approach following the remote learning period, as discussed later in this report.

One of the Maths students utilised the online medium to give students an opportunity to create a collaboratively designed test to practise for their upcoming formal assessment: **“They made a mock quiz themselves collaborating on one Word document with myself. I then edited it and then I was able to give it to them, something I would never have been able to do in a classroom, but I can definitely do that online.”** (Maths teacher, Focus Group)

Effective digital practices across the faculties

Different faculties adopted different strategies in recognition of the unique needs of their curriculum area, and teacher skill. Some of these have continued in the post-remote learning environment.

Maths

■ Tracking assignments through OneNote

“Students download the assignment and then turn it in and what that gave me as a teacher, the ability was to assess and see the student work and who was doing it and who wasn’t doing it. If they were not doing it then I could follow up and that was a method of tracking the student work and if they were online or maybe they may have had problems with the technology, so that was a signal that we needed to help them out”. (Maths Teacher, Focus Group)

■ Generating a weekly online quiz

“Probably the challenging part was with homework, to ensure homework was being completed so what we did as a faculty for mathematics, was I told my teachers is to make a weekly quiz. I assigned a team leader for each grade, and I said to them pick five questions from each exercise which gives a 25-question quiz. Essentially if the student can answer the quiz that means they’ve been doing their homework and that was also embedded into forms. It was marked for you, and you could very effectively give feedback. I could give feedback for every individual question as well as an overall comment. I could set deadlines for when they would do it by and I could give them their mark. So this was a way for homework-checking because it was a little bit difficult to check that they were doing their homework every day. Anyone who didn’t perform in the quiz, that’s when we would give the call home, see what’s going on, is everything okay? Or speak to Welfare and that was a fast way to track their progress”.

Science

■ Moving to a flipped learning approach

“I used the Teams ability to record ... you can record the screen. Along with the voiceover and me explaining, I’m actually visually showing them the concept which is a practical concept. Also the fact that this was a recording, and they had a link, they could always go back and revise. That stream now for me is like a library, I have coded lessons and I have a whole bundle. What I’ve done with them at the moment in my Teams is I have my class and I have basically modules and under each module I have lessons. So it’s allowed me to develop these quite nice interactive videos that are always there. The students are telling me that they like them and I’m using them in a semi flipped learning mode now at the moment”. (Science Teacher, Focus Group)

HSIE

■ Revisiting learning through the use of recordings

“The students were really panicking and they’re like ‘why us’ kind of message. I said don’t worry, in fact this is a benefit for you because I’m going to record all my lessons whereas in class you’re not able to. So all of my lessons during COVID were recorded so if a student struggled with any particular topic they were able to go back and re-watch those videos. It actually benefited me as well because when students came to me and said ‘Sir, how do I do this?’, I would put up the video and say, ‘Do you remember when I said this?’ I can show them when I said, ‘This is what I mean by that.’ (HSIE Teacher, Focus Group)

Practices to support student inclusion

Strategies were implemented to overcome Internet access and device sharing challenges.

Although most students had access to the Internet at home, the school offered to assist students by providing data cards for those who had access challenges. Many families had to share devices between siblings as described by one teacher. **“I had a student who had three other siblings and they only had one desktop computer at home and he’s like ‘Yeah but my brother’s lessons are running the same time as my lessons. I can’t miss out on my work’ .”** HSIE teacher (Focus Group) Regular recording of lessons assisted in these situations, and the teacher was able to tell the student: **“I will run the lesson [at the regular time] but I will record it, that way after your brother finishes from the desktop you can go on, you can press the recording, you have access to all the worksheets and do your work that way”.**

Providing non-digital options and enabling use of multiple devices.

Some students, because of time, disability or difficulty, printed lesson notes which allowed them to complete learning at home in a way that worked best for them. Teachers also supported students to use multiple devices to access learning.

“Because of the way I had set up the resource they didn’t really need much Internet and it also was synched to their phone if they downloaded the app. We taught them how to have Teams on their phones and on their devices so a lot of the students said that they could still access things on their phone. So if they went somewhere with Wi-Fi or even if they were at home and someone else was using the computer they could still access everything because of the apps and the way they are all embedded and integrated together. So that worked quite well.” (Maths teacher, Focus Group)

Approaches to support wellbeing

> STAFF WELLBEING

Staff wellbeing was a primary concern for school leaders, who helped resource staff with training and devices for online teaching. They also minimised the need for adopting new digital approaches that might indirectly increase time needed for preparation of lessons. The following strategies were viewed as important, as despite this, there was agreement amongst teachers that time needed to plan and implement learning initially increased. They attributed this to the extra preparation of materials, and changing teaching and learning strategies to accommodate for online teaching.

A deliberate focus on synchronous teaching reduced teacher workload.

To assist with staff wellbeing, the school leadership decided that all lessons would be run live to help teachers to manage workloads. So, there were no pre-recorded videos, just voice and the screen that the teacher wrote on. As one of the leaders explained: **“Sometimes you can be more relaxed if there’s no preparation, it comes natural to the teacher. So we said, just run your lesson. We allocated a classroom for every teacher with all the facilities that they needed, and they were in a classroom obviously with no students. ... They would run the session, they’d mark the roll, they would write on the board, obviously displayed on the screen for the students. So that in terms of staff wellbeing, we took that measure just to help staff lower their expectations of themselves of having everything perfect”.**

“We advised that teachers also have families at home, don’t expect an answer now within 48 hours. So we actually had to develop guidelines for the teachers and for the families to say, ‘switch off, you don’t have to be learning all the time’.”

(School Leader, Focus Group).

“We were on the phone ... for hours just reassuring parents, saying it’s okay, you don’t have to be perfect.”

(School Leader, Focus Group).

Creating clear boundaries and expectations, helped to support work-life balance.

There was a clear endorsement of staff managing a healthy work-life balance and not being ‘available 24/7’ online. Because they were constantly accessible to students and parents online, some teachers were finding it difficult to switch off. Their after-school use of mobile phones exacerbated the problem. As mentioned previously, many teachers also monitored and responded to students’ online requests for assistance before and after school. For that reason, teachers were told that the school day finished at 4.30 and they had to log off. One school leader reported that she explained to a teacher: **“That’s how it’s got to be because you’ve got to get some exercise, you’ve got to get some sleep, spend time with family because even families were living isolated lives because we couldn’t visit each other’s houses”.**

Development of guidelines assisted in managing parental expectations.

School leaders developed guidelines, advising parents of realistic expectations for teacher email replies and student learning time at home. **“We advised that teachers also have families at home, don’t expect an answer now within 48 hours. So we actually had to develop guidelines for the teachers and for the families to say, ‘switch off, you don’t have to be learning all the time’.”** (School Leader, Focus Group).

> STUDENT WELLBEING

Communicating with the school community was vital.

The school considered communication key to student wellbeing. School newsletters were published more frequently and included details of services and support available to families, advice from school counselling staff, and online learning tips.

“So I think the main thing with welfare was to let everybody know that we are here to support them if they need it, to reach out. We were doing our constant checks, and being present in their online learning because once they were not visible to us and we’re not visible to them, some kids would think oh we can relax now. So we were constantly emailing them, calling them so they thought okay, no, we need to get on board.” (School Leader, Focus Group)

A goal of the school communications was to support parents at home who were trying to help facilitate their children’s learning, sometimes under challenging circumstances. Parents were given strategies and support.

“We were on the phone ... for hours just reassuring parents, saying it’s okay, you don’t have to be perfect.” (School Leader, Focus Group).

“We were communicating with the parents, giving them a courtesy call on how things are going, did they need help? Do they need any support because obviously you have issues sometimes with access to resource in different families, different situations, offering that assistance” (School Leader, Focus Group)

The school conducted an online survey asking for feedback from parents and students towards the end of the remote learning period. The survey sought feedback on what the teachers did well during that period and whether there were elements they would like teachers to keep doing. The school wanted to ascertain how the students felt about coming back to school for face-to-face learning, and whether they were nervous about coming back to school.

Welfare staff provided essential supports to both students and staff.

The school has two welfare co-ordinators, one for male students and one for female students. Teachers were advised to contact them if there were any trends when marking attendance or if any issues arose during lessons. The welfare co-ordinators were on the phones during the day just checking in with students, not only about behaviour but also providing welfare checks if student attendance warranted them.

"I think in the future, if we're headed there, a more flexible timetable for students to incorporate more physical activity during the day is very important".

(HSIE teacher, Focus Group)

Logging off for exercise was important to help facilitate physical activity.

The school was mindful of the importance of physical activity for students. The PDHPE faculty devised routines and exercises for the students to be completed during Tuesday sport and their PDHPE lessons. This proved positive for student well-being, although it was up to the students and parents to ensure that they engaged in physical activity since teachers could not monitor that. **"I think in the future, if we're headed there, a more flexible timetable for students to incorporate more physical activity during the day is very important"**. (HSIE teacher, Focus Group)

Social interaction was encouraged to support general wellbeing.

A strategy to combat isolation and anxiety was through 'checking in' with students at the start of lessons. Some teachers found it beneficial to begin with a five-to-ten-minute session talking to the students about their day and asking how things were going for them. They thought this was critical as it was easy to forget that students were isolated at home in front of a screen without their friends. They found that the students would look forward to that and said they enjoyed that time.

"... I've got my laptop open, I'm marking the roll. As they sign in, I want to hear at least their voice or at least say hello. I made a thing that okay, you don't want to turn your mic on and say hello? Give me a chat and say that you're here. I think that really just gave a nice introduction to the lesson because I think we were so focused on getting the work done and anxious ourselves that we forgot that they're stuck at home sitting in front of a device all day long, not seeing their friends and not seeing each other. I think that worked reasonably well in my perspective". (Maths Teacher, Focus Group)

Practices continuing beyond school lockdown period

Enhanced opportunities for collaboration and sharing.

Collaboration has been further enhanced through online use of Microsoft Teams, providing more streamlined resource sharing amongst staff. Homework is now mostly online, and the culture of 'handouts' has diminished. Microsoft Teams is now also being used as a vehicle for sharing more targeted resources with students requiring additional supports.

Ongoing use of blended learning approaches.

Teachers reported on an increase in blended learning approaches following the remote learning period. One of the Maths teachers indicated that a 'flipped classroom' approach has been adopted in his area. He implements pre-class online activities, including use of diagnostic quizzes and forms, to identify concepts that may need closer attention in class.

"It makes my teaching easier because when I come to class the next day, I've already addressed the homework problems, we've already addressed any misconceptions. It also means that if I've noticed a bit of chatter online I know that that concept might need to be readdressed in class and so that's what's really nice." (Maths teacher, focus group)

An HSIE teacher adopted a similar blend of face-to-face and online strategies in her class debates. Students used to bring media articles to class that described controversial issues. These articles would provoke passionate class discussion and debate of contemporary topics linked to the syllabus but often would take up too much class time. In the wake of the remote teaching period, these debates now occur online in the Microsoft Teams chat mode before and after classes.

“If they go on a rant I just leave them, let them discuss whatever they want. If they start mentioning things that are irrelevant then I’ll step in and say okay, let’s debate the topic only.”

(HSIE Teacher, Focus Group)

“Some parents were asking on the parent teacher interview how do I confirm whether he has homework or not? Now they can go to Teams and see if there is any homework”.

(Maths teacher, Focus Group)

She believes that **“...this [blended approach] I guess has made it a bit more of an efficient form of communication.”** (HSIE Teacher, Focus Group)
This teacher described her role as promoting the delicate balance between student-led discussion and moderation: **“If they go on a rant I just leave them, let them discuss whatever they want. If they start mentioning things that are irrelevant then I’ll step in and say okay, let’s debate the topic only.”**

Continuation of online peer learning strategies.

Maths teachers reported a shift in their adoption of online peer learning strategies using Microsoft Teams. This has been used to support students with additional learning needs, and has been particularly beneficial from a homework perspective.

“It’s been great in mathematics in that students can get access to the teacher if they have a homework problem, or we actually encourage online collaboration. If a student’s doing their homework, they have a question, they post the question up and they assist each other and we as teachers jump in when necessary.” (Maths teacher, Focus Group)

Another Maths teacher (Focus Group) described a similar strategy he is using by setting up a Microsoft Teams group facility with his Year 12 class: **“I have a homework help channel, and this is where the students will ask a question and they’ll reply to one another and help each other through anything that they’re working through or any questions they have.”**

Shifting homework online.

Homework is now undertaken primarily online throughout the school, resulting in a significant saving in paper. **“Now all of our classes have MS Teams as a homework centre for homework and for assignments and they’re using forms, MS Forms for online quizzes. And it’s a lot easier now because it takes away from the time that teachers have to spend marking because you have auto-feedback through some of the options that you have”.** (School Leader, Focus Group)

The use of Microsoft Teams has been helpful for parents to keep track of what is happening with students’ homework. **“Some parents were asking on the parent teacher interview how do I confirm whether he has homework or not? Now they can go to Teams and see if there is any homework”.** (Maths teacher, Focus Group)

Ongoing use of Microsoft Teams for learning.

The school has adopted an ongoing use of Microsoft Teams. Across the remote learning period, programs for Kindergarten to Year 12 were developed in the online space, making them, and all the resources, accessible to everyone. With an ongoing back up to the cloud, it is always accessible. Staff find the Microsoft Teams system more streamlined, resulting in a reduction of anxiety in relation to missing out on information.

Participants' recommendations and lessons learned

"Have a good sense of humour about everything, that's what got us through, but I think really invest in professional development ...and we really focused on technology for professional learning...we saw that gap, so I guess for the future maybe do some sort of situational analysis and see where your gaps are and then start filling them in".

(School Leader, Focus Group)

"The best advice is that it's not going to be perfect and that there's going to be hiccups and mistakes but that's okay... Things happen but that's okay, it's all good, everyone's in the same boat. You just have to do your best."

(English teacher, Focus Group)

Adopt a context specific approach.

Leaders suggested that every school has different needs, and a situational analysis is needed to strategically address gaps in resourcing and professional development. Teachers also emphasised preparation, professional development and keeping a sense of humour as a central lesson taken from their remote learning experiences.

"Have a good sense of humour about everything, that's what got us through, but I think really invest in professional development because [as luck would have it] we had started on a journey designing for deep learning. ... We said to ourselves okay, we need to invest ... in technology ... and we really focused on technology for professional learning. We did that because we knew, we saw that gap, so I guess for the future maybe do some sort of situational analysis and see where your gaps are and then start filling them in". (School Leader, Focus Group)

Support collegial, flexible and agile approaches.

Teachers emphasised collegiality as central to their success during remote learning. One teacher recognised the benefit of teamwork: **"...sharing and working together made it a lot easier from my perspective, so that's probably the best advice I would give."** (Maths teacher, Focus Group) A

Science teacher emphasised sharing of resources: **"Share resources so that each teacher effectively only has to worry about doing one thing instead of worrying about the three or four different classes they teach. If we help each other and we work as a team it's so much easier."**

The importance of being both agile and flexible were also considered important, and the recognition that: **"Things could go wrong, or things might not go according to plan so be aware that you need to have a different plan or strategy or an approach to things."** (Maths teacher, Focus Group)

"The best advice is that it's not going to be perfect and that there's going to be hiccups and mistakes but that's okay... Things happen but that's okay, it's all good, everyone's in the same boat. You just have to do your best." (English teacher, Focus Group)