

# Al Noori Muslim School

Digital practices to support learning

July 2021



# About the Case Studies

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.

## About Al Noori Muslim School

- 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](http://www.myschool.edu.au).



## Data Collection

Al Noori Muslim School was the second case study in this project. Data were collected during Term 1, 2021 through:

- focus group with members of the leadership team
- three focus groups with teachers
- two focus groups with students
- survey of 638 students from Years 5-12
- artefacts and sample student work and school policies.

# Key Insights

**“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)

## 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. A calm approach was adopted by school leaders, aligned with part of the school ethos to ‘live in the present moment’. The school developed a working from home policy and reassured the community, while maintaining as much consistency of learning as possible.

### Providing digital resources and leadership support.

Staff were provided with all the required technology to livestream classes from home. As a further support and reassurance to staff, school leaders were also available at school if needed, in recognition that: “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. (School Leader, Focus Group)

## Key factors affecting remote teaching practices

### Collegiality and teamwork enhanced connection and supports.

**“... 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)

Connected and collaborative approaches were modelled and supported by school leaders and subject coordinators to leverage a strong sense of community. Teachers shared resources through Microsoft Teams allowing consistency between classes and across cohorts. This open share also helped to reduce staff anxiety.

**“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)

### Preparation for remote teaching enabled a smooth transition.

Trialling learning from home with half the student population provided an opportunity for students and staff to authentically learn the technology. This preparation helped develop essentials skills for when the mandatory remote teaching period occurred.

### Effective technology support reduced challenges.

A range of devices were used by staff and students to access and support learning, including phones. Teachers and school leaders praised the daily support provided by the school during the remote learning period which ranged from addressing the hardware needs of some staff and students, to assisting with home connection issues.

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

After school peer-led technology sessions helped to enhance staff collegiality and 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 helping staff develop an: **“understanding of how to use Teams as a form of communication with students and to teach”** (HSIE teacher, Focus Group).

**“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)

### **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 common approach to the choice of educational technologies was also promoted by the school to minimise the need for teachers and students to learn and implement additional new technologies and practices. The secondary school chose to use Microsoft Teams, One Note and Microsoft Forms, with the primary school using Class Dojo and Microsoft Teams for communication and sharing between teachers.

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(Subject Coordinator, Focus Group)

### **Effective digital practices during the remote teaching period**

#### **Developing understanding of online etiquette.**

Staff 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)

#### **Implementing strategies to monitor learning and provide feedback.**

One of the issues that concerned teachers was not knowing whether the students were engaging effectively during lessons. They were particularly concerned about students who might ‘fall behind’ and need remedial work after the remote learning period. Class Notebook in Microsoft Teams was used to track learning, offer individual task allocation, and provide timely feedback.

#### **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 successful use of questioning to develop concepts and encourage interaction during Microsoft Teams lessons.

A number of specific strategies were adopted:



**Mirroring** - using technology to replicate the classroom with the teacher writing on a virtual board, along with students, as they discuss and share information.



**Multiple Devices** - having chat visible at the same as verbalising and sharing information on a virtual board.



**Annotations** - using comments to annotate a PowerPoint slide in response to class discussions.



**Online chat function** - using the chat feature in Microsoft Teams to take notes or print out the teacher-created annotated document for records and further notetaking.

#### **Providing individual remedial assistance and feedback.**

Teachers were concerned about students being ‘left behind’ and invested extra time offering individual remedial support. Different strategies were used, from providing and referring to sections of pre-recorded videos, to communicating directly to students on their individual Microsoft Teams pages, and through the use of diagnostic surveys. Before and after school voluntary sessions were offered to ensure students received the same level of feedback as at school. The teachers saw the benefit of this individualised support, with one of the HSIE teachers (Focus Group) 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.

Teachers across departments explored ways to enable student-led activities. One experience within HSIE involved students finding and sharing newspaper articles on a contemporary issue to upload and act as stimulus for class discussion and debates. 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)

## Practices to support student inclusion

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

Where required, the school provided data cards for students who had internet access challenges. Families with multiple students and limited devices experienced challenges with students being online for lessons at times. Regular recording of lessons assisted in these situations.

### 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.

**“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.”** (Maths teacher, Focus Group)

## Staff Wellbeing

- A deliberate focus on synchronous teaching reduced teacher workload.
- Creating clear boundaries and expectations, helped to support work-life balance.
- Development of guidelines assisted in managing parental expectations.

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.

## Student Wellbeing

- Communicating with the school community was vital.
- Welfare staff provided essential supports to both students and staff.
- Logging off for exercise was important to help facilitate physical activity.
- Social interaction was encouraged to support general wellbeing.

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.

**“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)

## Practices continuing beyond school lockdown period

### Enhanced opportunities for collaboration and sharing.

Collaboration has been further enhanced through ongoing use of Microsoft Teams which has provided more streamlined resource sharing. 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. This included ongoing and enhanced use of Microsoft Teams, as well as flipped classroom approaches. They have seen the role of the teacher begin to shift, with one describing her role as promoting the delicate balance between student-led discussion and moderation. **“If they go on a rant [in an online space], 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)

### Continuation of online peer learning strategies.

Maths teachers reported on a shift in their adoption of online peer learning strategies using Microsoft Teams, as well as for supporting students with additional learning needs. This has been particularly beneficial from a homework perspective, with the platform enabling students to assist each other.

**“...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)

### Shifting homework online.

Homework is now undertaken primarily online throughout the school, resulting in significant saving in paper. The school has also recognised the increased visibility this has given parents. **“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. As a result, the system is considered to be more streamlined and resources accessible to all staff. This has resulted in a reduction of anxiety for staff in relation to missing out on information.

## Participants’ recommendations and lessons learned

### Adopt a context specific strategy.

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 saw collegiality as central to their success during remote learning. The importance of being both agile and flexible were also considered important.

**“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)