

# What Remote Learning Taught Us

We reflect on the transition to remote learning and what we have achieved along the way.

While some predicted the effect COVID-19 would have on our everyday lives, the adjustment to remote learning, working from home and physical distancing still required a steep learning curve. Melbourne Girls Grammar benefitted from a strong technological infrastructure and were able to make a swift change to the delivery of curriculum. In the background, there was a lot of work to be done to support both students and staff in their move online. The decision to move to remote learning did not happen overnight, although it might have appeared as though it did, due primarily to the preparedness of our staff to support our students in their delivery of curriculum online. As an independent school, Melbourne Girls Grammar was able to consider all the pros and cons of an early move to remote learning. While the government debated what was safe and in the best interests of children in schools across the country, Principal Dr Toni E. Meath, with the full support of School Council and the Executive team decided that on 18 March 2020, Melbourne Girls Grammar would commence remote learning. This decision was what was best for our school, as one who boasts an incredible digital infrastructure with the tools and resources to launch remote learning swiftly, reducing disruption to our Grammarians' learning.

From this week, Melbourne Girls Grammar started to welcome students back to campus. This offers us the opportunity to reflect on where we started with this remote learning journey, and what we've accomplished in that time.

This infographic gives just a glimpse of what remote learning looked like from the outside. It doesn't, however, take into account everything that went into making the Remote Learning Program the innovative learning experience it was for our Grammarians.

As the Director of Professional Practice, Ashley Pratt's role changed during this time to support the delivery of our teaching and learning program. Ashley's skillset in the area of digital pedagogy served us well and his insights to the logistics of remote learning show just how far we came in such a short time.

"The move to remote learning was careful and considered. We were lucky enough to have been making contingency plans from quite early on and as the situation became clearer, we moved rapidly to enact these plans with relatively little disruption," said Ashley.

With just one planning day in between face to face teaching and remote learning, the quality of our teaching staff became more evident than ever as we moved online using our Learning Management System, Zoom, Seesaw, Office 365 and every other system in our toolbox. Students were prepared for what was to come and reassured that their teachers would be readily available to assist them.

"The most surprising aspect was how cleanly the move to Remote Learning occurred. It required a huge amount of work by teachers but we were able to get the whole transition complete over 36 hours, a significant achievement by anyone's measurement," said Ashley.

Fellow staff member Stephanie Walton agreed that due to the collaborative and supportive nature of colleagues, the transition was much cleaner than expected.

"What was so reassuring, and something that I am extremely grateful for, is how all staff members helped and supported each other in the preparation for remote learning. We shared tasks and played to each other's strengths by knowing who is best at organisation, who is the best at making videos and who to call on for IT help," said Stephanie. "Teachers are usually a pretty collaborative and helpful bunch of people, but the sharing of resources has been exceptional, both within our school community and beyond. Both our colleagues and our students have shown great patience and generosity with their time, their opinions and support."

As an organisation, Melbourne Girls Grammar has always fostered independence and resilience in our Grammarians. When we moved to remote learning, the foundational skills we layered at each year level were put to the test, and our Grammarians were thriving. With our current Year 12 cohort the first to have completed our innovative Senior Years Program, the preparedness of our students was one we could be proud of, especially at the senior level.

Providing a blend of synchronous (to be completed together as a class, e.g. a Zoom lesson) and asynchronous tasks (to be completed in their own time, e.g. a report) allowed students the freedom to manage their time to the best of their abilities and make the most of the resources and support when necessary.

"As a whole community I felt that we were really well prepared for the transition. Through the use of our Learning Management System, we already had the majority of our resources online," said Stephanie. "Students were already used to accessing work online, both at school and at home, but they have shown great flexibility in their coping. They have developed effective context specific strategies with the help of teachers, coordinators and coaches. As we settled into remote learning it became less surreal and I found myself thinking what will it be like when we return."

Indeed, as the end of remote learning approaches, we start to reflect on everything that has come from it; improved technological use, lessons in self awareness, and improved hand hygiene. Now we look to assess what elements of remote learning should stay with us long after the period of necessity ends.

Ashley had his own thoughts about what he'd like to see in the future. "I think I would like to see a new appreciation for the bonds of friendship and

familial connection. I hope everyone will learn to appreciate the time we spend in each other's company a little more. I was particularly moved by the message of Her Majesty, The Queen: "We should take comfort that, while we may have more still to endure, better days will return: we will be with our friends again; we will be with our families again; we will meet again."

### **Contacts**

Eliza Crookes

0437420128

mailto: [eliza.crookes@mggs.vic.edu.au](mailto:eliza.crookes@mggs.vic.edu.au)