



Pedagogy Development: Building on Positive Learnings from COVID-19

**A Report to the
National Catholic Education Commission**

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Dr Trudy Dantis
Principal Researcher

September 2022

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About the National Centre for Pastoral Research

The National Centre for Pastoral Research (NCPR) is an agency of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference whose mission is to assist the Catholic Church in Australia at all levels in understanding the cultural, social and personal dimensions of religion in the changing contemporary context. The work of the NCPR is overseen by the Australian Catholic Council for Pastoral Research which, in turn, reports to the Permanent Committee of the Conference. The NCPR was established in 1996 and was previously located in Melbourne, before moving to Canberra in 2018. Previous research studies conducted by the Centre include *Listen to What the Spirit is Saying: Final Report for the Plenary Council Phase 1: Listening and Dialogue* (2019), *Understanding Religious Vocations in Australia Today* (2018), *Our Work Matters: Catholic Church Employers and Employees in Australia* (2017), and *Called to Fullness of Life and Love: National Report on the Australian Catholic Bishops' Youth Survey* (2017).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is the result of an invitation from the National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) to the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference National Centre for Pastoral Research (NCPR) to carry out a research study of pedagogical development and positive learnings from COVID-19. The purpose of the study was to investigate Catholic schools that had developed innovative approaches to online teaching and learning during COVID-19. The focus of the project was learning about these experiences and innovative practices, with a particular focus on religious education, faith and spirituality.

The project aimed to answer the following key questions:

1. What strategies were most effective to improve learning and wellbeing outcomes for students in Catholic primary and secondary schools? What improvements do we need to make so that all students benefit?
2. How can we improve our transition to remote learning for individual students (especially those with special needs, remote students and those in boarding schools), as well as in preparation for future situations similar to COVID-19?
3. How can we apply learnings from best practice examples to the new learning landscape?

The study used a predominantly qualitative strategy using multiple case studies and a mixed methods approach to address the key questions. Data collection was carried out by means of interviews with school principals, parents, teachers and Directors of learning and teaching, and focus groups with students and parents. The study also examined documents developed by Catholic Education Offices for external and internal distribution.

Seven Catholic primary and secondary schools from around Australia, identified as having developed particularly innovative strategies related to online learning, were selected for the study. These schools were drawn from a list of schools identified through discussions with the National Catholic Education Commission and the team of Catholic Education Commissioners.

A total of 51 participants were involved in 29 interviews and focus groups. Ten participants were teachers, five of whom had additional roles, including Religious Education Coordinator, Pastoral Coordinator, Curriculum Coordinator and Year Leader. Five participants were principals, and one was a former deputy principal. Four parents, with children in participating primary and secondary schools, were also interviewed. Additionally, four Directors of learning and teaching from the ACT, NSW, Victoria and WA participated. A broad range of year levels was selected for the six student focus groups, representing 27 students in total.

The document analysis explored information from different state and territory Catholic Education Offices relating to COVID-19 policies, mental health wellbeing and support for teachers and students, and pedagogical and spiritual resources for remote learning environments. While Catholic Education Offices were usually the conduit for COVID-19 information from state governments to schools, schools also created their own resources.

The fieldwork research identified that when schools transitioned to remote learning due to COVID-19 restrictions, many adopted a 'synchronous model' of online learning. While some students and parents appreciated the structure which this model provided, most schools found that flexibility was required to deal with the issues which arose in online contexts. Some of the issues included teachers developing and delivering suitable online teaching resources, engaging students online, and managing the lengthy periods students spent online. While families appreciated clear communication from the schools, there was a lot of pressure on principals and senior staff to monitor and communicate the ever-changing situation of the pandemic.

Throughout much of the pandemic, a hierarchy of support was maintained and appreciated by school communities. This hierarchy had teachers supporting students, principals and senior staff supporting teachers, and diocesan Catholic Education Offices supporting schools. Students received support in their learning activities and for their social and physical wellbeing, which was usually monitored by their teachers. Having clear structures and responsibilities in the patterns of support ensured schools were more effective at managing the many challenges of the pandemic and the associated periods of lockdowns.

The research also explored, from several perspectives, the experiences of faith and spirituality in schools during the pandemic. An initial task for those involved in religious education was to modify the curricula and resources for the online context. Teachers responded by creating a variety of resources and activities, for both parents and students, and encouraged families to continue religious practices at home. While some parish or diocesan activities were offered online and prompted by the schools, the level of enthusiasm to engage in some locations waned over time. Overall, the inability to gather together in person for religious activities had a significant impact on students and their families, and it was acknowledged that rebuilding a sense of a faith community in schools could take some time.

The research team listened to the many voices of Directors of learning and teaching, principals, teachers, parents and students and considered the findings of the study in light of previous literature. The team developed a set of general recommendations for policy-makers and leaders in the field of Catholic education under six themes:

1. Prioritise planning
2. Build a network of collaboration
3. Prioritise wellbeing and support
4. Enhance learning opportunities for vulnerable students
5. Strengthen formation in faith and spirituality
6. Support schools to rebuild community.

The research also raised several questions that provide avenues for future research. They are:

1. What newer flexible models of learning, such as flipped classrooms, hybrid learning models and varied timetabling models are available for schools to explore to deliver a better experience for learners?
2. How can schools operate a model of blended learning without overburdening their staff?
3. How can online learning support crucial community building activities, especially for young students?
4. What are effective ways to measure and monitor success in the online environment that take into account both the academic and non-academic skills development of students?
5. What forms of agile and flexible work arrangements are needed to support teachers in the future?

The findings of this research can aid in the development of policies and practices in a variety of settings. There is likely to be a 'new normal' for teachers and students which may be very different to pre-COVID-19 days, and Catholic schools which retain the skills learned during the past two years may well deliver education differently, more efficiently and more effectively in the future.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In early 2020, the first wave of the novel coronavirus (later named COVID-19) began infecting people throughout the world. In an effort to stem the flow of infections, many countries began to mandate lockdowns. People began working from home, many businesses shut their doors, and school children began learning at home through resources provided by schools and the online presence of their teachers. The length of time students were expected to be at home was uncertain, and the impact of this new arrangement on learning, social activities and wellbeing was still to be determined.

In Australia, individual states and the differing school terms in each drove the response to the pandemic, with some states, such as South Australia, choosing to end Term 1 early but return for Term 2, whereas Victorian school children remained at home for much longer.¹ Several schools also worked with a blended learning model where some children attended face-to-face, but others accessed remote, online learning.² Table 1 below sets out the dates of the first COVID-19 case and the subsequent government announcements affecting schools for each state.

Table 1: Impacts of COVID-19 in Australia up to 30 June 2020³

State/ Territory	First reported case of COVID-19	Education announcements affecting schools (up to 30 June 2020)
NSW	25 January 2020	<p>23/3/20 – Schools to remain open—parents encouraged to keep their children at home.</p> <p>21/4/20 – NSW school students gradually transition back to classrooms in Term 2. All children back to school full-time by Term 3.</p> <p>19/5/20 – Return to full-time, face-to-face teaching for school students from Monday 25 May.</p>
Victoria	25 January 2020	<p>22/3/20 – School holidays would be brought forward, commencing 24 March.</p> <p>30/3/20 – Stage 3 restrictions announced, which included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People only being allowed to leave their homes for four reasons: food and supplies; medical care; exercise; and work or education and, • Gatherings of no more than two people unless they are members of an immediate household, and it is for work or education. <p>7/4/20 – All Victorian government primary, secondary and special schools would move to remote and flexible learning and teaching for Term 2. Changes announced to the academic timetable for Victoria Certificate of Education (VCE) and Victorian Certificate of Applied</p>

1 David Sacks et al., “COVID-19 and education: how Australian schools are responding and what happens next,” accessed July 6, 2021, <https://www.pwc.com.au/government/government-matters/covid-19-education-how-australian-schools-are-responding.html>.

2 Clare Buckley Flack et al., *Educator perspectives on the impact of COVID-19 on teaching and learning in Australia and New Zealand* (Pivot Professional Learning, April 2020), https://pivotpl.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Pivot_StateofEducation_2020_White-Paper.pdf.

3 Rebecca Storen and Nikki Corrigan, “COVID-19: a chronology of state and territory government announcements (up until 30 June 2020),” accessed August 3, 2022, https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp2021%20Chronologies/COVID-19StateTerritoryGovernmentAnnouncements#_Toc52275796.

State/ Territory	First reported case of COVID-19	Education announcements affecting schools (up to 30 June 2020)
		<p>Learning (VCAL) students. Free internet access and laptops would be provided to government school students who did not have access to digital technologies.</p> <p>23/4/20 – An additional 21,000 internet dongles would be made available to Victorian students to support remote learning, with priority given to senior secondary students, students in bushfire-affected areas and families who cannot afford internet at home.</p> <p>12/5/20 – Government school students to begin a phased return to the classroom from 26 May.</p> <p>22/5/20 – Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) exams would commence from 9 November, a month earlier than initially anticipated when learning from home commenced.</p> <p>30/6/20 – Return to tougher restrictions, including specific postcodes would return to Stage 3 Stay at Home restrictions until at least 29 July.</p>
Queensland	29 January 2020	<p>10/3/20 – International travel ban for state school students and staff for destinations other than New Zealand.</p> <p>26/3/20 – State schools would be student-free until the end of Term 1. Schools would remain open for children of essential workers.</p> <p>13/4/20 – School students to learn from home for the first five weeks of Term 2 (until 22 May), with schools only open for children of essential workers.</p> <p>4/5/20 – Outline of the steps for children to return to school through a staged approach starting from 11 May.</p>
South Australia	1 February 2020	<p>13/3/20 – Schools would close for a minimum of 24 hours in the event of a confirmed COVID-19 case and only reopen on the advice of health experts when safe to do so.</p> <p>25/3/20 – Launch of the <i>Our Learning SA</i> website to support students learning at home through access to curated curriculum resources across all learning areas.</p> <p>3/4/20 – Launch of a flexible learning platform that completed the <i>Our Learning SA</i> website and enabled teachers to create their own individual online learning spaces to deliver lessons and content to students in the classroom and at home.</p> <p>8/6/20 – In government schools, parents, carers and visitors are allowed inside schools for meetings and to drop off and pick up students.</p>
Western Australia	21 February 2020	<p>9/3/20 – School travel ban extended to include the US and Canada, with New Zealand being the only country to which international travel by WA school groups would be considered.</p> <p>23/3/20 – Introduction of Stage 1 restrictions with the expectation that the restrictions would be in place for at least six months. Schools would remain open until the end of the school term. However,</p>

State/ Territory	First reported case of COVID-19	Education announcements affecting schools (up to 30 June 2020)
		<p>parents would not face the usual consequences if they decided not to send their children to school.</p> <p>26/3/20 – New learning arrangements for WA government schools from Monday 30 March, with families encouraged to keep children at home.</p> <p>2/4/20 – Further border restrictions with people no longer being able to enter WA from 6 April without an exemption.</p> <p>17/4/20 – Government schools open to all parents and carers who chose to send their children to school from the beginning of Term 2. School arrangements would be reviewed before the start of week 4. Distance education resources would be provided to students who continued to learn at home.</p> <p>14/5/20 – All school students would be required to return to school from 18 May, with an exemption for students who may be medically vulnerable or have a family member with a chronic health condition.</p>
Tasmania	2 March 2020	<p>25/3/20 – From 25 March parents could choose to keep their children at home, with learning at home opportunities to be provided as much as practicable. In addition, school holidays were brought forward to 9 April, with school staff using the pupil-free days to plan and prepare for learning at home in Term 2.</p> <p>24/4/20 – All government and Catholic schools in the North-West of Tasmania would remain closed, with Term 2 commencing on 4 May. Government schools outside this region would commence Term 2 on 28 April.</p>
Northern Territory	4 March 2020	<p>23/3/20 – Temporary measures introduced to close businesses. The decision to send children to school would be a choice for parents for the remainder of the term.</p> <p>26/3/20 – Final four days of school term would be student-free to allow staff to prepare for Term 2.</p> <p>8/4/20 – Remote Community Schools Package announced to incentivise teachers and school staff not to leave their communities during term break.</p>
ACT	12 March 2020	<p>22/3/20 – ACT schools would move to pupil-free days from 24 March 2020, with the ACT school system to prepare to transition to alternative teaching models from Term 2.</p> <p>28/3/20 – Additional laptop computers would be provided to public school students in Years 4, 5 and 6 to ensure equitable access to online and home-based learning.</p> <p>8/4/20 – ACT Public schools to move to remote learning in Term 2, beginning 28 April.</p> <p>7/5/20 – Planned return to on-campus learning for government schools, with a staged return from 18 May 2020.</p>

As schools transitioned to remote learning, they faced many challenges in adapting lessons plans, organising and monitoring online classes, creating resources for learning and keeping students engaged in the online environment. COVID-19 restrictions and unexpected lockdowns required schools to be agile in planning and adaptable to changing needs of staff and students, all the while providing quality education. Some schools developed strategies that were conducive to the online environment and proved to be effective.

About this project

The purpose of this research project was to study Catholic schools that had developed innovative approaches to online teaching and learning during the pandemic. The study aimed to identify and learn about these effective strategies and practices, with a particular focus on religious education, faith and spirituality. The intention was to understand how schools could improve their transitions to remote learning and prepare for future educational disruptions.

At the beginning of the research in late 2020, our intention for this research was primarily a retrospective study, hearing from schools that had already been through a COVID-19 lockdown and returned to face-to-face learning. To support this, the initial plan was to do in-depth research in 10 schools across Australia with a visiting research team conducting interviews and focus groups onsite. However, as the study progressed it became apparent that the impact of COVID-19 was ongoing and undertaking the project as envisaged would be extremely difficult.

As states and regions went through different cycles of lockdowns and COVID-19 restrictions, it quickly became apparent that we would need a flexible research approach. This resulted in data being collected during a period when schools were still going through the COVID-19 experience. Some had been through one or more cycles of lockdowns, while others were in the midst of their first experience. The aftermath of the pandemic also brought severe staffing problems and resulted in extreme fatigue for many staff. Consequently, a few schools that had initially consented to the study decided to pull out. We therefore supplemented this lack of data with organising more interviews with Directors of learning and teaching (henceforth called 'L&T Directors') in different states.

The findings of this study will help education directors make decisions based on contemporary data collected in Australia, rather than relying on anecdotal evidence and overseas research. This report will therefore help determine best practices for future transitioning of schools to remote learning during natural disasters, pandemics or in other emergency scenarios. Hearing from the experiences of staff, students and parents as well as education management personnel will allow the sector to revise existing strategies or develop new ones to assist remote learning and teaching in Catholic schools, particularly in the area of faith and spirituality. This research will supplement other studies investigating the experiences of schools during the pandemic and contribute to the strengthening of education policy-making and practices for Catholic schools in Australia.

Outline of the report

This chapter has provided an introduction to the research study. The next chapter, Chapter 2, contains a comprehensive review of the literature of remote learning practices and experiences and related subjects during COVID-19. Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology employed for this study and describes the interview and focus group participants. In Chapter 4, we present the findings of the document analysis that was conducted, examining material that was shared internally and externally by Catholic Education Offices. Chapters 5 to 7 focus on the main findings of the study drawn from the interviews and focus groups, under three headings: Learning and Teaching during Remote Learning, Wellbeing and Support, and Faith and Spirituality. Chapter 8 is a summary and conclusion to the report. This report also contains four short reflections on the research findings written by

key Catholic Education personnel, who have each thoughtfully considered the impact of COVID-19 on Catholic schools from their own perspective. This section is followed by a number of appendices, including copies of the research instruments, and other documents employed in the study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Remote learning

While the eruption of the global pandemic in 2020 created a new impetus for people around the world to work and study remotely, distance education (where the teacher and the student are separated by physical distance) had been offered for a considerable time.⁴ Australia's vast geography and comparatively low population led Australia to develop some of the earliest examples of effective distance education for children in remote areas. In the early 1900s, correspondence schools provided lessons to children through the postal system.⁵ In the 1930s, modelled on the Royal Flying Doctor Service, the School of the Air began providing education for children through a two-way radio system.⁶ Over the years, new technology was embraced to allow greater interaction between teachers and students. In 2002, the Alice Springs School of the Air implemented a project involving the use of two-way satellite equipment.⁷ Remote families were provided with a satellite dish and computer equipment in order to engage with their teachers and classmates. This model, referred to as IDL (Interactive Distance Learning), is still being used to deliver education to families in remote areas of Australia.⁸

Around the world, other remote communities, such as those in rural Alaska, had also begun using technology to deliver educational services to those in remote areas.⁹ They had discovered that success required the right kind of technological implementation, particularly overcoming issues with older members of the community embracing unfamiliar technology. However, they discovered that the use of remote learning also offered new opportunities, such as partnering with other educational institutions, e.g., universities, to provide infrastructure, and accessing expertise that would not have otherwise been available to the community.

Crouch et al., reporting on the use of technology throughout the Catholic Education network (CENet), noted that the use of digital pedagogy (a phrase describing the combining of digital technologies with pedagogy) has increased significantly over the last two decades.¹⁰ In this model, the digital tools inform pedagogy, and are an integrated part of the teaching experience. However, although they noted acceptance of this at the policy level, it did not appear to have been embraced as a central piece informing the curriculum in individual schools. Instead, digital tools were used to supplement traditional approaches to pedagogy. A particular issue identified in the ongoing implementation of digital pedagogy was the pace of technological change, which outstripped the professional development of the teachers who would need to implement it. As such, teachers' confidence in using new hardware or software was thought to be impacted.

4 Kathleen Harting, and Margaret J. Erthal, "History of Distance Learning," *Information Technology, Learning, and Performance Journal* 23, no.1 (Spring 2005):35-44, <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.587.5816&rep=rep1&type=pdf>.

5 Elizabeth Stacey and Lya Visser, "The History of Distance Education," *Quarterly Review of Distance Education* 6, no.3 (Fall 2005):253-259,293, <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/history-distance-education-australia/docview/231101077/se-2?accountid=28889>.

6 Marina V. Nevskaya, "Schools of the Air in Australia: The Modern Distant Learning Prototype," *Наука телевидения* 6, no. 3 (2018):192-226, <https://doi.org/10.30628/1994-9529-2018-14.4-192-226>; Stacey and Visser, "The History of Distance Education", 253-259,293.

7 "Our Technology," Alice Springs School of the Air, accessed August 2, 2022, <https://www.schooloftheair.net.au/our-story/technology/>.

8 Alice Springs School of the Air, "Our Technology."

9 Dan Gordon, "Remote learning: Technology in rural schools," *T H E Journal* 38, no. 9 (2011):18-24, <https://www.questia.com/library/journal/1G1-272166767/remote-learning-technology-in-rural-schools-making>.

10 Vanessa Crouch et al., "It's about teaching, not the tool: Embracing digital pedagogy," *Australian Educational Leader* 43, no. 2 (2021):42-46, <https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/informit.924717115762740>.

On the other hand, Nilson and Goodson suggested that excellence in teaching went beyond the environment in which it was being taught, and therefore that pedagogy should lead the technology.¹¹ However, they noted that some strategies lend themselves to the online environment specifically, such as encouraging a direct connection between the student and teacher. Several challenges were also identified. One of the important factors they noted in relation to teaching in an online environment was some of the different rules relating to copyright. Use of resources that might be easily shared in a face-to-face environment might not be permissible in an online setting. During the pandemic, agencies provided advice around copyright in an online setting and several accommodations were offered. For example, the Copyright Agency provided extensive advice to schools in this area and made some temporary changes to assist schools.

Darby, in considering the impact of a change to an online learning environment, noted that while students are trained from a young age to walk into a classroom, sit at their own desk and prepare to be taught, the equivalent skills of entering and using an online classroom are still very new for most people.¹² She also noted the challenges in engaging with students, and in helping students to engage with each other, in an online environment.

Most research undertaken in relation to remote learning prior to the pandemic focused on university or other adult education environments. While online learning was available in primary and secondary settings, in most environments this appeared to be primarily part of a blended or hybrid learning model. As such, the introduction of full-time remote teaching due to the pandemic presented several new challenges.

COVID-19 disruptions

Prior to the knowledge of a new, virulent disease spreading from China, Australia was already being impacted by significant natural disasters.¹³ Years of drought led to the early start of a uniquely destructive bushfire season in June 2019. The fires reached their peak in December 2019 and January 2020 with thousands of buildings and homes destroyed, and smoke at extremely hazardous levels blanketing many cities along the eastern side of the country. The rain in mid-February doused the fires, but also led to devastating floods. Then on 11 March 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the outbreak of COVID-19 to be a global pandemic. The federal government closed national borders in mid-March and began advising the practices of social distancing and mask-wearing.

Around the world, pandemic responses included all sorts of workplace and school closures to prevent the spread of the virus. These responses included some form of remote learning support for students; addressing issues of equity in remote learning, particularly for students who did not have internet access; waiving or postponing various assessment requirements; addressing a range of student needs that the schools had previously been involved with, such as food, and mental health support; and finally addressing the needs of special populations, such as students with disabilities, students in foster care, and those not proficient in English.¹⁴

11 Linda B. Nilson and Ludwika A. Goodson, *Online Teaching at its Best: Merging Instructional Design with Technology and Learning Research* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2017), 1-15.

12 Flower Darby, *Small Teaching Online: Applying Learning Science in Online Classes* (United Kingdom: John Wiley & Sons, 2019), xv-xxxiii.

13 Jane Shakespeare-Finch et al., "COVID-19: An Australian Perspective," *Journal of Loss & Trauma* 25, no. 8 (2020):662-672, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15325024.2020.1780748>.

14 Justin Reich et al., "Remote learning guidance from state education agencies during the COVID-19 pandemic: A first look," *EdArXiv Preprints*, April 2, <https://doi.org/10.35542/osf.io/437e2>.

Eacott et al. identified that the different funding models in Australia for public schools, compared to Catholic and independent schools, impacted the ways schools responded to the virus threat.¹⁵ Public schools are primarily funded through the state governments, whereas the federal government is the primary funder for non-government schools. Both state and federal funding is provided directly to state Catholic Education Commissions who allocate it to Catholic systemic schools on a needs basis. Independent schools receive their government funding directly. Due to these differences, Catholic and independent schools appeared to be worse off because of their fixed funding allocations and their inability to access treasury funds for additional assistance. Initially, some Catholic and independent schools chose to close in response to initial outbreaks, with many starting school holidays early, compared with public schools, which were required to remain open. However, federal government warnings that they may withdraw funding from Catholic and independent schools if they did not reopen¹⁶, and the later advance on \$3 billion of already committed funding, led to schools reopening earlier than planned, albeit through remote learning arrangements. Nevertheless, individual circumstances for each school, including the presence of positive COVID-19 cases, staff shortages, and choices of parents to withhold or send children to school, meant that school principals were left to make decisions that best supported the school community, students' learning and the work of school staff.¹⁷

In many rural and remote communities, the impact of COVID-19 was even more pronounced due to a lack of available supports, among other factors. Prior to COVID, rural communities had experienced population decline, difficulty in attracting workers, and a shift in the age demographic as residents grew older.¹⁸ These shifts impacted rural schools particularly as many were forced to consolidate or close. In addition, the bushfires, droughts and floods that had appeared prior to the impacts of COVID-19 had disproportionately impacted rural and remote communities.¹⁹ Ledger and Fuqua noted that COVID-19 highlighted the inequities faced by such communities due to lower access to technology, professional learning, practicums and specialised support for children with specific needs.²⁰

Children who experienced inequities, such as living in poverty, living with a disability or who were in families where English was not a confidently spoken language, were identified as being at risk of disengaging from school.²¹ The social structures and systems in place for those with a disability prior to the pandemic were very

15 Scott Eacott et al., "COVID-19 and Inequities in Australian Education – Insights on Federalism, Autonomy, and Access," *International Studies in Educational Administration (Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration & Management (CCEAM))* 48, no.3 (2020):6-14, <http://cceam.net/publications/isea/isea-2020-vol-48-no-3/>.

16 "Independent schools told to reopen or lose funding as National Cabinet discusses coronavirus impacts on education," ABC News, April 9, 2020, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-04-09/independent-schools-told-to-reopen-coronavirus-funding/12138092>; Paul Karp, "Coalition offers independent schools early funding if they return to face-to-face teaching," *The Guardian*, April 29, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/apr/29/coalition-offers-independent-schools-early-funding-if-they-return-to-face-to-face-teaching>.

17 Matthew Bradley and Maura Sellars, "Mediating governmentality during Covid-19: A principal's task," *Social Sciences & Humanities Open* 2, no.1 (2020):1-6, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2020.100086>.

18 Simone White et al., "In-the-Moment Experiences of Rural School Principals in the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Rural Educator* 43, no.2 (2022):47-59, <https://doi.org/10.55533/2643-9662.1322>.

19 Shakespeare-Finch et al., "COVID-19: An Australian Perspective", 662-672; Nicola Sum, "School leaders' perceptions of their roles during the pandemic: an Australian case study exploring volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA leadership)," *School leadership & management* 42, no.2, (2022):188-207, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2022.2045268>.

20 Susan Ledger and Melyssa Fuqua, "Disruption, Diversity and Dynamic Developments in Rural Education During COVID-19," *Australian & International Journal of Rural Education* 31, no.1 (2021):1-7, <https://doi.org/10.47381/aijre.v31i1.297>.

21 Natalie Brown et al., *Learning at home during COVID-19: Effects on vulnerable young Australians: Independent Rapid Response Report* (Hobart: University of Tasmania, Peter Underwood Centre for Educational Attainment, 2020), https://www.utas.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/1324268/Learning-at-home-during-COVID-19-updated.pdf; Stephen Lamb et al., *Impact of learning from home on educational outcomes for disadvantaged children: Brief assessment* (Melbourne: Victoria University, Mitchell Institute, 2020), <https://www.vu.edu.au/mitchell-institute/schooling/impact-of-learning-from-home-for-disadvantaged-children>; John Daley et al., *The Recovery Book: What Australian governments should do now* (Grattan Institute, June 2020), <https://grattan.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Grattan-Institute-Recovery-Book.pdf>; Robyn English, "Teaching in the

much affected by requirements for remote learning and social isolation.²² Additional learning and living assistance, respite care and even access to health care were all impacted, with parents of children with additional needs experiencing exacerbated distress and uncertainty.

For many schools, emergency remote teaching, where remote learning practices were hastily adopted due to an emergency situation, rather than being an integrated distance education strategy, was the main response to providing education in these times.²³ This meant that the well-planned courses and availability of appropriate programs and technology were not necessarily readily available, and researchers warned that educators should not be judged by the standards expected in usual online learning.²⁴ While some thought that this period of forced remote teaching might make the idea of online or blended learning more palatable to the general community, others were concerned that unfounded stereotypes about online learning not being as high quality as face-to-face learning might be reinforced.²⁵

At the beginning of the pandemic, there were concerns that school students would face significant learning loss as a result of the time spent in isolation.²⁶ Another issue of concern was around behavioural factors of both students and their parents. There were concerns that the different dispositions of students would have a significant effect on their success with remote learning. Also, the impact of parental support for the children, or lack of it, was considered to have a considerable influence.²⁷

There were specific concerns raised about the impact of remote learning on students with special needs, such as disabilities, autism and other conditions that required learning assistance.²⁸ The particular importance of schools in both providing a regular daily structure and much-needed resources was highly valued.²⁹ However, others also saw the opportunity to provide a more 'autism-friendly' environment through the remote learning possibilities of the lockdown period, where the overwhelming sensory inputs of a public environment were not present.³⁰

time of COVID-19," *Practical Literacy: The Early & Primary Years* 26, no.2 (2021):4-5, <https://doi.org/10.1002/bmb.21348>; Flack et al., *Educator perspectives on the impact of COVID-19*; Sacks et al., "COVID-19 and Education."

- 22 Sophie Yates and Helen Dickinson, "Navigating Complexity in a Global Pandemic: The Effects of COVID-19 on Children and Young People with Disability and Their Families in Australia," *Public Administration Review* 81, no.6 (2021):1192-1196, <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.13352>.
- 23 Charles Hodges et al., "The difference between emergency remote teaching and online learning," *Educause Review*, March 27, 2020, <https://er.educause.edu/articles/2020/3/the-difference-between-emergency-remote-teaching-and-online-learning>; Kadir Karakaya, "Design considerations in emergency remote teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic: a human-centered approach," *Educational Technology Research & Development* 69, no.1 (2021):295-299, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11423-020-09884-0>.
- 24 Hodges et al., "The difference between emergency remote teaching."
- 25 Gill Cowden, Pru Mitchell, and Pauline Taylor-Guy, *Remote Learning: Rapid Literature Review* (Camberwell, Vic: Association of Independent Schools NSW & Australian Council for Educational Research, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.37517/978-1-74286-610-9>; Hodges et al., "The difference between emergency remote teaching."
- 26 Brown et al., "Learning at home during COVID-19."
- 27 Lamb et al., *Impact of learning from home*.
- 28 Sarah A. Cassidy et al., "An expert discussion on autism in the COVID-19 pandemic," *Autism in Adulthood* 2, no.2, (2020):106-117, <https://doi.org/10.1089/aut.2020.29013.sjc>; Daley et al., *The Recovery Book*; Flack et al., *Educator perspectives*; Donald M. Stenhoff, Robert C. Pennington, and Melissa C. Tapp, "Distance Education Support for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder and Complex Needs During COVID-19 and School Closures," *Rural Special Education Quarterly* 39, no.4 (2020):211-219, <https://doi.org/10.1177/8756870520959658>.
- 29 Stenhoff et al., "Distance Education Support", 211-219.
- 30 Debbie Spain et al., "This may be a really good opportunity to make the world a more autism friendly place': Professionals' perspectives on the effects of COVID-19 on autistic individuals," *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders* 83, (2021):1-13, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rasd.2021.101747>.

There were also concerns raised about the possibility of an increase in domestic violence and child abuse during lockdown periods.³¹ The surveillant and reporting role that schools usually provide was seen as particularly important in curbing such behaviour, as well as providing students with a safe environment to go to each day.³² The period of remote teaching was seen as possibly impacting negatively on vulnerable students as a result.³³

By late 2020, many Australian students had returned to the classroom, albeit with various restrictions imposed, such as the cancellation of excursions and extra-curricular activities.³⁴ Victorian students, in particular, had faced significant periods of being locked down at home, with the longest cumulative lockdown for any city in the world of 245 days.³⁵

One of the major concerns at the beginning of the pandemic was the learning loss that students would face during the time of remote learning. A study of NSW Year 3 and 4 government school students showed that overall there was not a significant decline in their academic successes compared to the 2019 cohort.³⁶ Some of the explanations for this included the focus on literacy and numeracy during the year, a reduction of extra-curricular activities due to COVID-19 restrictions allowing more time for schoolwork, and the efforts of educators and parents to mitigate the impacts of the remote learning period.³⁷

While Gore et al. did not find a significant reduction in academic success, it was noted that the measure for such success was focused on mathematics, reading and science. Other school subjects, which did not attract as high a priority, such as physical education, appear to have been overlooked. Physical education was noted as particularly challenging to teach remotely in a meaningful way.³⁸ Mercieca noted that religious education was difficult to teach online, as were instrumental music lessons and Design, Art and Technology classes (DAT).³⁹ Sullivan et al. also noted that the teaching of more involved concepts in mathematics may have taken a back

31 Janet Clinton, *Supporting Vulnerable Children in the Face of a Pandemic: A paper prepared for the Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment* (Melbourne: Centre for Program Evaluation, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, April 25, 2020), <https://www.dese.gov.au/download/10214/professor-janet-clinton-centre-program-evaluation-melbourne-graduate-school-education/14627/document/pdf>; Ilan Katz et al., "Child maltreatment reports and Child Protection Service response during COVID-19: Knowledge exchange among Australia, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Germany, Israel, and South Africa," *Child Abuse & Neglect* 116, (2021):1-17, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2021.105078>; Ilan Katz et al., "One year into COVID-19: What have we learned about child maltreatment reports and child protective service responses?" *Child Abuse & Neglect* 130, (2022):1-16, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2021.105473>; Stephen Teo and Glenys Griffiths, "Child protection in the time of COVID-19," *Journal of paediatrics and child health* 56, no.6, (2022):838-840, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jpc.14916>.

32 Clinton, *Supporting Vulnerable Children*; Teo and Griffiths, "Child protection", 838-840.

33 Clinton, *Supporting Vulnerable Children*; Teo and Griffiths, "Child protection", 838-840.

34 Jenny Gore et al., *Evaluating the impact of COVID-19 on NSW schools* (Newcastle: University of Newcastle, December 2020), https://www.newcastle.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/704924/Evaluating-the-impact-of-COVID-19-on-NSW-schools.pdf; Storen and Corrigan, "COVID-19: a chronology."

35 "Victorian students return to schools after months of learning from home," *ABC News*, October 12, 2020, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-10-12/students-return-to-victorian-schools/12753282>; "Students sent home as Victoria lockdown throws schooling into turmoil," *9News*, May 27, 2021, <https://www.9news.com.au/national/coronavirus-victoria-lockdown-school-closures-education-what-parents-students-need-to-know/e73be870-8184-4f63-bc1a-14dbba9ed29d>; Stuart Marsh, "Almost 700,000 Victorian students to return to remote learning during lockdown," *9News*, July 12, 2020, <https://www.9news.com.au/national/coronavirus-victoria-students-return-to-remote-learning-during-second-lockdown/30dbc8d3-6a2d-4845-9bdf-87b057756880>; Barbara A. Spears and Deborah M. Green, "The challenges facing pastoral care in schools and universities due to the COVID-19 pandemic," *Pastoral Care in Education* 40, no.3 (2022):287-296, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02643944.2022.2093961>.

36 Gore et al., *Evaluating the impact of COVID-19*.

37 Gore et al., *Evaluating the impact of COVID-19*.

38 Gore et al., *Evaluating the impact of COVID-19*; Vaughan Cruickshank, Shane Pill, and Casey Mainsbridge, "'Just do some physical activity': Exploring experiences of teaching physical education online during COVID-19," *Issues in Educational Research* 31, no.1 (2021):76-93, <http://www.iier.org.au/iier31/cruickshank.pdf>.

39 Bernadette Mercieca, "Well-being and Community during COVID-19 times: A story of a Catholic secondary school in Melbourne in 2020," *Australian Education Leader* 43, no.1 (2021):62-65, <https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/informit.797677517724333>.

seat to shorter tasks and repetitive practice during the time of remote teaching.⁴⁰ So, it may be too early to tell the effects of learning loss.

The disruptions to education were not merely felt during times of remote learning, but also on return to more 'normal' school attendance. Mercieca noted in her study on a Melbourne Catholic secondary school that several students struggled with returning to the more populated and noisier environment of the school yard and classroom, compared to the intimate and quieter environment of their family home.⁴¹ Spears and Green also noted the challenges of teaching new university students in 2022, most of whom had spent their formative years 11 and 12 in pandemic conditions.⁴² They noted that the experiences of this cohort were unlike that of any seen before.

Learning and teaching resources

While some studies have shown that the expected learning loss was negligible, these results may have been due to measures taken to provide students with the needed technology.⁴³ For example, in the ACT, children in government schools in years 4, 5 and 6 were provided with Chromebooks, an extension of the program that provides Chromebooks to students in years 7 and above.⁴⁴ In Victoria, the Government was providing computers and internet dongles for students who could not otherwise access their school work.⁴⁵ In some areas, schools and educators even took it upon themselves to ensure their students were provided with needed technology.⁴⁶ Despite these efforts, the "digital divide" appeared to remain for those in remote areas, particularly Indigenous students.⁴⁷ This was partially due to a lack of access to technology, but also driven by a lack of affordability where the only internet services available were via mobile phone data.⁴⁸ In some instances, the school-provided laptop was the only access to the internet in the house, and parents' needs precluded students from using it.⁴⁹

Starkey et al. reported that while technology was enabling, it was not always engaging.⁵⁰ They found that the online learning environment during the pandemic did not effectively provide a social, cognitive and teaching presence nor support discourse. They reported that teacher preparedness was a particular issue across most contexts.

40 Peter Sullivan et al., "Threat and opportunities in remote learning of mathematics: Implication for the return to the classroom," *Mathematic Education Research Journal* 32, (2020):551-559, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13394-020-00339-6>.

41 Mercieca, "Well-being and Community", 62-65.

42 Spears and Green, "The challenges facing pastoral care", 287-296.

43 Jennifer Gore et al., "The impact of COVID-19 on student learning in New South Wales primary schools: an empirical study," *Australian Educational Researcher* (Springer Science & Business Media B. V.) 48, no.4 (2021):605-637, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-021-00436-w>; Gore et al., "Evaluating the impact of COVID-19."

44 Yvette Berry, "Chromebooks rolled out to years 4, 5 and 6 [Press release]," March 28, 2020, https://www.cmtedd.act.gov.au/open_government/inform/act_government_media_releases/yvette-berry-mla-media-releases/2020/chromebooks-rolled-out-to-years-4,-5-and-6.

45 Marsh, "Almost 700,000 Victorian students"; Storen and Corrigan, "COVID-19 a chronology."

46 Angela Page et al., "Fostering school connectedness online for students with diverse learning needs: inclusive education in Australia during the COVID-19 pandemic," *European Journal of Special Needs Education* 36, no.1 (2021):142-156, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2021.1872842>.

47 Gore et al., *Evaluating the impact of COVID-19*; Page et al., "Fostering school connectedness online", 142-156; World Vision Australia and the Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation, *Connecting on Country: Closing the Digital Divide for First Nations students in the age of COVID-19* (Australia: World Vision Australia, 2021), <https://www.worldvision.com.au/docs/default-source/publications/government-submissions/connecting-on-country.pdf>.

48 World Vision Australia, *Connecting on Country*.

49 Page et al., "Fostering school connectedness online."

50 Louise Starkey et al., "Special issue: Covid-19 and the role of technology and pedagogy on school education during a pandemic," *Technology, Pedagogy & Education* 30, no.1, (2021):1-5, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1475939X.2021.1866838>.

Callaghan investigated the types of technological platforms available in schools and identified that the most commonly used platforms in Australian schools included the Microsoft in Education, Google for Education and Apple K-12 Education product suites.⁵¹ Google Classroom and Microsoft Teams were the most implemented platforms for primary schools using a single platform and for high schools. Google Classroom and SeeSaw were the most common for those using multiple platforms in primary schools.

Crouch et al. identified four sub-themes of positive outcomes from the period of remote learning. The first was an increase in teacher confidence in using the technology.⁵² Second was the ability to provide for students with diverse learnings through technology in ways that had not been realised before. Third, the period of remote learning helped schools to become more discerning in which technologies they chose to use and to make more strategic choices in their technological decision-making. And fourth, they found that the period allowed increased communication between school and home. This was primarily undertaken through digital platforms, which allowed teachers to more easily interact with parents, or for parents to have more visibility of their child's learning.

Supports for schools

Despite the concerns raised at the beginning of the pandemic—or maybe as a result of them—a strong community response was evident in the way school communities came together.⁵³ This included providing support services to the larger school community and working more closely with teachers and other school staff.⁵⁴ Charteris and Page identified that school connectedness was an important factor in schooling engagement.⁵⁵ This is seen as a multi-dimensional construct that provides a sense of belonging, a commitment to learning and an experience of a safe and supportive environment.

However, as predicted, there were significant socioeconomic disparities evident. Schools with a lower ICSEA (Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage) were more likely to report issues with transition to a remote learning model, issues with access to technology and negative effects on students' learning.⁵⁶

In relation to their students, educators expressed concerns about students' social isolation, wellbeing and learning loss.⁵⁷ There were also widely differing opinions about adapting to and implementing new technology in their teaching.⁵⁸ There were also significant concerns regarding teacher wellbeing, with some teachers reporting a significant increase in workload, the difficulties of managing teaching in a blended environment, and also the difficulties faced by teachers who had their own children at home to manage as well as their professional workload.⁵⁹ However, many teachers worked hard—as complex, multiskilled professionals—to bring about

51 Noelene Callaghan, "Understanding the role of technological platforms in schools," *Educational Media International* 53, no.4 (2021):355-373, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523987.2021.1992864>.

52 Crouch et al., "It's about teaching," 42-46.

53 Clare Buckley Flack et al., *Principal perspectives on the impact of COVID-19: Pathways toward equity in Australian schools* (Pivot Professional Learning, February 2021), https://docs.pivotpl.com/research/COVID-19/Pivot_Principal+Perspectives+on+the+Impact+of+COVID-19+Whitepaper_February+2021.pdf; Alec O'Connell and Simon Clarke, "A School in the Grip of COVID-19: Musings From the Principal's Office," *International Studies in Educational Administration* 48, no.2 (2020):4-11, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ehh&AN=145310227>.

54 Flack et al., *Principal perspectives*.

55 Jennifer Charteris and Angela Page, "School bonding, attachment, and engagement through remote learning: Fostering school connectedness," *New Zealand Journal of Teachers' Work* 18, no.2 (2021):91-108, <https://doi.org/10.24135/teacherswork.v18i2.329>.

56 Flack et al., *Principal perspectives*.

57 Flack et al., *Educator perspectives*.

58 Brown et al., *Learning at home during COVID-19*; Flack et al., *Educator perspectives*.

59 Flack et al., *Educator perspectives*.

massive changes in the delivery of learning and in continuing to engage students. Some of the success identified includes having a professional learning community to support this new learning, having been able to upskill technologically and being able to reimagine the delivery of the curriculum in a new way.⁶⁰

A study of Australian Twitter posts by Ewing and Vu during early 2020 indicated that while public opinion indicated a stronger appreciation for teachers than before, there was also a great deal of frustration and confusion, particularly towards government officials and politicians.⁶¹ Several tweets also highlighted the perceived difference between government and non-government schooling experiences, expressing the opinion that a socio-economic divide between the two would be evidenced in children of public schooling suffering more during the pandemic, especially regarding access to technology.⁶²

Leadership throughout the pandemic was seen as key to the success or otherwise of remote learning and school connectedness. Sydney Catholic Schools had introduced a new leadership framework in March 2018 which looked at leadership through six complementary lenses: religious, learning, relational, adaptive, strategic and cultural.⁶³ Ivers noted that this, together with significant investment in ICT infrastructure and professional development programs for teaching in an online environment, prior to the advent of the pandemic, appeared to have helped to make the transition to remote learning smoother.⁶⁴ Among staff, principals, school leaders and teachers related their engagement with various professional networks to share knowledge and experiences during remote learning.⁶⁵ They also reported sharing gift bags among staff as gratitude for their effort during difficult times.⁶⁶

Faith and spirituality

Ivers noted that in Catholic schools, the person of Jesus Christ is central to the learning approach.⁶⁷ Fussell also suggests that community is central to the mission of Catholic education and Catholic schools provide a setting for students to be formed as “persons-in-community”.⁶⁸ Interpersonal relations are key to developing this community, a form of interaction that was limited during remote learning periods. Fussell suggests that considering students’ needs through a framework of helping students to build relationships with self, God, others, community and creation is key to a Catholic learning strategy.⁶⁹ He notes that a Christian community is not focused solely upon itself but seeks to be in service to others. Catholic schools provide an environment not just to be taught information about the faith, but to provide a lived experience of it.⁷⁰

60 Anne Foale, “Teachers’ voices from Tasmanian schools during the pandemic,” *Australian Educational Leader* 42, no.3 (2020):60-62, <https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/informit.602180383748960>.

61 Lee-Ann Ewing and Huy Quan Vu, “Navigating ‘Home Schooling’ during COVID-19: Australian public response on Twitter,” *Media International Australia* 178, no.1 (2021):77-86, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1329878x20956409>.

62 Ewing and Vu, “Navigating ‘Home Schooling’”, 77-86.

63 David Ivers, “What Next? COVID-19 and Australian Catholic Schools Through a Leadership Lens,” *International Studies in Educational Administration* 48, no.3 (2020):23-29, <http://cceam.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/ISEA-2020-48-3.pdf#page=29>.

64 Ivers, “What Next?”, 23-29.

65 Sioau-Mai See et al., *The Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey 2021 Data* (North Sydney, NSW: Australian Catholic University Institute for Positive Psychology & Education, 2022), https://www.healthandwellbeing.org/reports/AU/2021_ACU_Principals_HWB_Final_Report.pdf; Sum, “School leaders’ perceptions”, 188-207.

66 Sum, “School leaders’ perceptions”, 188-207.

67 Ivers, “What Next?”, 23-29.

68 Ronald D. Fussell, “Gather Us In: Building Meaningful Relationships in Catholic Schools Amid a COVID-19 Context,” *Journal of Catholic Education* 10, (2020):150, https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/ce_covid/10/.

69 Fussell, “Gather Us In”, 149-161.

70 Fussell, “Gather Us In”, 149-161.

Buchta, Cichosz and Zellma identified that while the involvement of parents in the religious education of younger school-age children during the pandemic meant that children participated in religious instruction without major problems, the virtual learning environment limits the forming of authentic interpersonal relationships, which is a necessary part of an upbringing in faith.⁷¹ Mercieca reported that teachers felt challenged teaching religious education through remote learning as many activities usually involve physical spaces, such as a chapel.⁷² However, they also reported that helpful approaches in the online environment included integrating religious education into other activities, such as colouring a mandala or going for a walk.

Communication

Communication was received through a variety of means during the pandemic. Initial announcements about school closures or lockdowns were disseminated through press conferences.⁷³ Within the school environment, schools reported using videos and websites, screencasting, Google classroom, phone, email and texting.⁷⁴ While some teachers used previously created content, others created their own resources.⁷⁵ Howarth also noted that successful communication in her school environment meant engaging in frequent, personal and tailored communication, using infographics and simple models, and gathering stakeholder feedback (such from parents, teachers, staff and students) through surveys, meetings and personal phone calls.⁷⁶

Mercieca, in her case study of a Catholic secondary school in Melbourne, reported that connection was set up each day for online pastoral time with home groups, and weekly year level assemblies.⁷⁷ Wellbeing coordinators also spent a great deal of time contacting families of students who had disengaged. This could involve using Google Meet to connect with students who were struggling, or phone calls from counsellors. She noted that due to psychosocial concerns some students were reluctant for their homes to be seen on video display and so phone contact was preferred.

In rural environments, White et al. reported one school becoming a central learning hub, where remote learning resources were shared.⁷⁸ The school parking lot became a place for parents to drive through and download key student learning materials onto their devices or pick up USBs with the materials. Other schools used a mixture of learning communication, with paper-based learning packs, USBs loaded with materials including PowerPoint presentations, or emails with learning links sent through.⁷⁹

In some rural communities, teachers drove considerable distances to deliver materials and to connect with families.⁸⁰ They also initiated regular check-in times with students throughout the day. In some cases, teacher aides rang younger primary school-aged children to listen to reading or made home visits. Facebook was also used to communicate school events.⁸¹

71 Roman Buchta, Wojciech Cichosz, and Anna Zellma, "Religious Education in Poland during the COVID-19 Pandemic from the Perspective of Religion Teachers of the Silesian Voivodeship," *Religions* 12, no.8, (2021):650, <https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/12/8/650>.

72 Mercieca, "Well-being and Community", 62-65.

73 Sum, "School leaders' perceptions", 188-207.

74 Charteris and Page, "School bonding", 91-108; Crouch et al., "It's about teaching", 42-46; Kerryl Howarth, "Education down the rabbit hole: An elementary school's successful response to COVID-19," *Australian Educational Leader* 42, no.3 (2020):43-48, <https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/informit.602124484835185>.

75 Crouch et al., "It's about teaching", 42-46.

76 Howarth, "Education down the rabbit hole", 43-48.

77 Mercieca, "Well-being and Community", 62-65.

78 White et al., "In-the-Moment Experiences", 47-59.

79 White et al., "In-the-Moment Experiences", 47-59.

80 Flack et al., *Educator perspectives*; White et al., "In-the-Moment Experiences", 47-59.

81 White et al., "In-the-Moment Experiences", 47-59.

Wellbeing and pastoral care

One particular effect of the period of remote learning was the impact on both students' and teachers' wellbeing. A number of interviews by Forster highlighted the ethical dilemma between emphasising student wellbeing and learning.⁸² One teacher reported that during COVID-19 student wellbeing became the priority over learning for the first time in their career.⁸³ A study by Zhang of primary school students in China found that mental health symptoms, such as depressive symptoms, nonsuicidal self-injury, and suicidal behaviours, had increased for students in May 2020 compared to the previous November 2019.⁸⁴ Houghton et al., in a longitudinal study of Western Australian adolescents over four timepoints—two prior to COVID, one as schools closed, and one post the reopening of schools—found significant increases in depression symptoms and decreases in positive mental wellbeing.⁸⁵ They noted that there were gender differences, with females reporting greater change. Overall, they found that the COVID-19-related school closures adversely affected adolescents' mental health and feelings of loneliness.

A study reported by Argoon in the *Herald Sun* at the beginning of 2021 indicated that several experienced teachers felt compelled to leave the profession following the events of the pandemic.⁸⁶ The primary reason given was the loss of the student-teacher relationship which was exacerbated by remote learning. The study also indicated that teachers in Australia who were struggling to maintain connection with their students and peers also struggled to produce a high-quality educational experience, and were exhausted by the workload and burdens placed upon them.⁸⁷ On the positive side, a study done by Heffernan et al. in December 2020 showed that public perception of teachers' work was more positive since the pandemic.⁸⁸

Naidoo et al. investigated the experiences of young people in NSW and Victoria during periods of lockdown.⁸⁹ They reported social isolation being a key concern, as well as the loss of many activities that gave life structure, meaning and a daily rhythm, such as school extra-curricular activities and physical activity. They also reported online learning challenges, such as unengaging pedagogies, lack of ongoing teacher support, lack of timely feedback and difficulty with the clarification of concepts. However, the young people interviewed found that a safe and secure home and positive relationships with caring adults and peers helped develop their capacity for resilience. Students mentioned engaging in new creative pursuits, participating in recreational activities with family, and making more connections with people outside their usual friendship circle, such as with extended family overseas. Mercieca noted that students in her case study took on board activities, such as weekly fun events, to keep up morale and build year level communities.⁹⁰ She noted that the school introduced changes to

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- 82 Daniella J. Forster, "Is learning more important than well-being? Teachers told us how COVID highlighted ethical dilemmas at school," *The Conversation*, November 9, 2020, <https://theconversation.com/is-learning-more-important-than-well-being-teachers-told-us-how-covid-highlighted-ethical-dilemmas-at-school-144854>.
- 83 Forster, "Is learning more important."
- 84 Lei Zhang et al., "Assessment of Mental Health of Chinese Primary School Students Before and After School Closing and Opening During the COVID-19 Pandemic," *JAMA network open* 3, no.9 (2020):1-4, <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2020.21482>.
- 85 Stephen Houghton et al., "Adolescents' longitudinal trajectories of mental health and loneliness: The impact of COVID-19 school closures," *Journal of Adolescence* 94, no.2 (2022):191-205, <https://doi.org/10.1002/jad.12017>.
- 86 Ashley Argoon, "Why remote learning was last straw for burnt-out teachers," *Herald Sun*, January 13, 2021, <https://www.heraldsun.com.au/education/why-remote-learning-was-last-straw-for-burntout-teachers/news-story/694ac026527647f33ac9d8c5936f9c1b>.
- 87 Louise Gwenneth Phillips et al., "Reimagining Education: Learning from COVID-19" (panel discussion, Southern Cross University, May 28, 2021), <https://www.scu.edu.au/education/events/reimagining-education--learning-from-covid-19-panel-discussion-led-by-associate-professor-louise-phillips.php>.
- 88 Amanda Heffernan et al., *The Impact of COVID-19 on Perceptions of Australian Schooling: Research Brief* (Monash University, 2021), <https://www.monash.edu/education/research/downloads/Impact-of-covid19-on-perceptions-of-Australian-schooling.pdf>.
- 89 Loshini Naidoo et al., "Sociality, resilience and agency: how did young Australians experience online learning during Covid-19?" *Australian Educational Researcher* 49, no.1 (2022):81-96, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-021-00500-5>.
- 90 Mercieca, "Well-being and Community", 62-65.

the timetable to allow for classes of less than an hour per session, which allowed for more sizeable breaks. It was also suggested that a 'wellbeing day' (day off) once a fortnight would be valuable in future lockdowns to grant more rest for both staff and students.

Spears and Green identified three various kinds of care that schools provided during the pandemic: emotional care (of students' and families' wellbeing), pedagogical care (of students' learning and academic achievements), and social care (an enhanced sense of mutual care between students and staff).⁹¹ Noting that students' physical, social and emotional wellbeing is recognised as fundamental for successful learning and development (the oft-cited concept of 'Maslow before Bloom'⁹²), they identified that pastoral care of students is key to the school's mission.

Conclusions and gaps in the literature

It has been noted that remote forms of learning have long been part of the educational scene in Australia in which children living in very remote areas have been taught via radio or other forms of electronic communication. However, the mass effects of COVID-19 on schools were unprecedented, with schools in every state and territory moving to online learning for some period of time. While most schools have resumed in-person classes, the impacts of COVID-19 continue to have an impact on staffing and student attendances. Studies on the impact continue to be undertaken.

Initial research into the impacts of COVID-19 on education was focused on government schools, although some studies had a broader sample that included Catholic and independent schools. Research also had a focus on the experience of university students. However, more research on the effects on primary and secondary students in Australia has come to light in the past year. Case studies from the Catholic education systems have also been published, although there do not yet appear to be broad studies into the impact of COVID-19 nationally. To some extent this is difficult to quantify with each state having such different experiences of the events.

Early literature anticipated that there would be significant learning loss as a result of the change to online learning. However, some subsequent studies have suggested that the academic impact has not been as great as anticipated. On the other hand, most research to date has looked at measures, such as HSC or NAPLAN results, or on the opinions of school staff or parents, rather than the students themselves. Some research has noted that it does appear that the impact of the movement to online learning has been greatest in low socio-economic areas where access to the technology and suitable spaces within the home for learning and the ability of parents to assist their children were limited. It was also expected that children with special needs and children in vulnerable contexts would experience greater impact from online learning.

The limited research with young people who have experienced remote learning during the last couple of years suggests that there has been a significant impact on mental health, partly due to the loss of a sense of community and partly due to the loss of a sense of structure to life that is provided by going to school. It has been noted by researchers that the impact on the sense of community strikes at the very heart of the Catholic philosophy of education which is focused on creating relationships with God and with others. Most research on the impacts of the pandemic, and the innovations that have results has been confined to small samples, often case studies of one or two schools, and usually at a secondary school level.

91 Spears and Green, "The challenges facing pastoral care", 287-296.

92 See <https://www.pacesconnection.com/blog/it-is-critical-to-maslow-before-students-can-bloom> for more explanation of this concept.

In some studies, there is a narrow definition of academic success that appears focused on literacy and numeracy, rather than considering broader subject areas. It has been anticipated in the literature that subjects such as physical education, arts and technology, and religious education would be more difficult to teach online than literacy and numeracy. While some studies had the advantage of having gathered information prior to the pandemic for comparison, most have been focused only on the time of the pandemic itself. It will take some time before any changes detected can be classified as having only a short-term effect, or rather they will have a much longer-term impact on students. At this stage, there is also limited research on the positives that have emerged from the times of remote learning during the pandemic.

The literature on the impact of COVID-19 on education will continue to grow in coming months and years. This study can make a significant contribution with its focus on the impact on the wellbeing of students and particularly on how the responses of schools have made a difference to staff and students.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHOD

Research questions

The research sought to explore the changing landscape of Catholic education as a result of COVID-19. Catholic schools developed several innovative approaches to online teaching and learning during COVID-19. The focus of the project was learning about experiences and these innovative practices, with a particular focus on religious education, faith and spirituality.

The aims of the project were to investigate the following:

1. What strategies were most effective to improve learning and wellbeing outcomes for students in Catholic primary and secondary schools? What improvements do we need to make so that all students benefit?
2. How can we improve our transition to remote learning for individual students (especially those with special needs, remote students and those in boarding schools), as well as in preparation for future situations similar to COVID-19?
3. How can we apply learnings from best practice examples to the new learning landscape?

Research methodology

To be consistent with the overall aims of the project, the research process chosen for this project was a predominantly qualitative strategy using multiple case studies and a mixed methods approach. Phase 1 involved a literature review and document analysis. Phase 2 involved case studies. The reason for adopting this approach was because of its advantage of depth and detail over the breadth of quantitative research methods. The nature of the data in this study had to be rich and deep to identify and explain the diversity of educational approaches and the impact of COVID-19 in different settings. A qualitative approach allowed us to listen to the varied stories of participants and collect detailed information about the activities of their schools and their experiences during remote learning and the COVID-19 pandemic.

School selection

Seven Catholic schools from around Australia, identified as having developed particularly innovative strategies related to online learning, were selected for the study. These schools were drawn from a list of schools identified through discussions with the National Catholic Education Commission and the team of Catholic Education Commissioners. A copy of the Invitation Letter to State Education Commissioners to nominate schools for this study is attached as *Appendix 1*.

Based on the recommendation notes accompanying each school, the research team selected a diverse list of schools which included:

- Systemic and independent schools
- Urban, regional and remote schools
- One special assistance school.

Each school was contacted by its State Catholic Education Commissioner and invited to participate in the project. The school was informed of the aims, goals and methodology of the project through an Invitation Letter to the Principal (*Appendix 2*). Once a school had agreed to be involved in the study, the Research Coordinator made

contact to confirm participation and arrange for a list of participants to be invited to participate. A copy of the Confirmation Letter is attached as *Appendix 3*. The school contacted participants on behalf of the research team. Participants were informed about the various aspects of the research through an Information Letter to Participants (see *Appendix 4*).

Participant selection and recruitment

A maximum of 15 participants, which included students, parents and staff, were recruited in each school. In schools where recruitment was not possible (due to COVID-19 restrictions), interviews were only conducted with the school principal. The research team also interviewed L&T Directors from the Catholic Education Offices. Throughout this document the term ‘Catholic Education Office’ is used to identify the relevant Catholic education authority in a state, territory or diocese. However, it is recognised that individual offices may be named Catholic Schools Office, Catholic Education Commission or other terms.

Participating schools

The project recruited participants from seven schools, from various dioceses and states. Four of the schools were secondary colleges, including co-educational, all-girls and all-boys schools. Two schools were primary schools, and one was a K-12 school for students with a mild to moderate intellectual disability. In three of the schools only the principal was interviewed. In the other four schools, a combination of students, teachers, the principal and parents were interviewed. A list of the schools and their location is outlined in Table 2.

Table 2: Names of participating schools by level, location, diocese and state

School name	Level	Location	Diocese	State
Avila College	Secondary	Mt Waverley	Melbourne	VIC
Resurrection School	Primary	Kings Park	Melbourne	VIC
Parramatta Marist High School	Secondary	Westmead	Parramatta	NSW
St Joseph’s Primary	Primary	Moorebank	Sydney	NSW
Mary MacKillop College	Secondary	Wakeley	Sydney	NSW
Mater Dei School (Good Samaritan Education)	K-12	Camden	Wollongong	NSW
St John’s College	Secondary	Darwin	Darwin	NT

Interview and focus group participants

Overall, a total of 51 participants were involved in 29 interviews and focus groups. Participants came from schools or Catholic Education Offices: ACT (1), NSW (36), Northern Territory (1), Victoria (12) and WA (1).

Ten participants were teachers, although five of them also had additional roles, including Religious Education Coordinator, Pastoral Coordinator, Curriculum Coordinator and Year Leader. Five of the participants were principals and one was a former deputy principal. Four parents, with children in participating primary and secondary schools, were also interviewed. Additionally, the four L&T Directors from the ACT, NSW, Victoria and WA participated.

A broad range of year levels was selected for the six student focus groups, representing 27 students in total. Each group was comprised of students from year levels, as follows:

Primary:

- Year 2
- Year 5
- Various year levels

Secondary:

- Years 8 and 9
- Years 11 and 12
- Year 12.

Data collection

Data collection for this project involved a mixed methods strategy that included:

- Several semi-structured face-to-face interviews with principals, teachers, parents and L&T Directors
- Focus groups with parents and students
- Documents prepared by Catholic Education Offices to be shared both externally and internally.

Interviews and focus groups

The interviews and focus groups with participants were guided by a set of questionnaires that explored various topics and allowed for spontaneous questions and the development of responses. Six different interview and focus group schedules (*Appendices 5-10*) were developed for school principals, teachers, parents, students and L&T Directors, respectively. Each schedule addressed several aspects of COVID-19 and remote learning. Its scope and content were influenced by the literature review and were planned in such a way as to obtain information about individual and school practices. The overall nature of the questions reflected an appreciative inquiry approach, a process that focuses on the positive experiences of participants. The main sections of the interview guide included the following four themes:

- Remote/Online Learning
- Support by the School/Catholic Education
- Communication/Learning and Teaching Resources
- Faith and Spirituality.

The duration of the interviews was typically 45 minutes to an hour. In a few instances, it was not possible to interview individuals separately due to time and commitment issues. In such cases, semi-structured group interviews were carried out with moderately directive questioning. These interviews were useful in producing rich data in some main areas, although it was not possible to complete the entire set of questions and individual expression was somewhat diminished in this setting.

Document analysis

The document analysis was conducted through a systematic search of each state and territory Catholic Education Office website. In larger states such as New South Wales (NSW) and Queensland, diocesan websites were also searched using keywords and phrases relating to COVID-19. Relevant information was downloaded, and any links to external sites were followed, yielding more information. Some links led to password-protected portals

to which we did not have access and therefore information from these could not be included. The document search was completed between 19 January 2021 and 16 February 2021.

In a few instances, the researchers were given access to Catholic Education Office portals where information was held that was shared internally with schools. Other Catholic Education Offices sent us numerous resources that they had circulated internally during stages of remote learning. This information was included in the research. A complete list of websites and portals that were accessed during the research is available as *Appendix 11*.

Care was taken to ensure that all documents were relevant, up-to-date and reliable in order to maximise the advantages of using these as source materials for the research. All electronic data were stored on SharePoint and password-protected. Physical copies of notes and consent forms were stored in a locked cabinet in a secure office. Data will be stored for a minimum of seven years before being destroyed in accordance with research protocols.

Data analysis

The qualitative data analysis for this study was done using NVivo software. All interviews and focus groups were video-recorded and transcribed and data uploaded into NVivo. Interviewers noted impressions, recurring themes, quotes and points of interest during their discussions. Research material from the document analysis in the form of documents, images and webpages was also incorporated into NVivo and a comprehensive process of data coding and identification of themes was undertaken. The pattern of coding involved two approaches; firstly, descriptive coding, where information was coded by topics, and secondly, 'in vivo coding', where themes emerged from the language or phrases used by participants.

Ethical considerations

Ethics approval for the project was sought from the Christian Research Association and was granted on 12 July 2021 (see *Appendix 12*). A further amendment to the application was advised in December 2021; it concerned further researchers involved with the project, a change in the number of schools approached, minor amendments to the letter to the principals, consent forms and interview questions, and finally, the addition of a support services sheet (see *Appendix 13*) as requested by Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools (MACS).

Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained at three levels in this study. First, the State Education Commissioners were asked to give their consent to the project and to nominate potential schools to participate (see *Appendix 14*). Second, school principals were asked to give their written consent to allow their schools to participate in the research (see *Appendix 15*). Third, each person (or parent/guardian of a person below the age of 18 years) invited to participate in an interview or focus group was provided with an information sheet and asked to sign a consent form. Student participants aged 16-17 years were also asked to sign a consent form in addition to parental consent. Care was taken to ensure that all participants were aware of their rights during the course of the research. Copies of these consent forms are available as *Appendices 16-18*.

Confidentiality

The nature of this study required that some participants were identifiable (e.g., school principals). Since one of the aims of the project was to publish innovative learning strategies, it was expected that principals would be pleased to be invited to participate in this project and would be eager for the good news about their schools to be published.

Despite the inherently public nature of the project, it was recognised that interviews would cover a wide range of topics and that some things said by interviewees would need to be kept confidential. This matter was dealt with by making each participant aware that they might be recognised. Since the researchers wanted to include the role of the person who made a particular comment, their consent was obtained prior to their being interviewed. However, in order to ensure no published comment could be attributed to any individual without them being aware of what was to be published and giving their consent to its publication, participants were therefore advised that further consent would be obtained for the release of data from interview transcripts and from all documents with identifying information (see *Appendix 19*).

Research with minors

As participants included students younger than 18 years old, special considerations were made to ensure the safeguarding and appropriateness of any interactions with them. All researchers who were involved with data collection were required to have Working with Children registration in their home state and to complete appropriate Child Protection Training for Working with Children. In addition to the Participant Information sheets provided to parents and older students, a version of the Participant Information sheet was provided which was written in language appropriate for younger students (see *Appendix 20*). Consent for participation was required by parents or guardians for all students under 18 years old. However, the autonomy of students aged 16 or 17 was recognised, and as such, an assent form signed by the students themselves was required in addition to the parental consent form. Parents or guardians were also advised that they could stay with their children during interviews or focus groups if they or their children wished to do so. However, no participants chose to take up this option, though a teacher was present at every focus group. All interviews took place using the video-conferencing application, Zoom, so that at no stage were researchers physically present with minors.

Research in different states/education offices

To undertake research in Catholic schools, some states required ethics approvals from the state education body before approaching schools. In Queensland, approval for the project was received from Brisbane Catholic Education (see *Appendix 21*). In Victoria, further clarifications were sought and amendments to the participant consent forms were required for clarity. The queries were resolved satisfactorily, and the State Education Commissioner approved the project to progress without needing to submit a formal MACS Research in Schools proposal (see *Appendix 22*).

While all researchers had appropriate Working with Children registration in their home state, it was discovered that some states, notably Queensland, did not recognise interstate registration and required researchers to gain Working with Children registration in that state. This process was quite involved for non-Queensland residents, and, unfortunately, due to the delays involved in the process, this impacted the researchers' ability to undertake data collection with Queensland schools within the timeframe allowed.

CHAPTER 4: DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

The main purpose of this chapter is to present the analysis of information from different state and territory Catholic Education Offices relating to COVID-19 policies, curriculum development, memos, guidance material and instructions to teachers, parents and students during transition to remote learning. Some of this material was publicly available on the websites of the Catholic Education Offices. In other cases, material was only available to specific groups of people who were given access to portions of Catholic Education Offices websites but it has been shared with the research team by the Catholic Education Offices. Some Catholic Education Offices shared some material that was not publicly available with the research team. The following analysis was limited by what was made available.

One general issue for the Catholic Education Offices was how to share materials. Should they provide them directly or should they expect schools to be the conduit? For example, the Queensland Catholic Education Commission (QCEC) developed a SharePoint library but found that it was not frequently used. An education officer of the Queensland Catholic Education Commission explained:

In 2020, QCEC responded to the immediate challenge posed by COVID-19 through the creation of a SharePoint library dedicated to storage of communications and resources that would support the knowledge base and operations of the Catholic School Authorities [CSAs]. Access was also provided to members of the QCEC Education Reference Group. QCEC maintained this library with daily briefing notes (where relevant) and encouraged CSAs to share resources in this space. However, over time it became apparent that there was minimal engagement in terms of additional uploads of materials external to QCEC. CSAs were also supported with resources produced by the QDoE [Queensland Department of Education] which were made available to all sectors. It is our understanding that there was some uptake of these resources. However, CSAs largely coordinated their own responses to the academic and wellbeing needs of their students, families and communities. (Catholic Education Office staff)

The information yielded from this document analysis forms an understanding of what information was available to parents, students and teachers as they dealt with the rapid changes to Catholic education in 2020. There were four major categories of information:

1. COVID-19 information and policies
2. Mental health and wellbeing
3. Pedagogical resources
4. Spiritual resources.

COVID-19 information and policies

All state and territory Catholic Education Offices made available different guides to the correct hygiene and handwashing procedures in response to COVID-19. A collection of these guides can be viewed in *Figure 1*. Further resources made available included information for parents to help support them in talking to their children about COVID-19. For example, Catholic Education Northern Territory offered links to articles, comics and animated clips advising parents on how to educate their children about COVID-19:

- How to talk to your kids about coronavirus (<https://www.nbcnews.com/better/lifestyle/how-talk-your-kids-about-coronavirus-ease-their-fears-ncna1129851>)

- This is the comic for children explaining the coronavirus (<https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/02/28/809580453/just-for-kids-a-comic-exploring-the-new-coronavirus>)
- A four-minute animated clip for children on coronavirus (<https://www.brainpop.com/health/diseasesinjuriesandconditions/coronavirus/>)

The Cairns Catholic Education Office offered advice on helping to keep children connected while social distancing, while the Townsville Diocese Catholic Education Office made available a frequently asked questions resource written by the federal government.

Policies for dealing with COVID-19 were communicated to principals and teachers by the various state and territory Catholic Education Offices. These policies included changes to student activities when they returned to the school grounds, such as not drinking out of communal drinking fountains, and policies for people visiting the school grounds.

Policy directions from the Catholic Schools NSW referred teachers to the NSW Department of Education policies around physical distancing for students returning to face-to-face teaching, such as best hygiene practices and having activities with as little contact as possible. Further COVID-19 policies issued by the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria related to advice from the Victorian Education Department for school camps and excursions. This advice included policies for hygiene and cleaning practices, management of all attendees' contact details, policies for the event of illness and the requirements to wear face masks.

The Catholic Education Offices played an important role in summarising the policy decisions of the state education departments and interpreting them for the schools. Some of this information was passed directly to principals. However, some information was made more generally available. For example, a media release from the Catholic Schools NSW highlighted the decisions that were made by the NSW Educational Standards Authority COVID-19 Response Committee for the safety of students, including adjustments to the Higher School Certificate, flexibility in syllabus outcomes and the cancelling of NAPLAN testing.

At the height of the pandemic, Catholic Schools NSW was issuing advice on the state of COVID-19 and the ramifications for their schools on a weekly basis. Later, these communications were circulated fortnightly and included information relating to any school or border closures, what had changed since the last briefing, any further information and contact details for further information. Along with these internal briefings Catholic Schools NSW also circulated COVID-19 information from the NSW Health Department such as informing teachers, students and parents what a 'close contact' is, who and when you might need to self-isolate and what to do in the event of becoming ill.

Further to the communication of health advice, Catholic Schools NSW provided detailed information relating to their policies and guidelines for students that attended school during the pandemic. These guidelines included information relating to social distancing practices, infection control measures, hygiene requirements and workplace safety considerations for staff and students.

Figure 1: Different guides offered for hygiene and handwashing practices



On some occasions, the Catholic Education Offices also gathered information from the schools and from parents to check how they were responding and identify their particular needs. MACS sent out a survey to parents in preparation for the second lockdown. The research aimed to improve remote learning experiences for Melbourne school children as they entered lockdown.

Catholic Education Offices also shared how schools were responding to their contexts. There were documented stories of students and schools continuing with projects and programs despite the disruptions caused by COVID-19. For example, a major creative arts display that happens each year at Bede Polding College in Sydney was still held in 2020 through digital means. Similarly, in the Archdiocese of Sydney, and the Dioceses of Wollongong and Bathurst, Year 5 and 6 students took part in a project to produce artworks and accompanying reflections on their understanding of the Christmas story, sharing them digitally.

Mount St Joseph Girls College, Altona, participated in the St Vincent de Paul Society 'Winter School Sleepout'. Usually, the program sees students spend a night at school to raise awareness for homelessness. But as all students were in lockdown, the event took place at home, and saw students and staff select uncomfortable places to sleep, be that the couch, backyard or in their car.

Mental health and wellbeing

Critical to supporting parents during COVID-19 was access to different mental health support services. All state and territory Catholic Education Offices offered various resources designed for parents to support their mental health. For example, Catholic Education Canberra and Goulburn had a resource listing many support services available, such as CatholicCare, Kids Helpline, Mental Health Line, Beyond Blue, Lifeline, Mensline and Headspace. The Catholic Education Offices of the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle and Archdiocese of Brisbane offered a guide to positive mental health from the Australian Psychological Society.

A further resource included self-care for parents during COVID-19 developed by Catholic Education Western Australia (CEWA). Tips included connecting with faith, making time for yourself, looking after your health, connecting with family and friends, limiting news watching and practising self-compassion. The Cairns Catholic Education Office also circulated a resource to parents offering 10 ways to care for themselves during COVID-19. This included tips on how to stay active, practise mindfulness, connect with friends, access professional help and support services, focus on eating well, limit news consumption, listen to music, de-clutter your environment, watch or read something uplifting and learn something new.

Other resources made available to parents included means of obtaining financial support from CEWA and the Lismore Catholic Education Office. This information offered guidance on who to talk to in the event of financial hardship and a range of tips and services for dealing with financial difficulties.

Many Catholic Education Offices offered resources to parents to protect the e-safety of their children. These included links to the Australian Government E-safety Commissioner website and offering tips, such as monitoring children's online activity, placing technology in public spaces in the home and encouraging children to use only official school communication channels.

Catholic Education Tasmania suggested that parents needed to be supportive and connected to their children during this time and help them develop a daily routine around remote learning practice.

Catholic Education Canberra and Goulburn provided parents with resources to help navigate Google Classroom, an online portal delivering educational resources to students.

Catholic Education Offices, such as those in Western Australia, Victoria and South Australia, offered resources to teachers for supporting students during COVID-19 and periods of remote learning. Catholic Education South Australia and Catholic Education Commission of Victoria had links to their information stored in a portal and the research team did not have access. However, information from the CEWA was publicly available. It outlined ways that teachers could support their students, including ensuring visibility over digital communication:

- *Every school was given access to the Visible Wellbeing e-program, which provides a range of wellbeing practices and activities that can be delivered at any point in the day during virtual lessons. The interventions demonstrate how students can maintain and build their wellbeing via small wellbeing habits and practices.*
- *The Reflect Microsoft Teams app was also introduced to make the wellbeing of students visible to teachers, build each student's self-awareness and reflection, promote wellbeing literacy and emotional management skills, and identify students of concern (for referral to pastoral staff).*

It was noted that a team of psychologists was on hand to assist with any needs the students might have:

The CEWA Psychology Team continued to service CEWA schools during the period of remote learning, including:

- *Virtual consultation for principals, teachers and parents*
- *Online school case management*
- *Capacity-building for staff focusing on student mental health and wellbeing*
- *Capacity-building for parents focusing on mental health, wellbeing, behaviour, parenting and learning at home.*

CEWA also implemented a range of seminars aimed at upskilling staff in:

- *Staff self-care*
- *Resilience*
- *E-wellbeing*
- *Non-therapeutic counselling skills*
- *Managing student risk remotely.*

This training continued for staff to help deal with the transition of students back into the classroom with the following modules:

- *Staff self-care*
- *Stories and experiences*
- *Child safety*
- *Re-establishing classroom routines*
- *Re-establishing social connections*
- *Resilience and supporting emotional needs*
- *Parent engagement.*

Support and wellbeing for teachers

The Catholic Education Commission of Victoria made available their policies and supports for teachers during COVID-19. These resources included supporting teachers who felt vulnerable and did not want to return to face-to-face teaching:

Advice from the Victorian Chief Health Officer is that, as with other members of the community, teachers and school staff may be at greater risk of more serious illness if they contract COVID-19 and they are:

- *Aged 70 years and older*
- *Aged 65 years and older, with chronic medical conditions*
- *Of any age, with a compromised immune system*
- *Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and aged over 50 years, with one or more chronic medical conditions.*

If an employee advised that they were in one of the above risk categories and had been advised by their treating medical practitioner to stay home as a precaution, employees in this category could work from home.

There were also supports in place to help teachers who were pregnant or needed to work from home because of caring duties.

Catholic Education South Australia provided support for their teachers with a resource providing information using MS Teams, a digital communication platform used to conduct remote lessons. The resource offered advice on conducting video conferences and education through a webinar, while there was also a series of self-help videos and several links for further learning. Further resources for teachers were the policies around schools managing COVID-19 at schools and the guidelines for remote teaching.


Pedagogical resources

Many Catholic Education Offices had password-protected portals through which most learning resources were distributed. Publicly available pedagogical information included weekly lesson plans from Catholic Schools NSW, including those prepared by the NSW Department of Education and those developed internally. Catholic Education Canberra and Goulburn prepared a physical education activity plan, Brisbane Archdiocese Catholic Education Office offered a home reading strategy for students and Catholic Education Offices in Tasmania and South Australia circulated activity guides and a daily planner.

In preparation for remote learning, most state and territory Catholic Education Offices offered resources helping parents prepare for the transition. These resources included a learning environment checklist distributed by Catholic Schools NSW (see *Figure 2*). Lismore Catholic Education Office published a resource advising how to create a learning space at home (see *Figure 3*). Cairns Catholic Education Office also suggested ways to keep children engaged (see *Figure 4*). Catholic Education South Australia offered a resource to create learning routines (see *Figure 5*). Catholic Schools NSW offered a support guide for parents with home learning responsibilities developed by the Diocese of Lismore.

Figure 2. Learning environment checklist

NSW Department of Education



Learning environment checklist

In setting up this space the following should be considered:

- Is the area free of distraction?
- Is there excessive noise in the area?
- Are there trip hazards in the area?
- Is the area exposed to direct glare or reflections?
- Does the area have sufficient power points available?
- Is equipment (extension cords etc.) in good, safe, working condition?
- Is there a proper desk and chair and other necessary equipment (light, stationery and devices)?
- Is the chair adjusted correctly?
 - Feet should be flat on the floor and knees bent at right angles with thighs parallel to the floor.
 - The chair backrest should support the lower back and allow your child to sit upright.
 - The chair should move freely and not be restricted by hazards such as mats and power cords.
 - Chair arm rests should be removed or lowered when typing.
- Is the computer adjusted correctly?
 - The screen should be positioned directly in front of your child.
 - The screen should be at a distance where your child can see clearly and easily without straining. The top of the screen should be slightly lower than eye level.
 - The keyboard should be positioned at a distance where elbows are close to your child's body and their shoulders should be relaxed.
 - The mouse should be placed directly next to the keyboard.
- Are their most frequently used items within easy reach from a seated position?

education.nsw.gov.au




Figure 3: Creating a learning space at home checklist

Learning at Home: Setting up a Learning Space

Your child will need a dedicated place to learn.

- If using a device set it up preferably with a blank wall behind the child if possible.
- Avoid setting up study spaces in bedrooms.
- Headphones will be important if more than one child will be working in the same area and when using Zoom meetings or watching instructional videos.
- Make sure your child works at a desk or table
- Encourage children to use different places for different learning activities eg. online learning at the desk, reading in the garden. They will soon tire of sitting in one place.
- Minimise distractions during learning time and turn the TV off .
- If multiple children are using one device, it will take time for the family routine to develop as learning programs are communicated to you by different teachers.
- Be patient with yourself and your children's teachers. We are all in a new environment.



Diocese of
LISMORE
CATHOLIC EDUCATION

Family School Partnership Services

Figure 4: Ways to keep children engaged

LEARNING AT HOME: HOW TO KEEP YOUR CHILD ENGAGED

Created by the School Counselling and Psychology Team - Catholic Education Services Cairns

As most of us move into a learning from home model because of COVID-19, many parents are feeling overwhelmed with the reality of schooling at home. To support learning at home, you're not required to be an expert or an educator. Your role is to be a parent and to partner with your child's school to support your child learning at home. It is important to recognise that this will be a journey and there is no expectation for it to be perfect. Below are some tips that we hope will help you in supporting your child learning at home. Explore the underlined words by clicking on them to access further information.

Be kind to yourself

- ✓ Don't put too much pressure on yourself to be perfect or feel you should know it all.
- ✓ Take comfort in knowing that school-based lessons rarely go perfectly even for professional teachers.
- ✓ Take breaks when you start to feel overwhelmed.

Establish family routines

- ✓ A healthy daily routine is great for concentration and learning, as well as mental and physical health. When establishing a routine for learning at home, consider:
 - » Waking at usual times
 - » Preparing 'lunchboxes' in the morning and eating the contents at usual break times
 - » Dressing in full (or part) school uniform
 - » Scheduling in movement and brain breaks. [Go Noodle](#) and [Rainbow Yoga with Adrienne](#) are great websites with lots of different activities for you and your child to do.
- ✓ Be flexible with your routine and adjust if it doesn't work the first time (or the second or third time).
- ✓ Follow the advice provided by your child's school regarding virtual lessons and how to access them and incorporate them into your daily routine.

Establish family expectations

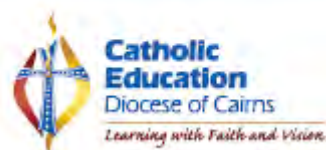
- ✓ Learning from home takes some time for both parent and child to get used to, so establishing what you expect from your child and what they can expect from you is important.
- ✓ When establishing family expectations, consider including:
 - » A morning and afternoon check-in, asking questions such as:
 - What will you be learning today? What resources/support do you need?
 - Do you need help with something to make tomorrow more successful?
 - » A plan for how you might manage tension. See information from the [Red Cross](#) on how you can defuse family tension and conflict.

Set up the learning environment for success

- ✓ An environment in which your child feels comfortable, has minimal distractions and allows them to focus will work best.
- ✓ Learning at home should take place in a shared family space (such as the dining room) rather than your child's bedroom.
- ✓ [This checklist](#) will help you to set up a home learning environment for your child.

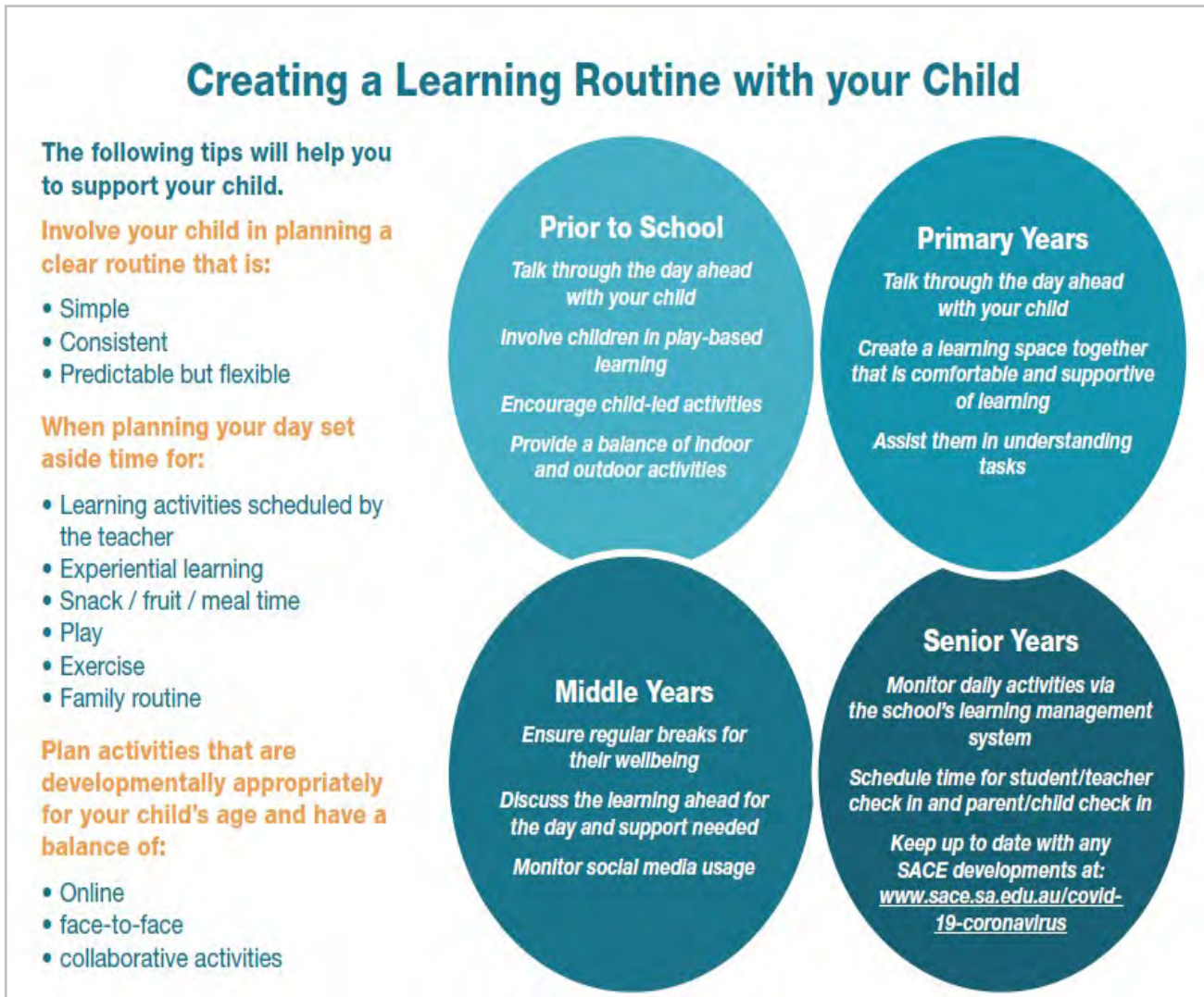
Remember, your child's teacher will be available to provide support and guidance along the way, so keep in contact with them.

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Rev:23Apr2020

Figure 5: Creating a learning routine for children



Other resources offered to parents in preparation for home learning included information relating to digital technology. In response to the move to remote learning Catholic Schools NSW circulated a NSW Department of Education policy document about the provision of access to digital technology for school children who did not have computers or tablets at home. Catholic Education South Australia developed a resource guide for parents helping them understand what digital technologies would be used with remote learning and how to prepare for it.

Catholic Education Offices in the Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia, along with the Cairns Diocesan Office, offered teachers guidelines for remote teaching. In one example, Catholic Education Northern Territory offered a series of suggestions for teachers to use during their online lessons:

- *Teacher responsibilities*
- *Limit live lessons to 20-30 minutes*
- *Set the behavioural expectations of your online class and ensure students abide by them*
- *Ensure the goals for each lesson are clear*
- *Encourage students to communicate via the school learning platform*
- *Keep students to assessment and communicate clearly regarding this*

- *Provide feedback and grade assessment tasks within a timely manner; two-week turnaround*
- *Keep in contact with parents/guardians particularly with students who are not engaging or participating in an appropriate manner.*

Cairns Catholic Education Office offered its teachers a holistic set of suggestions for adapting to changes as remote learning became a reality. These suggestions included simplifying lessons, focusing on social and emotional learning, being positive, talking through challenges and being attentive to struggling students. Catholic Education South Australia's resources for remote learning for teachers focused more on ensuring the safety protocols between the teacher and student were followed. Such protocols included that teachers must only use the school online environment; personal phones, email and social media accounts should not be used; one-on-one student to staff video conferences should not occur; students should be working in a public area of the house; and teachers need to ask permission to record any part of the lesson. Catholic Education Western Australia focused on delivering remote learning with continuity underpinned by five practices:

- *Quality relationships in a remote learning context*
- *Learning design in a remote learning context*
- *Engagement in a remote learning context*
- *Instructional range in a remote learning context*
- *Place, space and technology in a remote learning context.*

Most pedagogical resources for teachers were provided to them through password-protected portals. However, Sydney Catholic Schools made available publicly different lesson plans and curricula for many different subjects, including religious education for all age groups in secondary school.

There were few learning resources made available by Catholic Education Offices for children to engage with on their own. Most of the pedagogical information provided by the different state and territory Catholic Education Offices was aimed at parents and teachers. However, Catholic Education Tasmania had an activity for students aged 13-16 years in which they needed to take a stand on an ethical issue, in this case, wearing face masks, and convince their audience of the position they had taken. There was another activity designed for younger children, 9-12 years old, in which they needed to draw a comic strip of part of their day at home.

In Western Australia, there was a focus on cross-sector networking with the State Education Department, Independent Schools Western Australia and tertiary institutions. The CEWA website noted:

CEWA staff are working closely with staff from the Department of Education, School Curriculum and Standards Authority, the Association of Independent Schools Western Australia, Tertiary Institutions Service Centre and the School of Isolated and Distance Education, to share resources and to address issues in relation to areas such as disruption to assessment and reporting, examinations, NAPLAN and the Online Literacy and Numeracy Assessment.

It was noted that these resources were only meant to supplement teaching resources and it was stressed that Catholic school teachers still needed to provide learning that reflected the values and ethos of Catholic education, as in the following instructions on the CEWA website:

<https://www.education.wa.edu.au/learning-at-home>

The Department of Education has launched the Learn at Home website to support parents, students and teachers. A range of resources have been curated on this site. Resources for each year of schooling will continue to be uploaded in the coming weeks. There are resources on the site to assist parents in engaging their children at home, particularly younger children, and resources will be uploaded for ATAR students. The site is not designed as a teaching platform and while it contains many useful resources these need to be used with discretion. Teachers are encouraged to use relevant resources which connect to the curriculum and also align with our Catholic ethos. There will be resources on the Learning at Home website that do not accord with the teaching of the Catholic Church and will be in conflict with the values of our Catholic ethos. Please urge teachers to exercise discernment in the use of these resources, as they would with any resource. If teachers are unsure of the suitability of a resource, including those on the Learning at Home website, they are in the first instance to seek the advice of their Principal, Assistant Principal – Religious Education or Leader of the Religious Education Learning Area. The Religious Education and Faith Formation Team are also available to provide advice and guidance in these matters.

Child safety online was another focus for the Catholic Education Western Australia. As with many Catholic Education Offices, it accessed information from the federal government's E-safety Commissioner. The information offered was for both parents and teachers:

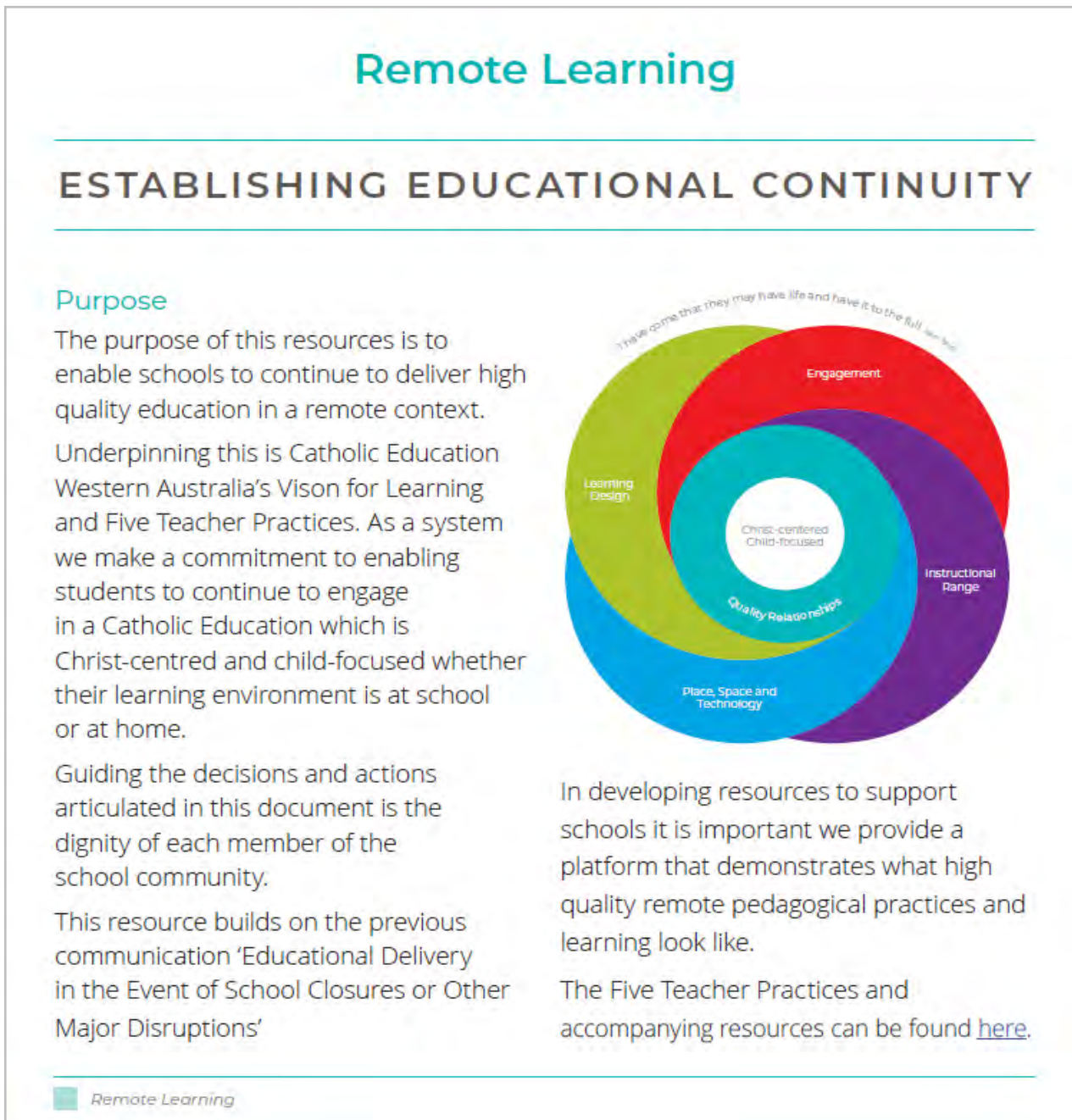
Many students will engage in online learning in the coming weeks. It is important to continue to upskill students and staff on practices which will foster safety in a digital environment. The following websites have been designed to support young people, parents and teachers.

- <https://www.esafety.gov.au/about-us/blog/covid-19-keeping-schools-and-learning-safe-online>
- <https://www.esafety.gov.au/about-us/blog/covid-19-online-safety-kit-parents-and-carers>

Another important CEWA focus was on increasing the capacity to use and knowledge of digital pedagogy as at the time the duration of the lockdown was unclear. The framework underpinning the digital pedagogy was supported by five key teaching practices: learning design, engagement, instructional range, quality relationships and place, space and technology (see *Figure 6*):

As staff gain confidence in delivering learning remotely, it is important that schools engage with building capacity to facilitate good pedagogy in a remote classroom. A resource to support schools in engaging with the Five Teacher Practices in continuing to deliver high quality education in a remote context is attached.

Figure 6. Catholic Education Western Australia (CEWA) remote learning framework



Quality Relationships in a remote learning context

- How are teachers continuing to foster quality relationships founded on the example of Christ?
- How do students have a voice in decisions that impact on their learning?

Learning Design in a remote learning context

- How are teachers using assessment to enable them to measure student learning and to change their instruction to ensure they are meeting the needs of each student?
- How are teachers providing effective feedback so that students know how to act upon it?

Engagement in a remote learning context

- How are teachers continuing to recognise and develop students' strengths, gifts and talents?
- How are teachers ensuring the learning is meaningful, interesting, relevant and achievable?

Instructional Range in a remote learning context

- How are teachers optimising and empowering student learning using effective online collaboration?
- Through student-centred inquiry, how might teachers support students to persist with authentic and sustained challenges?

Place, Space and Technology in a remote learning context

- How are teachers ensuring students have an organised virtual space to learn?
- How are teachers ensuring learners feel safe and welcome, that their voice is valued and that they have a strong sense of belonging?

Spiritual resources

CEWA provided spiritual pedagogical resources in the form of encouragement to pray and undertake Christian services:

Try to make regular times for prayer, morning prayer, grace before meals and other family prayer times. While Churches remain closed try to recreate Church in the home using special places set up with religious symbols. Remind students of serving others at this time by offering prayers for those in need.

Students can also do Christian service at this time by writing to, or phoning those who are lonely and housebound. Following health advice, they can help parents prepare and deliver care packages and meals to the doorsteps of those who need extra support.

Resources relating to family prayer were distributed by Catholic Education South Australia and the Catholic Education Offices of Lismore, Cairns and Brisbane. These documents were designed to help guide families in prayer during a time when other spiritual places like Catholic schools and churches were closed. For example, the Diocese of Lismore offered a resource giving eight suggested opportunities for family prayer:

- *Pray before a meal*
- *Pray before bed*
- *Pray in the car*
- *Pray before engaging in hospitality*
- *Pray for others*
- *Pray for each other*
- *Pray as critical needs arise*
- *Pray when sin is prevalent.*

The Brisbane Catholic Education Office offered a resource to encourage and guide family prayer by offering different forms of prayer, such as meditative prayer, routine prayer, traditional prayer and gratitude prayer (See *Figure 7*). The Cairns Catholic Education Office offered a resource of a rite of reflection to connect the family before mealtime. Catholic Education South Australia had a resource available for families to be able to engage in different prayers over the Advent period. This document had 16 links to resources relating to Advent from organisations such as Caritas and the Jesuit Institute, and children-friendly prayers and the story of Christmas (see *Appendix 23*).

Catholic Schools NSW offered information on *Pray School*—an initiative of the Wollongong diocese that provided a weekly Religious Education program for children, along with key Scripture stories covered in the Primary Religious Education curriculum with follow up activities.⁹³

93 “Pray School,” Diocese of Wollongong, last updated May 2, 2020, <https://sites.google.com/dow.catholic.edu.au/pray-school/home>.

Figure 7. Different methods of prayer for the family

RELIGIOUS LIFE OF THE FAMILY

Prayer is a way for families, communities and individuals to come together, show solidarity and be there for each other. We lift our hearts and minds to God. Everyone can pray and one only has to have the will to pray. Prayer can offer routine and comfort and a sense of peace in uncertain times. There are many ways we can pray alone and also with our families and communities. If you have access to electronic devices and internet, these opportunities could also be shared remotely with extended family and friends.



		
<h3 style="margin: 0;">Prayer Space</h3> <p style="margin: 5px 0 0 0;">Create a prayer space in the home. This can be done with a small table and some coloured cloth. We are currently in Lent so use purple if you have it. Find a candle and a crucifix (if you have one). You might also like to add some flowers and prayer stones. If you have a Bible it could be placed in the space as well. Try not to over clutter the space. Keep it simple as sometimes all you need is a candle.</p>	<h3 style="margin: 0;">Meditative Prayers</h3> <p style="margin: 5px 0 0 0;">Practice silence and stillness. Light a candle to remind you of the presence of God and sit quietly alone or with others in your family. Close your eyes and become aware of your breath. You might like to include a mantra. <i>Maranatha</i> is an ancient Aramaic word meaning come Lord Jesus. This can be repeated gently with the breath. Spend 5-10 minutes on this meditation.</p>	<h3 style="margin: 0;">Pray in Creation</h3> <p style="margin: 5px 0 0 0;">Sit outside and take a moment to listen to the sounds, paying attention to what you can feel and see. Give thanks to God as you sit in stillness, peace and quiet.</p>
		
<h3 style="margin: 0;">Ignatian Examen</h3> <p style="margin: 5px 0 0 0;">This prayer come from Ignatius Loyola the founder of the Jesuits (Pope Francis is a Jesuit) The Examen has 5 simple steps.</p> <p style="margin: 5px 0 0 0;">Stillness: Stop and become present in the moment. Let the noise stop and be aware of God.</p> <p style="margin: 5px 0 0 0;">Thanks: Think of the things you are grateful for in your day. They might not be the things you would expect.</p> <p style="margin: 5px 0 0 0;">Awareness: Think and pray a bit more. What is really going on in your mind and heart? Share your thoughts and feelings with God.</p> <p style="margin: 5px 0 0 0;">Sorrow: What am I sorry for and how can I do things better?</p> <p style="margin: 5px 0 0 0;">Hope: Look ahead to tomorrow. What is a positive way I could look at a new day?</p>	<h3 style="margin: 0;">Traditional Prayers</h3> <p style="margin: 5px 0 0 0;">Traditional prayers can provide comfort in repetition and simplicity. They can help to refocus the mind.</p> <p style="margin: 5px 0 0 0;">Take time to say the Our Father and/or the Hail Mary. Pray a decade of the Rosary as a family and share who or what is your offering for the prayer.</p>	<h3 style="margin: 0;">Routine</h3> <p style="margin: 5px 0 0 0;">Develop a routine and try to have all the family participate (e.g. before bedtime). Each person might offer their own thoughts about what or whom they would like to pray for. Try and pray daily.</p>
		
		<h3 style="margin: 0;">Gratitude Prayer</h3> <p style="margin: 5px 0 0 0;">Share the things you are grateful for, e.g. a moment of your day, good health or a person.</p>


A Brisbane Catholic Education School

Two Catholic Education Offices, Cairns and South Australia, offered resources for pastoral support in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Cairns Office collated a four-page document of different prayers designed for challenging times. There were seven prayers, one to say each day of the week. At the same time, Catholic Education South Australia offered a list of resources, collated by *The Jesuit Post*, to support people looking for Christ during the pandemic. An article, also by *The Jesuit Post*, was circulated by Catholic Education South Australia highlighting the importance of prayer as a response to COVID-19. It noted that prayer encourages you to be calm, while embracing Christian values of loving your neighbour and going the extra mile to help people.

Conclusion

The materials on the websites of the various Catholic Education Offices that were publicly available or made available to the research team could be categorised under four themes:

- Dealing with COVID
- Advice regarding mental health and wellbeing
- Materials to aid home learning
- Advice regarding one's spirituality.

Most Catholic Education Offices had health materials about how students and staff could minimise the risk of the spread of COVID. Most of this material was based on their state government's advice, although some specific examples of how the principles should be applied in the school setting were often provided, and helpful materials such as visitor registration forms, were included. Most Catholic Education Offices focused much of their attention on interpreting state government policies and directions and providing advice to schools. They would then send regular briefings to principals. These briefings were not generally made public and were not considered in this review of documentation.

There was some advice on the websites of the Catholic Education Offices about mental health and the wellbeing of both students and staff. In some locations, simple guidelines were offered on ways to maintain wellbeing. There were also links to sources of support for counselling and other assistance, such as dealing with financial hardship.

General advice was offered on the websites about home learning: how parents should set up suitable learning-friendly spaces and how they should ensure the safety of their children in online environments. There was some general advice for teachers in relation to home learning. However, because most of the detailed curricula materials for teachers were made available through password-protected portals, it was not possible for the research team to evaluate the range or nature of such materials.

As well as Catholic Education Offices being a conduit for state government information relevant to students and schools, they also provided their own resources, and particularly worthy of note, some examples from the schools illustrating how events and programs were conducted in an online environment.

A major consequence of COVID-19 was disruption to communal worship practices for Catholics and others, as churches in many locations were closed and religious activities and events at schools were halted. It was noted that several Catholic Education Offices addressed this by offering spiritual resources designed for families, for example, encouraging them to engage in prayer, be that before a meal, in the car or before bedtime. Some pastoral supports were offered by Catholic Education Offices directly aimed at the health implications of COVID-19.

CHAPTER 5: LEARNING AND TEACHING DURING REMOTE LEARNING

The impact of COVID-19 on Catholic schools directly affected students, families, teachers and school leadership staff, as well as staff in the diocesan Catholic Education Offices. Most schools transitioned from an on-site classroom environment to remote learning within the space of a few weeks, and there were numerous challenges schools faced as government lockdown restrictions were placed on communities, often at short notice. The research explored what schools did during remote learning periods and the impact remote learning had on those in their school community. It examined the variety of learning and teaching resources which were developed and utilised, and the various communication strategies schools implemented to ensure minimal disruption to staff and students.

From the classroom to remote learning

In the early stages of the pandemic, in around April 2020, many schools moved quickly to put things in place to ensure their students and staff were setup to work remotely in the expectation that state governments would announce lockdown restrictions. In some states, the timing of the first lockdown coincided with school holidays, which meant that schools had around two weeks of non-school time to plan for remote learning. Of course, while the students were on holidays, many school staff were required to work to ensure plans were in place for the start of the new school term. Prior to the first lockdown, taking notice of what was happening in other countries and anticipating similar developments in Australia, some schools had already started planning for 'learn from home' scenarios for their staff and students.

L&T Directors in the Catholic Education Offices suggested that having the time to plan was very helpful in that it provided them with a 'window' to support each school to implement its own plans.

Although advanced planning for COVID-19 was appreciated by teachers and principals, schools that already had a learning management system prior to COVID, which could then be easily adapted to remote learning, did particularly well. As expressed by one classroom teacher:

I think we were in a really good position because our learning management system was set up, but also our staff were in a really good position. So, our staff were really comfortable in our processes and the methodologies we use for teaching and where everything was and our student body was well set up, they knew how to access the materials they needed to be able to be comfortable with their learning process. (Teacher)

According to principals, teachers, students and families, in the early stages of COVID, many schools provided a lot of communication about changes, and distributed it via various channels. Additionally, at the executive level, there were many online meetings between Catholic Education Offices and school principals. In one diocese, a regular online principals' meeting was held whenever there were any significant changes of which schools needed to be made aware. The meetings provided an opportunity for principals to ask about anything which affected their school or to clarify uncertainties around changes. Feedback from principals suggested that these meetings were highly beneficial and appreciated.

Certainly, what eventuated in the schools in different states depended on the extent to which there were COVID-19 cases and each state government's response to containing any COVID-19 outbreaks. In WA, for example, many schools planned for a longer period of remote learning but ended up returning to face-to-face learning earlier. Ultimately, some schools in that state only had a period of around three weeks of remote learning during the first year of COVID. In contrast, during the initial stages of the pandemic, some schools in other states

planned for remote learning for three weeks which kept being extended and ultimately ended up being several months.

When the various states and territories introduced border travel restrictions and different isolation periods, some schools were more impacted than others, especially those located near border towns or those which had students living on-site, such as boarding schools. For example, one L&T Director recalled the impact the initial WA restrictions had on a group of students returning to school from interstate or overseas after school holidays and who were required to isolate beforehand. While WA schools were not largely providing remote learning, they did, in fact, need to provide online learning to some students in these circumstances. Over time, though, as COVID-19 outbreaks occurred intermittently in different states, nearly all schools were required to do remote learning in some form, which the initial and ongoing planning allowed them to implement at short notice and undertake without too many problems.

The uncertainty of the pandemic was felt in numerous ways by schools, not just from a health perspective. For example, in the early stages of the pandemic, one secondary principal became aware that some school support staff and teachers of some subjects, such as food technology or art, felt some insecurity around their employment. However, the reality was that although some staff may have had their roles changed slightly, all staff worked extremely hard to ensure the logistics of remote learning were met and, with modifications, the curriculum was delivered to students.

Teaching and learning online

In terms of how schools chose to structure their remote learning, some schools had strict and highly structured online routines for their students, while others went with a less structured approach, allowing students more flexibility.

In the schools which tried to replicate on-site classroom routines in an online format, the students, for example, were required to wear their uniforms, be groomed appropriately, to login promptly to every single class and always have their webcams on. In one secondary school, the routine of keeping to the school's on-site timetable worked well for staff and students, as noted by a teacher: "So, our school had a synchronous model. It was a really effective model. The students engaged really well, and we were able to deliver our content in a minimally uninterrupted manner, which was good."

Several parents also expressed their gratitude for the structured approach in those schools, such as one parent of a secondary student: "Overall, I found it really good that they had the structure of the lessons. I found it really helpful, and I was really grateful to the teachers for that structure." A few parents noted that having the school maintain a rigid online class teaching structure, but also having the school monitor their children's conduct, as they would with on-site learning, meant they were assured that they themselves did not need to monitor their child, when in many instances they were working from home as well.

A student from one of these schools reflected positively on the structured approach of remote learning in his school:

The thing I thought was really good though, was that our school set up for us to feel as though we were in the classroom, even though we weren't. In a way, we would have our Zooms with the normal teachers we would have for the class, at the time we would be in class. We would have the recess and lunch when we would normally have it. They put us into breakout rooms, to put us into our groups. They tried to make

it feel like it was a normal class as much as possible, which definitely helped with our learning. That's why I think that may have separated us from other schools. (Secondary school student)

On the other hand, some teachers, parents and students recognised the need to be able to adapt so that there was less rigidity and some flexibility in online learning to ensure expectations on students were not unrealistic. As one parent of two primary school students noted:

The expectations were just to do your best. Because some parents are working, and some parents don't wake up or they're doing shift work. So, everyone's really different, and, you know, if you can't log on or do something, you can do this later. It felt flexible. (Parent)

This thinking was also expressed by one principal who noted the unrealistic expectations some schools had put on their students and their families around online learning during the pandemic:

Some of these assumptions around what's possible in their community are unrealistic, even in relatively privileged environments, such as our families, not every kid has a room they can go to, not every household has enough Wi-Fi bandwidth. And if mum and dad are working at home too, or even if they're not, and they got younger ones, like all that complexity. (Principal)

Another school principal highly affirmed the synchronous model of learning for all of the lockdown periods, which followed the normal structure of the school day, with the same start and finish times, the same breaks and identical period times. However, without being too prescriptive and with some guidance, the teachers were entrusted to teach as they needed to, so in reality it was a structured model but with flexibility.

With rapid changes occurring in the initial stages of the pandemic, students and teachers had to adapt to a different learning landscape and quickly learn the technology which came with it. Some students and teachers were able to adjust relatively smoothly, while others “struggled a little bit in the first instance, and they were teaching each other.” In many locations, schools “found out very quickly that some kids had no access to technology, which was a real challenge.” (Principal)

Overall, in moving to remote learning, there was much that worked well for many schools, but also some significant challenges that schools faced in delivering online learning in an effective way.

Learning and teaching resources

As noted in the document analysis, most of the diocesan and state Catholic Education Offices developed resources for their schools, which were then available for dissemination to students and families. These included front-facing resources and links to websites and activities for students, mostly quite general resources for use in primary schools predominantly.

At a state and diocesan level, there was also a lot of sharing of other types of learning and teaching resources, materials and expertise, even between the various education sectors: government, Catholic and independent schools. There was also encouragement to share resources to support the ongoing teaching and learning, whether between schools, diocesan offices or sectors. Examples of these resources, accessed mostly via secure education portals, included, besides teaching and learning materials, emergency management plans, occupational health and safety advice or business continuity plans.

While having the resources available and being able to easily share them was critical, it was equally important for teachers and school staff to be able to understand and implement any new material appropriately. To ensure

this occurred, there was an abundance of professional development (PD) opportunities for school staff. One L&T Director, whose office had provided a lot of training resources, praised the enthusiasm of most teachers to engage with the training:

We provided quite a lot of online PD, and what we were really keen to do was not just provide technical PD, but really look at “what is this going to be like pedagogically?” In the first instance, it was really varied, because some schools were really comfortable, and really jumped into some really strong pedagogical space. In other cases, it was just trying to do what we can, but really do the best we can. And people did a great job. (L&T Director)

Several schools disseminated the learning and teaching resources through the Compass platform, but also utilised Google Classroom as a main portal for students’ classroom work. With the resources in central locations “as a place to start”, teachers were trusted and given the flexibility to use the resources directly, adapt them as needed or create their own. Canvas was another platform that some schools used, and comments from some students and teachers indicated that it provided a seamless transition from face-to-face to online learning. The added advantage, according to one secondary student, was the flexibility to use it in on-site or in remote learning:

But they also adapted it so that it would work when we were at school as well. So having this new thing of being online and at school it was just more of, like, a mutually exclusive thing, where if we were to go into lockdown again, we’re used to it already, and then, if we when we came out of lockdown, then we could also use it at school, so we wouldn’t have to be changing between two different areas that we do our work in. (Secondary school student)

During the numerous lockdown periods, most schools used online video conferencing software, such as Zoom or MS Teams, to run parent-teacher interviews. Many schools found the online format, rather than face-to-face, much more efficient and many parents appreciated not having to leave their homes, while still being able to have one-on-one time with their child’s teachers. Even post-lockdowns, acknowledging the benefits, many schools have continued with the online format, or undertaken a combination of both formats throughout the school year.

What worked well with remote learning?

When students were asked, many mentioned that there were some clear advantages to learning from home. For example, many students appreciated not having any travel time to and from school, which meant more time could be spent on leisure, or for just a few students, more time spent on study. However, some suggested that it suited some students who could work well independently but may have been much harder for others who needed more guidance or supervision.

In one primary school, in a culturally diverse and low socio-economic area, some of the school staff—including the teachers, the principal and other leaders—physically delivered learning packs to every student regularly, initially weekly then later fortnightly. From a learning perspective, this was highly valued by parents and students because they did not have to rely on obtaining resources and materials themselves. However, it was also greatly appreciated because of the perception that the school was going ‘above and beyond’ in offering their care for students. As one grateful parent explained: “So, it made a difference [for the students] also to see their teachers coming to do their delivery for them, they got to appreciate [that each week]”.

There was a mixed response from students about whether they enjoyed learning from home and the impact it may or may not have had on their learning. One senior student, who had no siblings living with her at the time,

felt that learning from home was “actually quite easy”, as there were few distractions, although she appreciated how hard it was for some of her friends who had siblings who were also at home.

Students noted that IT issues could be the difference between learning well or struggling to learn at all. One student suggested that, to start with, setting up the technology and getting used to learning online was difficult, but over time students and teachers became more familiar with technology and were able to adapt it to their needs and utilised it much more smoothly. Schools that had previously used IT heavily in classroom teaching before the pandemic were at an advantage when they were forced to go to remote learning when the pandemic hit, as noted by one secondary teacher: “We weren't faced with this sort of online learning scenario prior to COVID, but we were able to sort of adapt because of some of the things we incidentally did in preparation for it without knowing it was coming.”

In primary schools especially, some students did not have their own personal devices, such as a laptop or tablet, so schools made provisions for them to take school computers home or in some instances purchased devices for them. In one primary school, prior to the pandemic, students in most grades used a laptop or tablet as part of their learning, but the newest students, those in prep, were given new devices, and families who could not access the Internet were given dongles.

Communication between schools and parents was also reported as important for ensuring remote learning continued smoothly. Whatever sort of communication strategies were used by schools, parents appreciated that it was informative, regular, inclusive and recognised the needs of their own situation.

Some schools have continued some successful aspects of what they did during the lockdown periods of the pandemic, acknowledging that some students and staff are still having to isolate due to COVID. For example, one school was continuing to load all of the work onto their online learning platform for students. The additional advantage of this approach was that the communication channels included parents who had access to the work, so they could continue to be involved in their child's learning.

The L&T Director of a diocese noted that one positive aspect of the pandemic was that it had been the most significant professional learning experience that the teaching workforce as a whole has ever experienced, having navigated modern technologies and remote teaching resources which, to some extent, were forced on schools without suitable notice and planning.

Challenges to online learning

While many schools jumped relatively smoothly into remote learning, others struggled with the transition, particularly some schools in remote areas that had to contend with students living in areas with poor Internet connectivity or had other technology issues not as prevalent in more populated areas with greater service accessibilities. While schools did what they could to assist and support students with their learning in whatever way was needed, the additional work involved in doing so needed to be creative and was nonetheless quite considerable.

IT and other technology concerns were common problems that students, teachers and parents found particularly challenging at least on some occasions. While only a few of the interview participants noted that it was such a significant problem that it impacted students' learning, almost all of the interview participants mentioned having had at least some disruptions at times due to difficulties with technology. Most commonly these were related to Internet or wi-fi connectivity, although sometimes it was seemingly small issues, such as resetting logins or passwords, which, although usually fixed easily, would often cause additional stress for those concerned.

Even though students appreciated connecting with their peers every day, albeit online, most of them missed their friends and the socialisation that physically being at school brings. One parent really worried about the fact that her daughter was struggling with not being able to see her friends each day:

When they normally would be in touch and see each other, they couldn't see each other. They could only see each other after school finished and just for a little chat. That was pretty hard for her. And it was so good when she did go back. (Parent)

A further challenge for many students learning from home related to the distractions they faced away from the classroom. This was noted by numerous students, but was emphasised well by one secondary student:

It was very easy to get distracted, especially being at home, because you're in a comfortable environment. So, you had your phone, your laptop, you have the TV, you had your bed. It was just really difficult to try to stay on track. (Secondary school student)

Health issues associated with regularly being online each day were noted as a significant challenge by some parents and students. Parents particularly expressed concern for the continuous connectivity online and the impact it had on their children. Such health concerns related to posture, eyesight or headaches, but also the loss of some physical activity due to lockdown restrictions. One parent explained her concern about her daughter's health during remote learning: "We noticed increased headaches. Actually, no, she never got headaches before. And as a result of doing all this, she started to get headaches. She never got headaches before the pandemic."

A common challenge for some students, but not all, was having to learn from home in an environment that was not always conducive to learning. Many students had siblings who were also learning from home, and sometimes parents who were working from home as well. Frequently this meant sharing a house with others in rooms that were not always ideally setup as study or office spaces. A young primary student highlighted this issue simply: "Well the hardest thing for me was I have younger siblings and they were all making noise. Like, I couldn't concentrate, and I kept finishing late."

Noise, lack of privacy, sharing desk space or lack of wi-fi bandwidth were just some of the related issues students had to deal with. Even in situations where students did not have to contend with other siblings or parents around to distract them, sometimes that proved to be a negative, as reflected by one student:

Well, both my parents work [away from home]. So, I had my older brother at home. But he couldn't really help me with my learning. He had his own commitments. So, it was easier, but it wasn't the best, because you were by yourself. (Secondary school student)

The ongoing pandemic has added to the challenge for schools in that, although most students are now learning at school, there are now frequently some students needing to learn from home, such as those who contract COVID-19 or those who are immunocompromised. This has meant that imaginative solutions or combinations of solutions, such as mixed modes of teaching, have been needed to ensure students' learning outcomes are not impacted too much. Schools catering for students in remote locations have also had to deal with challenging scenarios. In early 2022, as the various state governments eased COVID-19 restrictions and started opening up again, communities in some rural locations experienced COVID-19 outbreaks, which they had never experienced in the previous two years. This created challenging situations for some schools, especially boarding schools. In one diocese, this was one of the biggest challenges such schools have ever faced, as expressed by one L&T Director:

We now have COVID-19 in [the area], so as a result, we now have quite a number of our boarders, particularly our lower school boarders, who have not come back. So, while we're providing remote

learning, what that looks like in real terms is challenging. So, in some cases we have students who are in a community where we have a school, but they don't necessarily attend that school, and that school is already dealing with the challenges of COVID-19 in that community. (L&T Director)

Impacts of remote learning

On school leaders and staff

In responding to government public health orders and legislation, during moves in and out of lockdown, school and education leaders were, according to one principal, “on call, quite literally, 24 hours, seven days a week”, and there was a significant demand on teachers and other school staff. The workload of school staff at all levels meant many staff were left “pretty exhausted”, particularly because many worked long hours, often outside the normal school week or term. Many school leaders, and indeed teachers, felt a huge responsibility to ensure remote learning was done as smoothly and “as normal as possible” with as minimal impact on students and families as possible.

In most schools, there was a necessity to have some staff at school and some working from home. Often, principals, other school leaders and support staff worked on-site, while others worked a combination of on-site and at home.

The practicalities of teaching remotely were hard for many teachers, especially for teachers of some subjects, e.g., mathematics, physical education. Many teachers suggested that students were less likely to ask questions during online learning, and teachers struggled to get cues from students when only a tiny face in a frame could be seen during an online class. Additional demands were placed on some teachers working from home who had their own children sharing the same spaces, while all working or learning remotely, as was the experience of one primary teacher: “I've got three teenage young men at home ... I actually had to resort to my bedroom. But it's just the way you do what you have to do. But it was stressful. It was extremely stressful.”

Many teachers also missed the routines of physically attending school each day and the structure that following a classroom-centred timetable offered.

Contrastingly, one teacher, who had a responsibility to physically go into school each day, found it hard because she left her family at home, including a child who did not get the support and assistance she needed from her own school and who would have benefited from having her at home. Similarly, one executive school staff member struggled with having to work on-site each day during lockdowns when most of the teachers were required to work from home.

One teacher reflected philosophically on the fact that, although working remotely was challenging at times and required a significant amount of extra work, as a teacher he was still employed, unlike some of his friends in other occupations who could not work or who were laid off.

On students, parents and their families

When COVID-19 restrictions were first put in place, some students viewed it as something of a novelty at the start. However, in some geographical areas which had extended lockdown periods, for some students, over time, the reality of remote learning became monotonous and tedious rather than enjoyable, as explained by one student:

My first thoughts were, like, Oh, we're at home. This is going to be great, spending time at home. But going through it, it changed a lot. Me personally, my mindset, I was more down because I didn't see my friends. (Secondary school student)

Lack of motivation amid the uncertainty of lockdown periods affected some students more so than others. One student suggested: "In school you have your peers around you, so you have to do it. Whereas when you're at home, you have to be self-directed. Sometimes you lose the discipline when you're alone". In that sense, some students learned to become more independent in their learning, whereas other students became more unmotivated and less energetic about their learning. This sentiment was expressed well by one student, who suggested that the lack of motivation was related to the ongoing monotony of learning remotely: "You also don't really change your environment very much, so you're working in the same place constantly and that can become very boring. You just don't want to work anymore."

One Year 9 student, who was in Year 7 when COVID-19 started, suggested that remote learning was all part of the experience of starting at a new school and, for him, it was no more or less challenging, rather "just different" from being at school. He suggested that each student has different skills with some more suited to a remote learning environment than others:

At school you have to pay attention in class, get your work done when you are given it and complete it for homework. Online learning is more about time management, researching, and just knowing when to do what. It's just a very different atmosphere. (Secondary school student)

There were also contrasting views from families about the impact of remote learning on their children. One parent noted that she and her husband were quite happy during the lockdowns as they could both work from home while gaining an insight into their children's learning, which they would not have normally been able to do when the students were at school.

Another parent likewise suggested that it was a valuable learning experience for parents to have their children learning at home, although he noted that it suited parents, such as himself, who had flexible work arrangements.

One father of a primary school student, who shared the same room with his child during lockdowns, appreciated the opportunity of being a part of his child's learning:

So, I was actually part of the class, and I was seeing how they were interacting with the teacher. They were doing well some days, and as expected, some days they would be having those off-days and where they were distracted. (Parent)

On the other hand, where parents were not able to assist or support their children in learning from home, they had to trust that the teachers were making sure that work was completed, and support was being provided to their children.

Communication strategies during COVID-19

During the various stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, many schools worked hard to ensure that their communities were kept informed as much as was practically possible, given the rapidly changing situations. While diocesan Catholic Education Offices provided some level of guidance for schools about how best to communicate changes, many schools developed their own protocols using their own communication platforms.

Often the diocesan or state Catholic Education Offices provided the support and assistance in terms of up-to-date health advice and practicalities for transitioning to remote learning, but they also facilitated or coordinated some of the functional aspects for the schools, such as ensuring that schools had access to enough Internet dongles or other technologies for families or teachers to be able to learn or work from home.

Because of the impact of COVID-19 in different states, the various Catholic Education Offices and individual schools used different communication strategies. During the height of COVID-19 restrictions in Victoria, for example, the leadership staff of one school would watch each daily government press conference and summarise the relevant information for schools, which was then communicated to parents through their communication channels as soon as possible afterwards. Frequently press conferences were held on weekends, so staff would work Sundays to ensure the information was communicated before the commencement of the school week. In some states, communication to schools via principals also occurred through regular principal meetings, usually facilitated by the Catholic Education Office.

Generally, schools used a variety of communication strategies, formats and platforms, and often multiple formats were used every time to ensure important announcements were being received by families.

In terms of platforms, several schools used Compass or similar online applications, and many of the parents and students appreciated the efficiency with which communication with them could be made through multiple electronic channels. One primary school had another learning platform, called Seesaw Interactive, which parents and students found to be quite efficient and reliable.

What worked well?

By and large, schools that did well during remote learning periods were those that had some plans in place prior to lockdowns and were able to utilise technologies already in place to their advantage. However, again, communication at all levels was also an important aspect of schools managing remote learning effectively. The schools which found remote learning less challenging were those where the school's leadership staff were regularly interacting with their staff, as well as communicating changes regularly to students and families. Staff, especially, very much appreciated regular, relevant and clear communication, but were also thankful for the opportunity to provide their own input and feedback when changes affected them directly. One teacher expressed her appreciation for the regular communication:

I think if we didn't have that, I know for me, yeah, I had a lot of questions. And just having that email from [the Principal] answered a lot of those questions. And sometimes, the news will be saying something, but within half an hour, we get an email from [the Principal] backing up what was said in the, you know, in the news. So yeah, we were always kept in the loop with what was happening. (Teacher)

There were a variety of different and creative ideas which schools implemented to assist students and teachers with undertaking remote learning. One school created a remote learning information package for students and families, which included a professionally produced video that provided practical ideas for students to get the

best out of learning from home. The school's principal suggested that they received back 10 times the value of the cost of producing the video, such was its effectiveness with families. Similarly, another school published their own 'virtual handbook for teachers', which provided staff with practical guidelines, Q & As and expectations to ensure effective learning took place online.

When technology worked well and students and teachers were confident with the learning platforms they were using, moving from a face-to-face environment to remote learning was relatively smooth. A teacher at one secondary school acknowledged that, although online learning was not ideal, his teacher colleagues and his students had adapted extremely well with the changes in and out of remote learning:

Our teachers are very, very comfortable with the online environment. So, what it meant was for some it wasn't a huge transition. Yes, they missed out on the social aspect, but they were safe; they were happy, and I felt that was the same with the kids. The feedback from our parents was by and large—and I know a lot of parents—as do our staff, who are also parents—they felt they were very happy with what the school did because it meant there was a routine. (Teacher)

Overall, many students, teachers and parents were able to reflect on many of the positive outcomes of learning remotely, even though there were also many challenging aspects.

What was more challenging?

A common challenge for teachers and students in most schools was the fact that learning remotely was not as simple as just delivering generic classroom lessons online. Rather, each subject had a range of factors and requirements that meant that no 'one-size-fits-all' approach could be taken to online learning. As explained by the principal of one secondary college:

You just wouldn't talk as an English or history or RE teacher for 80 minutes. You'd go bananas right! Maths teachers, because of the nature of maths, requires a lot of teacher direct instruction, but still, you shouldn't be doing it for 90 minutes. (Principal)

The geographical location of a school, and the socio-economic levels of families from the school's catchment area, was sometimes a significant factor in the effectiveness of the delivery of remote learning. While technology and IT access issues, described above, contributed to the success—or not—of remote learning in some schools, the background of students' families and their household situations also affected to what degree schools were able to deliver classes online. Often schools needed to be somewhat flexible but realistic about the workload they asked of many of their students. This was expressed well by a teacher from one school, which was located in a culturally diverse area of Sydney:

One of the things we had to do with learning online, we had to cut back to really find what was the essence of what we wanted to do in the classroom. And we had to end the assessment tasks, we cut back, because even though possibly the workload wasn't inaccessible for the students, the actual anxiety for a lot of our parents and the family situations that we're dealing with just made the schoolwork really difficult. (Teacher)

Having endured numerous lockdown periods, one Melbourne primary school teacher and her colleagues reflected on the learning outcomes of her students during the pandemic and noted the negative impact that laptops or iPads had had on students in that time, particularly those in the lower grades. Overall, she suggested, children being on devices for much of the day, as they were during remote learning, meant that they had not developed their skills in some areas, such as literacy or handwriting. Since then, her school had moved away from online learning for some subjects:

We've discovered through online learning and children being on devices largely throughout the whole day, we've taken it right back to old-school handwriting. The children have lost the art of handwriting letter formation. So, in the juniors, we've pretty much gotten rid of our iPads here. We do use devices when we are doing testing and so forth. However, during the day we don't actually use devices. . . But yeah, through COVID, we've discovered here more so in the junior area [that is] absolutely as a result of COVID. Yeah, definitely. (Teacher)

A further challenge for many schools was the additional workload of teachers to do things online that would have taken half the time in a classroom setting. As one principal noted: "So everything was a little bit harder. Even if it didn't take double the amount of time, it still took a little bit longer."

Of course, many students and teachers missed the personal connections of being inside a classroom, but for teachers that also affected their ability to be able to teach interactively, as explained by one secondary teacher: "You can't replicate real, in person school with computer school. It's just not the same thing. And distance [education] doesn't do it."

As described by one teacher, another negative effect of online learning on students was the lack of 'incidental conversations' throughout the day, in both a professional and social capacity, particularly with those students who were not engaging as well online:

It was a lot harder to actually speak with students that maybe weren't engaging in study, and you know if they're in the room in front of you, you can pull them aside and you can have a conversation with them. It's very difficult when some students don't respond. (Teacher)

Summary of findings

The immediate response of many schools was to adopt a 'synchronous model' of online learning in which the patterns of school life in terms of uniforms, timetables for subjects and breaks in the day were maintained. Some students and parents appreciated the structure that that model of learning provided. However, most schools found that some flexibility was required to deal with the many issues that arose in online contexts. Some students did not have Internet access or technological resources and these issues had to be resolved. Many students struggled with motivation to learn and with motivation in general. The issues of lengthy periods of screen-time and the lack of the sort of peer contact that occurs in the school created problems.

Teachers were challenged with developing suitable resources, teaching tasks and methods of teaching that were suitable for online learning. There were issues of engaging the students online. At the same time, some teachers had their own situations at home to cope with, including their own children who were learning online.

There was a lot of pressure on principals and senior staff when they were monitoring the ever-changing instructions about COVID-19 lockdowns and how to manage education and seeking to communicate these to staff and the families of the students. The parents, on the other hand, appreciated clear and informative communication.

CHAPTER 6: WELLBEING AND SUPPORT

There is a hierarchy of support in Catholic schools. Students are supported by their teachers. The teachers are supported by the school, the management team and the principal. The principal is then supported by the diocesan and/or state Catholic Education Office. There are many instances where decisions and actions taken higher up the hierarchy have an impact on those further down, and some such instances were noted in the interviews conducted. Overall, however, the hierarchy of support was maintained through the lockdowns and, in most cases, was appreciated.

Support of students

All students interviewed appreciated the support of their teachers and their schools throughout the lockdowns triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic. They appreciated the efforts the teachers and schools made to continue their programs of learning online and their attention to their wellbeing. They kept in frequent contact with them through Zoom or other video-conferencing means. As one secondary school student explained:

In terms of teachers [they] have always been supportive in terms of, if we have any kind of issues we need to go through, they will be happy to help us. As well, in terms of times they always supported us in trying to make our day bright in being locked down. And they always like reach out to you if you have any kind of wellbeing issues, they could help you with. For me personally that helped me a lot, in terms of getting a bright day, in terms of looking at how I can enjoy myself while not being together in terms of the classroom. (Secondary school student)

One important feature of support was giving students a sense of hope. As one primary school student expressed:

They said that one day the isolation will finish. (Primary school student)

That confidence that it would all end was important to her.

Support in learning activities

Most students were clear that they could email teachers with questions or could access support through the school. Nevertheless, students noted that it was not as easy to ask questions of teachers as it was in the classroom. This appeared to be more of a problem with younger primary students who did not feel confident writing emails to their teachers or speaking up during class sessions. Some students noted that there was no one to explain the questions on their worksheets. For them, it sometimes seemed a long time before they got a response to their work. A group of primary school students reflected:

So, if you needed any help and you were still in the Google Meet, obviously you could just ask your teacher. And if you if you weren't on the Google Meet, and you were just off doing your work, you could email your teacher. But sometimes they would be busy, and it would take a long time for them to respond to your email. (Primary school student)

It was kind of hard for me because it was harder to understand what she was explaining online than face-to-face. (Primary school student)

If you needed to show the teacher your work, you just have to send it on SeeSaw, and it could take a long time for the teacher to see. And they would just leave a comment, instead of talking to you physically. (Primary school student)

However, many schools provided additional support for students who were finding it hard. Online break-out rooms with a teacher or an auxiliary staff member were frequently used, and these were appreciated by the students.

So sometimes if you needed help, the teacher would have a few people and he would have a group and just focus on them and help them with their learning. (Primary school student)

Online break-out groups were also used with the older students, often without a teacher. The idea was that the students would be able to collaborate. However, that did not always work.

Doing the group work was kind of the hardest, because on Zoom meetings when you're in like breakout rooms you didn't want to talk with anyone. Really, it was just silent. And so, it's hard to collaborate with people and see what is going on. As [student] said, having this study space and your free time space being in the same area, it was kind of hard to stay motivated to study and completing assignments. So that's kind of difficult for me. (Secondary school student)

However, those students reported that as time went on, they became more used to discussing issues and collaborating in group projects through the break-out rooms.

As noted in the chapter on remote learning, students in different socio-economic areas, and in remote versus urban areas, had diverse needs, particularly in relation to access to the Internet, video-conferencing or other computing technology. Support meant ensuring that all children had access to the appropriate equipment, which, in some areas, meant physically visiting homes to deliver appropriate devices and dongles. It was also important to provide back-up facilities for teaching students to use the equipment and maintain the technology. Some schools put considerable effort and personnel into ensuring this happened effectively. Students were also physically provided with worksheets and other materials. A teacher at one school in a low socio-economic area explained the process:

One of the very first things we did was identify that we need to actually send devices home with all of our students, because they just don't have them at home. We did a mad scramble to purchase—about two weeks prior to lockdown occurring—we did a mad panic to buy enough devices that we could send out one-to-one. And then, we delivered those on a weekly—sorry right at the start—to all the households and scanned them all out so we knew who had them. Then it was just a matter of creating learning packs or timetables with all the links and all the documents for all the students. And having that ready to go, so when we went into lockdown, we were a couple of days in advance of having to scramble as much as, I think a lot of other schools may have found themselves doing. (Teacher)

Everything had to be prepared for the upcoming week. ...That would all be audited and checked off, and then they would be physically printed then distributed into class groups and then they would be put into envelopes with any other resources, whether it was manipulatives or counters, those sorts of things, pencils, pens, coloured paper if we needed to do something specific, worksheets, you name it, it was all in there. And then they were put into class groups and separated out into family groups and then put through an app to do a route run and then the route run was split up into X amount of teachers and they were all chucked in the backs of cars and come Thursday and Friday was just two straight days of deliveries for every week of lockdown. (Teacher)

One of the teachers noted that, after a while, they would find little ‘Thank You’ notes with the package of materials to be picked up from the students. Sometimes, there would also be small gifts to express their appreciation. The school has kept the cards and put them in a large frame as part of their memories of the year of COVID-19.

In some remote areas, there were ‘black holes’ in Internet coverage. Even if students had the equipment, they were unable to use it unless their parents drove them into a town or somewhere where they could get a connection. Consequently, some students required written packages of materials for their learning to continue. Another difficulty students faced was problems with the technology itself. One parent described a situation that reinforced the need for effective communication protocols:

And then we were having a bit of a problem. Not a lot, but there was one time I remember that all of a sudden, she was disconnected. She couldn't connect with the lesson. And I did not know ... I tried to email the teacher. Not email, send a message. I think yes, I could email the school; I don't have the email of every teacher, but I didn't know what's the best way to communicate. If there was a system in which you can quickly feedback to the teacher to say, "Look, my daughter is not digging that lesson. It's just that we have a problem with the internet". And I think it was about 20 minutes or thereabouts that she couldn't get in, then eventually she got in. But that could easily cause the teacher to think, "Oh, she's not in. She didn't attend the lesson." But yeah. Nothing happened that time. (Parent)

Support in social wellbeing

Most students noted that what they missed the most was not being able to connect with their fellow-students. This was particularly a problem for younger students who did not have the freedom or ability to initiate electronic contact with friends. While teaching sessions were scheduled, there was no ‘recess’ to simply hang out with their friends.

The worst part about it you didn't really have much friends to play with when it was break time and you couldn't really talk to anybody else. Because if you had any siblings, they would probably be doing their work still. ... It was a very long time without seeing people face-to-face. (Secondary school student)

Schools took a range of initiatives to provide some social times for the students. For example, some schools ran a breakfast club which was a social video-conference session where students could talk with each other and do a ‘show and tell’ about what they were doing. One teacher described their own school activities as follows.

On a Wednesday morning here at school we normally have a breakfast club, or we have a Mass and so it wasn't necessarily a breakfast club as such, but it was things like, you know, what can you show? And sometimes we'd have a teacher show how they could beatbox or we ... they had a little cooking class or, you know, they just had different things offered in the morning to get kids up and excited about that day. Yeah so, we did a lot for the kids and tried to get everybody involved in those as much as we could. (Teacher)

Other schools organised social occasions for the students over video-conference. However, some older students were hesitant about spending even more time on their screens sitting at their computers.

While these activities were appreciated, they did not really make up for the face-to-face times that students would usually spend at school. For example, the students were not able to play sport together. It is not possible to replicate the time that young students normally spend in parallel activities together with electronic communications. This is an area of support in which schools had limited success during times of lockdown.

Support in physical wellbeing

The online video-conference sessions were not just about academic instruction. Some schools instituted other wellbeing activities, such as encouraging students to go outside or to go for a short walk and then talk about what they had found along the way or sharing pictures of craft work the students had done. These wellbeing times were built into the timetables. One student reported:

We did a lot of wellbeing exercises during online learning. So, I recall last year, when we were in Year 10, we had wellbeing Mondays and sometimes we have a day off or we do activities, which would go towards, for example, our house points or our house colours. So, sporting activities. And it was just a really good way to essentially connect the community a little bit more, but also having that model of taking it easy and not stressing too much. (Secondary school student)

Most schools continued to have a physical education program in which they encouraged the students to do particular forms of exercise. Older students were sometimes required to record themselves doing the exercise and they would send that back to the school. A secondary school student described the process:

Our teachers tried to integrate more physical exercise throughout the term and lockdown, because that was one of the priorities. So, what we would do is, depending on our unit, so I think last year it was soccer, so what we would do is they would teach us a skill or make us watch a YouTube video during class, and then we have to record ourselves doing that physical exercise. And then sending it to the teachers and submitting it as well. And then they would check. (Secondary school student)

Some parents expressed concern about the extent of online activity that was expected of the students. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, some parents reported that students suffered from headaches and from posture problems. A few questioned whether it was necessary to have so much online work. It was suggested that certain work could be done on worksheets, rather than being in front of the computer all day. Some schools took the initiative to provide parents with information about desirable conditions for children to work at home. Families varied in the extent they could provide such appropriate places. One mother described the situation in her home:

We've got a small house, so we don't have the spare room for the kids to study in. So, the logistics of it was a little bit like, okay, how are we going to manage this? So, one was on the dining table, and then one was, on the coffee table. And so, we just had to just see how we went. (Parent)

This mother was able to work part-time, which meant she was able to give a lot of help to her children. However, she went on to describe how sometimes the children had to go to their grandmother, who was not able to provide any assistance. Consequently, little schoolwork was done.

Monitoring students' wellbeing

Through the lockdowns, teachers monitored their students' wellbeing as well as their learning progress. In most schools, a system was implemented whereby a teacher phoned the home of the student at least once every two weeks. In some schools, it was every week. They would generally check on the student's wellbeing, discuss any particular needs or issues and offer support services such as counselling if required. Some schools used surveys that asked students questions about how they were going. One secondary student described how it was done in his school:

[It] was very positive experience in terms of wellbeing and things like that. I always felt anyone from school is here for us, like even teachers that didn't teach us. We could reach out to them. In home-room, we have those wellbeing activities. And each Friday, one day, I can't remember, they'd send out a form to check

up on our wellbeing. Just sort of like a checkpoint. And we just be honest there, and if say, for example, one week we said we're not feeling the best, then the teacher would have a Zoom call with us to make sure everything's going alright. We would send emails back and forth and just continue communicating with us. I also found that to be a very positive experience. (Secondary school student)

In a few instances, schools received feedback that they were phoning a little more than necessary, but, in the vast majority of cases, this monitoring was well received. Students themselves noted their appreciation. In some schools, translators were on hand to phone student families so that they could talk to parents in their own languages.

Records were kept of students' attendance in online sessions. In some schools, this occurred automatically, so that when students logged on, the software automatically recorded that they were there. If students were absent for a period of time, three days in one school, teachers would telephone the family to see what was happening and whether there was anything they could do to help. This personal contact was generally much appreciated by the families and by the students. Most schools had auxiliary staff who could follow up on students with special needs or issues. Some schools had counsellors on hand who could spend time with students who were finding things particularly difficult. It was observed that sometimes other students noted that a student was not contributing in the ways they expected, and they alerted the homeroom teacher or the year level coordinator, who would then make contact. This was partly attributed to a strong, caring culture created in the school prior to the lockdowns.

Some students with special needs, or those whose parents met particular criteria (such as being an essential worker), continued to attend school during lockdowns and teachers checked how they and their families were going. Many schools had aides or dedicated personnel who specialised in particular needs, who helped students with learning difficulties or those for whom English was an additional language. These people were engaged in following up with the students by phone. They were also involved in the video-conferencing sessions alongside the regular subject or classroom teachers. In some schools, online break-out rooms would be used where students with particular needs could be placed into a smaller group for specialised assistance.

Supporting teachers

All teachers interviewed indicated that they were supported by their schools and most spoke highly of the support that they received. They greatly appreciated the organisation at their schools, which gave them clear guidelines for what was expected of them. Many schools had a synchronous arrangement whereby the same lessons occurred at the same times as when the school was in normal mode.

One of the first issues for teachers and other staff was whether they would retain their jobs through lockdowns. Would they continue to have an income? Some principals saw it as a priority to assure the staff that their incomes were secure. One principal described it this way:

We assured all staff that no matter what happened in the next three terms, so Terms 2, 3 and 4, everyone would still have a job. Do not worry about it, everyone will still have a job, you do not need to worry about an income. (Principal)

In most schools, people in the management team phoned the teachers once a week or so to check on how they were doing. This was greatly appreciated. Having a principal or a member of the leadership team who would listen to them was especially important. Some schools did special things to show their appreciation for their teachers. They sent them personalised letters and gourmet gift packs. A regional director commented that one

of the good outcomes of the pandemic was closer collaboration between the staff in the school and a stronger sense of collegiality, and that this included the relationship between the administration and the teachers.

One of the things that really stood out: big improvement in our collaboration amongst staff ... Just the staff climate—support staff and leader relationships, jumped positively. (L&T Director)

For teachers trying to teach from home and with children also at home, the situation was not easy. There was also extra work involved in having to prepare worksheets ahead of time to send to students. The extra demands of work and home duties made life more difficult and some teachers reported that they felt drained and exhausted by these demands. The general anxiety that arose from the uncertainty of the situation, the worry about getting COVID-19, and not knowing how long lockdowns would be extended added to the overall stress. Working from home often meant that there was no clear end of the day for staff.

Flexibility from the management of the school was much appreciated as teachers tried to juggle the additional demands that came from lockdowns and from working at home. Most schools managed to give the teachers some extra time at the start of the lockdowns to prepare. Some schools were able to hire additional staff to focus on wellbeing and other administrative tasks while the teachers were able to focus on their primary task of teaching the students. One principal described his actions as follows:

For the school where I was at, I hired, quickly booked up, casual staff ... So, I had additional staff, casual staff, that would come in, so that they could cover the supervision of the children who are attending school, so that the class teachers could focus on getting their lessons together and supporting the students online. And so, I know a lot of schools did a similar sort of structure, or that the exec covered supervision, so that teachers could be freed up to support online and given additional planning time to plan. (Principal)

In one school, the executive staff noted that contacting parents had become a burden for some of the teachers, so the executive took over part of that role. The sense that staff had of all being in this crisis situation together and doing their best to work towards common goals was noted by some staff as a positive factor.

Some senior teachers and coordinators were required to go to work in the school. In some cases, this was required by policies from the diocesan Catholic Education Office. This was problematic for those who had children at home, but who were required to work at the school. Some senior teachers and members of the leadership teams expressed that they would have appreciated more flexibility. In some cases, principals created rosters for those required at school so that more staff could remain home.

Some teachers felt isolated with relatively little contact with their peers. Schools that had additional staff to assist students with special needs were appreciated. They could take those students into a break-out room and give them the extra attention that was required. In some schools, additional coordinators, such as Diverse Learning Coordinators, Language Other than English Coordinators or Learning Support Officers, assisted with life skills and other topics and also provided some relief for the teachers.

Some schools had virtual social times for the staff. One school had a short prayer time every morning and celebrated births, deaths, marriages and other events of personal life. These occasions were appreciated but they also meant that staff were online for longer and time was taken from the work that they had to do. One teacher noted that the Catholic Education Office provided some guidance for developing an appropriate workspace in the home, so that staff had ergonomic set-ups with appropriate chairs and desks. It was not clear whether money was actually given to provide the right furniture. However, the guidance and attention to this detail was appreciated.

Some teachers reported that they had adequate resources, but there were others who felt that they needed more. In one diocese, the RE curriculum was suddenly changed in the midst of the lockdown. Several teachers noted that this was highly problematic. It meant a great deal more work and there were insufficient resources to meet the new demands that were placed on them.

Catholic Education Offices and support for principals and their schools

At times, Catholic Education Offices felt under immense strain during the COVID-19 pandemic. The rules and regulations from the government were constantly changing and often, with very little notice. Indeed, important notices from state governments could arrive at all hours and need immediate attention. The Catholic Education Offices had the responsibility to keep on top of these rules and regulations, interpreting them for the schools and communicating them to the principals. They counted on additional resources from the Departments of Education, such as financial assistance to pay for technology for students, but then were responsible for distributing these resources to the schools.

The Catholic Education Offices were also forced to grapple with issues of staffing across the schools, with high numbers of staff becoming sick or close contacts, and who therefore could not work. Catholic Education Offices also sought to provide support in cases of specific need, where students had made attempts at suicide or where there had been other particular mental health needs.

Most principals reported that the Catholic Education Offices had been supportive. In many instances, they had phoned the principals, not just to discuss management issues, but to provide personal support. They were well aware that the principals were shouldering additional burdens at this time. These phone calls were appreciated by the principals and some principals reported that helpful ideas came as a result of those phone calls.

However, there were occasions when principals reported that the Catholic Education Offices were not as flexible in their approach as they could have been. They did not always appreciate the needs and situations of particular schools. In several places, to provide support and advice, principals developed their own meetings with other principals in the area that were much appreciated. This was the case with schools for students with disabilities, for example.

Teachers were generally less positive about the support from the Catholic Education Offices than principals. They highlighted the difficulties involved with the requirements for executive and leadership staff to work on-site. As mentioned earlier, a change in the RE curriculum in the middle of the pandemic was seen as particularly inappropriate, and concern was raised about the lack of resources that came with the requirement for change:

I think that the school was great. Catholic Education Office absolutely not, but ... you know, and it was really, really difficult seeing them all working at home and seeing the executive staff and all of us having to come to work and I think I found that extremely difficult. I, I was angry about that, which was really awful but yeah, I found that very unfair. ... Anyway, so there's announcement that comes in at the end of Term 2, beginning of Term 3 and says "that's it. Stop. Change all your curriculum over ... The [Catholic Education Office] just went "here ... go", you know and "oh we've got some stuff online" and you click on it, and it wasn't ready, and it was horrendous and "oh we'll have this day out and this day out" and I'm thinking "we've got classes to teach, these students are here. How can you possibly do this to us?" (Teacher)

It was also noted by some senior teachers that staff in the Catholic Education Offices did not contact them directly. One teacher noted that there were continuing professional development activities that tended to take

a pastoral orientation. However, one-on-one telephone calls did not occur.

We divvied up the staff amongst the exec leadership team and identified, “Well, these are the people that I’m going to be calling on a weekly basis,” and we made those phone calls. Then within the exec we really called each other to check in on each other, because it was tense, and it was hard work. But I don’t believe that structure existed within [Catholic Education Office] to check in with schools. I think they did to a degree, with principals. And that’s completely valid and fine, but I don’t know whose responsibility it would have been to check in with all staff because that’s far too great. Just in my role as a leader, or as learning and pedagogy, there are learning and pedagogy leaders, there are Lit leaders in at [Catholic Education Office]. I think we got a few emails but to me a personal touch goes a whole lot further so that that might have been something they could have but, overall, not wonderful support. (Teacher)

Summary of findings

Good support meant, firstly, providing the tools and skills that were needed for the job: for students to learn, teachers to teach, and principals to manage. This meant having appropriate hardware, software, and the skills to use it. What was required varied from one context to another. In some instances, written resources were important, and in others, videos and other instructions were needed. Time and training were also needed to prepare the materials and to do the organisation.

Effectively supporting the teachers meant giving them the opportunity to focus on what they needed to do as teachers. Sometimes this meant setting aside some administrative matters and/or delaying significant changes, such as changes to the curriculum. In some places, it was possible to employ or involve additional staff to assist, for example, in supervising the children who had to come to school during lockdowns and those who needed additional assistance with learning, language or their wellbeing.

It was also important to provide support in relation to physical and social wellbeing, as well as in relation to the processes of teaching and learning, both for teachers as well as for the students. While some activities were held for social wellbeing of both staff and students, such as breakfast clubs for students and staff meetings where birthdays and personal events were acknowledged, these were of limited success. They were often experienced as adding to screen-time and the amount of time spent working. Physical wellbeing was promoted by encouraging older students to take time off to go to a nearby park or go for a walk, but it was hard to monitor.

Secondly, support meant clear, transparent and full communication between the Education Offices, the schools, the parents and the students. Again, this demanded a high level of organisation which was generally achieved, but at some cost to principals and directors.

Good support also meant monitoring how people were going, usually through one-on-one telephone calls. To some extent, Catholic Education Offices monitored principals and their schools. Principals worked closely with their executive teams to monitor their staff. The teachers monitored the students and their families, sometimes with the help of auxiliary staff. The feedback from those interviewed indicated that the weekly or fortnightly monitoring added to the burden of staff but was much appreciated. There were reports that relationships between administrators and teachers were generally improved across the schools through this form of communication. When issues were identified, for example, they could be referred to other specialist staff and counsellors. The one group of staff who in some settings appear to have missed on this monitoring were senior executive members of staff apart from principals.

Having clear structures and responsibilities in these patterns of support ensured that schools managed well the challenges of the pandemic and the lockdowns that were associated with them. Clear communications and frequent one-on-one support helped maintain morale, identify problems, and encouraged both staff and students. Providing interactive peer support for both staff and students was difficult without adding to the burdens both were experiencing during long periods on screen and work periods which had no clear beginning or end.

CHAPTER 7: FAITH AND SPIRITUALITY

The research explored the experience of faith and spirituality in schools during COVID-19 from several perspectives. It examined the provision of religious education (RE) in schools and teachers' experiences of teaching the faith in an online environment. It also examined students' experiences in faith formation and Religious Education, and the impact the pandemic had on students' practice of the faith and their relationship with God. One particular focus was the impact of the pandemic on the students' preparation for and reception of the sacraments. One further aspect explored Catholic values practised during the pandemic and the provision of pastoral care in the context of those values.

Religious education

In all the schools that participated in the study, RE continued during remote learning alongside other subject areas like mathematics and science. This was despite some schools having an option to reduce the curriculum during the pandemic. In NSW, for example, educational authorities had allowed schools to teach an abridged curriculum during COVID-19, focusing on literacy and numeracy during primary school and making professional judgements in secondary schools. Despite this, some schools kept the focus on RE constant:

The only things we suspended temporarily were the Stage Five electives. So, it was hard to do technics, woodworking, construction—a lot of those practical subjects in the elective space. So, what we said in Years 9 and 10, “When you have those elective periods, you can use that time to catch up on our core subjects”, which included religious education. We wanted the routine; we wanted the structure; we didn’t want to downplay any subject. (Principal)

In one school, where most students were of a lower socio-economic status and multifaith background, RE was offered as an optional subject as the school struggled to get their students to commit to more than the bare minimum of schoolwork required. As the Religious Education Coordinator (REC) explained:

We didn’t want to make that one [RE] a compulsory subject, we only made Literacy and Maths compulsory. But every single day, there was a task they could engage in Religious Education ... We wanted to pursue that with a little more vigour but recognised that for families that want their kids occupied, we need to provide it. For families that weren’t in a position to support the kids with their learning, the task was there. (Teacher)

Most schools modified the RE curriculum to have more self-directed exercises that students could do at home and did not require too much teacher instruction. Catholic Education RE teams in different states worked to create several resources that were sent to their schools to use where students were learning remotely. RECs in each school also supported this by creating customised resources for their school community. Commonly used resources included explanatory videos, worksheets and research tasks for students to complete. One school also introduced Christian meditation.

While the experience of adapting content enthused some teachers, others struggled with creating appropriate lesson plans and organising classes online:

We have KWL [Know, Worship, Love] in our school ... because it's a book, ...we were given [free] access online ... So that's where we normally read certain things in class and refer back to it ... I found it hard to navigate and ... in the end I gave up on it because it was too tricky. It was a little bit different to what I would normally look at in the book ...We rely on our plans ... and then also, we’d adjust what they had provided for us ..., as you said, they didn't give us lessons. I took their lessons and what we had already created for the term and mixed them together. (Teacher)

Sometimes the Zoom thing is a wonderful thing, and when you use a clicker, and you share your screen ... with prayer and images, that sort of thing works really well. It doesn't work with music. I mean, I'm a musician, and I would use music in a lot of our prayer settings a lot, and there's nothing like creating an atmosphere with music and such. And it never streams right, as it comes through it, because of people's listening devices, you know... And I think explicit faith formation activity did suffer. (Teacher)

From a student's point of view, RE activities were well received. In primary schools, RE classes during remote learning usually included several creative art activities, Bible reading or watching video clips. Four primary students described their class activities:

We could make these cards hanging on coat hangers. And we write on the back of the card's things like "What would Jesus do to show kindness?" And then we could write things about what we could do.

We did some writing about Jesus. And we watched videos about Jesus and had to remember our favourite parts.

We got to make our own Rosary bracelet and I've used that for praying as well.

There was one time when we had to study for three weeks about the Road to Emmaus. (Primary school students)

Secondary school students had more activities focused on self-learning:

They also gave us a lot of resources that we could turn to. Like podcasts or movies or TV shows, which would help us reconnect with our faith a little more.

There were also some live streams of online Masses as well. (Secondary school students)

Overall, there was a strong consensus that schools put their best efforts into using the available technology to pivot faith learning activities to the online environment and make them work.

Supporting families in faith and spirituality

One strongly evident theme was the emphasis RECs placed on creating resources not only for the students and teachers but also support resources for parents. The importance of connecting with families during the pandemic and ensuring they were part of the faith learning journey of their child was prominent in all schools. As the pandemic continued, this appeared to grow to also trying to support parents in their faith journeys. Staff from three different states shared their experiences thus:

A lot of our parent body are perhaps, not as active in their own faith or have no faith or different faith. I think that's where the teachers had to step up in terms of making sure that they provided all that support, all those resources on the video links, ... to parents to help them to facilitate the learning that was happening in the home environment ... I think in terms of the religious education and just the Catholic identity aspect at the school, the teachers would have had to support fairly significantly ... thinking outside the box about how to provide the scaffolds for the parents who are working at home with their children. (Teacher)

I would send a daily prayer, but I also started to include Mary MacKillop and Julian Tenison-Wood's quotes as well, so I was actually sharing that with the parents and students and staff as well ... but then also offering them something different, like ... during May, videos, if they wanted to pray the Rosary or other podcasts. ... It was trying to supplement their faith formation in other ways ... so sharing podcasts from Fr

Rob Galea or other prominent speakers ... On Fridays or Saturday mornings, I would send links about the local parishes and what they were doing through Zoom for their Masses. So, trying to still connect our families in prayer, but also in the charism of the school and then linking them back to their parishes as well. (Teacher)

The lessons we had at home ... were really based around the family unit ... For example, 'Create a prayer with your family' or 'Go outside in nature, have a walk. Think about, you know, what God has created.' ..., 'Would there be a question that you would like to ask God?' Or 'If you were God, what would you think about?' So really getting the family to talk about it themselves. I think a lot of families really enjoyed ... what we were trying to teach the children. Some families probably couldn't connect with it because they themselves don't know much about it or are not practising Catholics. ... Whether it was Googling a YouTube clip about scripture or actually writing scripture in the lesson plan and getting the families to read it first before doing the lesson, we tried to model it on what we did at school. Clearly, at school, there would be a lot more focus that we would do in the classroom, but we really tried to link it in, in terms of, 'This is ... the story as to why we are doing this particular lesson today'. (Teacher)

These efforts to reach out to parents appeared to be deeply appreciated. All the parents we interviewed were grateful for the attempts made by the schools to support the faith journey of their children. Some families put extra effort into ensuring their child's connection to the faith was not lost during the pandemic.

We set up more of a—we should've had it before, but you know, an altar space. My mum, when I was little, had one in our room. And I feel like I probably didn't emphasise it as much. But then, because we were at home and there was no Church to go to, you couldn't—I don't know, I felt like I needed that. And I was like, 'Oh, this is why my mum did it when I was little.' (Parent)

Prayer and liturgy

Prayer was a big part of learning from home. Most students' connection to the faith during remote learning came primarily through religious education and the schools' efforts to organise and promote online opportunities for prayer and liturgy. Schools continued the practice of prayer during class in one form or another. As two students noted:

So, at our school, at the start of every period, normally we do a prayer, and that stayed the same online. So, when we log on to the Zoom call, the teacher would wait for everyone to go in, and then we would start with a prayer like something simple, just like an Our Father or Hail Mary, to acknowledge the spirituality of others. And then that's basically stayed the same online for every period. So, we do homeroom and then each period, we would have a prayer as well. (Secondary school student)

And even on our Canvas page, we even had a page dedicated solely to faith and activities we could undertake to further our spirituality each day ... And we could log those activities so that the school could see what we were doing. (Secondary school student)

Many schools intentionally modified faith activities, such as the celebration of Mass and praying the Rosary to support students during online learning. One secondary student described the experience:

Like every day, we'd either receive an email, or it would be on Canvas a link for the Rosary Zoom. And we would be encouraged by the Religious Coordinator and the Year Coordinators to join those Zooms. And it also goes back to normality. So, going to the Rosary in the chapel, then putting that on Zoom, that connection between physical and online learning, you have a bit of connection there. So, you're not losing it all, you're only losing a bit of it. (Secondary school student)

These efforts appeared to have helped students maintain their relationship with God and feel connected to the faith. While for some, COVID-19 was a time of growth in the faith, for others, being physically away from people resulted in a loss of community and connection. Two secondary students reflected thus:

I definitely tried to get to as many Rosaries as possible. And as well as that, in the mornings we had things we could go to. And every single period, we would always start with a prayer. I definitely felt that helped. But I feel like there was a bit of separation. Every Wednesday, we have a Mass in the morning. But there were no whole school Masses. None of that was there. And I felt like that, even when coming back from Covid, because of social distancing and having everyone not being able to touch stuff, we also were limited there as well. So, I felt like it did have a little bit of a dent in our faith. But, as a school, we tried our best to make sure we could still have a connection with our Lord. And I feel like we did really, really well with it. (Secondary school student)

I think a lot of it ties back to the thing I said at the start, where it's a different environment, it's not something you can really compare to normal school—like, that time being alone. The whole point of faith is that it is your own morals, it's your own thoughts, it's what you want to believe. So, being alone helped you practice that. In religion class, we'd just be given the content and told to go to this part of the Bible if we were doing a Bible study. Being alone encouraged us to look up all of that on our own and also form our own thoughts around it, so rather than just being told in class and repeating what we had to on a paper for marks. So, being alone did promote forming your own opinions and morals as well. (Secondary school student)

Some students augmented the faith development opportunities offered by the school by participating in Masses live-streamed from parishes. In other instances, parish or diocesan activities appeared to have been developed during the pandemic, which offered opportunities for students to connect from home.

I did notice, though, cropping up in parallel, that I saw parishes and dioceses, youth groups or outreach, or prayer groups, grow in prevalence and visibility. So, even though it might not have been happening directly in the school, I think the opportunities for people to connect, young people to connect with. I hadn't seen them as visible as that before I knew they existed ... But it was much more visible ... which was kind of interesting, given how challenging the environment was; so, I think, yes, maybe the activity in schools might have decreased, I think activity elsewhere, increased but then I think it's up for families and young people into connecting to that. (L&T Director)

We'd all sit in front of the TV listening, and the parish have a youth group ... So, before the lockdown, they started organising activities for the children. So, they picked up during the lockdown, they had a few videos on YouTube, based on the gospel, for the Sunday. So, the children maybe, because they wanted to watch and they'd say, "Hey, can you put for us the children's activity from the Church?" And so, we'd put for them. (Parent)

Catholic values

One of the ways in which faith education is imparted is through Catholic values that are promoted and practised in every Catholic school. Many participants found it difficult to articulate the Catholic values of their school, linking them to prayer and liturgy in most cases. The impacts in this area therefore largely depended on the differences in the way schools promoted these values before and during the pandemic. In many schools, Catholic values were practised in a general sense through everyday actions:

Gospel values—faith, hope, love, ... they are intangible, ... and I would say they are practised every day regardless of whether we're remote or were local ... The way you treat each other and the genuine concern for the other comes out in big ways and little ways ... It comes out in the little ways where someone gives a damn that a kid looked unhappy and was sitting in a corner at lunchtime by themselves, ... the front office lady noticing the kid who's like every single day or looking dishevelled every time they do come in, ... if we're going to keep the values of faith, hope, love alive, and you know, treating the other as one would want to treat themselves, the golden rule—schools need to do it, and I think they do do it, I don't know a Catholic school that doesn't reach out and try to teach us to care and be inclusive. (Teacher)

I think the way that the sector pulled together to move quite quickly and to support families and students and teachers to do that, I think was an example of the values that Catholic education holds to be true, you know, in terms of solidarity, community, dignity, all those sorts of things were evident at the macro level. And what we also know, too, is that permeated then how school communities tried to remain communities through all of the different phases of the last year ... that meant things like those rituals that are part of our every day, starting the day with prayer or ending the day with prayer and ensuring that the protocols for how we talk and behave with each other, online or face-to-face were set up as established so this is actually how we are; whether we're face-to-face or not. So, I actually do think schools paid a lot of attention to the norms of behaviour which for us, is absolutely infused with the Gospel values. (L&T Director)

Most schools focused on the wellbeing of their students and ensuring supports were in place to continue their learning through the pandemic. In this context, the explicit promotion of Catholic values may have taken a back seat. There was one school that had a more focused approach, and was more intentional in practising its core Catholic values during remote learning:

So, we have the Marist charism as we're a Marist school, and I guess the grounding that's set prior to COVID-19 ... is a bonus for us because we live out that Marist spirituality every day. So, each of our new groups has their own Marist pillar, so Year 7 has Holy Family ... so family spirit is the pillar they sort of have ... and then Year 8 has The way of Mary and then Year 9 Simplicity, Year 10 Love of work, Year 11 Presence and then Year 12 is the whole Marist formation. And we're fortunate because in 2020, we actually got the Year 12 retreat in and the Year 7 formation day in so, I guess, grounding for both of those groups were there. And all of that is lived through in everything we do. So, when we talk to the students and we send videos home ... we talk about that charism all the time and the importance is, I guess, reinforced through homeroom wellbeing, year group wellbeing, and pastoral meetings and they still continued too throughout the COVID-19 remote learning. (Teacher).

Impacts of the pandemic

On faith formation and sacraments

One of the most significant impacts on the faith and spirituality of students was in their preparation for, and reception of, sacraments. Most schools usually scheduled sacraments in collaboration with their local parish, and teachers were involved in preparing students for their reception. With the closure of parishes and the ability to gather in groups, sacramental meetings and normal faith formation and preparation activities, such as retreats and year group Masses, had to be cancelled or postponed:

I do faith formation a little bit differently for Years 7 to 10 ... I don't do a full day, but we've actually developed a program where we do faith formation during Lent and Advent and other times throughout the year through the year group meetings. So, it's not just a one-day event; it's really trying to immerse

the students in the liturgical year and the events that are taking place ... We lost all that ... so, losing the ability to pray together and to come together for faith formation impacted us as a community. We really did miss that time to be together. (Teacher)

Other modifications had to be made to formation programs for periods when there were substantial limitations on gatherings. An example of this was provided below:

So, things like retreats, for instance, have been impacted, so schools have made sure—they've perhaps had one-day retreats instead of camps, at times. Staff formation days have been moved online; ... They've live-streamed school Masses, so a small number of students perhaps in the church or a central space. Other rituals such as Ash Wednesday have pivoted to the online space. We really wanted to make sure that we've encouraged schools ... everything that is faith—how do you pivot the faith into the online space? (L&T Director)

Some schools organised parent meetings online during the pandemic and found that they generated better attendance. As one L&T Director explained:

That's one of the things I think we've really learnt, and some of it, I think, has—that will go into the non-COVID-19 space is delivering parent meetings online; I don't mean just in the sacramental space, but delivering parent/teacher meetings online has been extremely successful because schools have had more—greater turnout with the online offering than they have necessarily with the physical offering ... And certainly, in the sacramental space as well as other spaces, that has happened. (L&T Director)

In regions where COVID-19 restrictions did not continue for as long, schools were able to organise their sacraments within the calendar year. In other locations, mainly where parish programs ceased, all preparation for First Communions, Reconciliation and Confirmation was put on hold until the following year, when staff could catch up with students who had missed out. In some cases, this placed a lot of pressure on schools to organise this suitably:

In our primary schools, you've got the sacramental program, which is a really important part ... Reconciliation, Eucharist, Confirmation, so you know those three activities that usually happen in Year 4, 5, 6 ... They couldn't happen. So, when we opened up, what you found is that everyone would try and cram them into a Term 4. (L&T Director)

So, when we returned to the sacraments, ... it was a massive rush. And it was interesting. For 48 days at the end of last year, I worked straight. Because Saturdays and Sundays, I had to go in because the REC ... couldn't come in. And so, I had to take that role on as well. So, you're going in Saturdays, you're going in Sundays. And then you have the work week again. Saturday, Sunday, and you do that again. So, I was burnt at the end of it. (Principal)

On attitudes toward Mass and prayer

COVID-19 also appeared to have impacted students' attitudes to Mass and prayer. Being distanced from physically attending Mass in the parish or school chapel reduced the enthusiasm and eagerness for such events. Two students shared their own experiences:

It takes a toll on you. You can't really be in a spiritual place or express it as well. I think, having been away from church for so long, it just makes you lazy in prayer, and so you tend to just forget that you're supposed to be faithful. (Secondary school student)

When we were at school, we could have the Rosary, or we could pray in the chapel. When we first went

online, we did do it for a bit, but eventually, we made a classroom for youth at school, and we will pray the Rosary like how we would, but I was on mute. So, it was different because you weren't physically with everyone in the chapel. (Secondary school student)

At a school level, some staff reported that they perceived a change in the way students engaged in faith activities. One principal described the difference they noticed during school prayer:

I even noticed our College prayer; I'm not hearing it being prayed like it was being prayed prior to COVID. So, we had ... our high achievers' assembly, we bring back our Year 12s that got in the 80s and 90s for their ATARs, and we had Year 12 and Year 11 ... And when we prayed the College prayer, I could barely hear it. And I don't remember that being the case. This is my fifth year here, and I don't remember it in my first two years. I remember hearing the [students] praying. So, I worry about the implication there. This is a school where it's just phenomenal. If you're in the month of May or October, and you want to pray the Rosary, you can actually get the whole school to pray the Rosary in an assembly, and they're very reverent. (Principal)

A parent shared her experience of the impact on her daughter's eagerness to attend Mass and how she was able to turn that around into something positive.

I think it would've impacted her in her willingness to keep going to Mass, and also, it affected her in that it caused me to teach her more about the Mass. You know, to explain to her more a little bit here, a little bit there because ... you don't want to say too much because kids don't listen too much anyway. They tune out after a little while. So little bits and whatever, trying to say it as less as possible. (Parent)

There were also comments made about the impact COVID-19 had on a family's experience of the Mass:

One of the things I noticed... our ability to be reverent during Mass was a bit ... challenged. Because when you're sitting on the armchair, it's not as easy, but we just did our best and ... when you have to kneel and stand up and kneel, we'd try to do that. But when you're sitting on a nice soft armchair, it's hard to be reverent. So, you tend to slouch a bit instead of sitting nice and straight, so yeah. I found that my husband wasn't that helpful because he would sit on the armchair, and he was not a very good example to the kids. You know, he'd lean back and sometimes ... because he's so tired, he'd fall asleep. (Parent)

There was a consensus that extra effort would need to be put in to regain some of the connectedness to faith that had been lost.

On the sense of community

The sense of community within schools is associated with many positive outcomes for staff and students alike, some of which are ensuring a supportive learning environment and a feeling of connectedness and belonging. The restrictions during the pandemic impacted this, particularly through missed opportunities to gather for important events and celebrations.

Every Wednesday, I have a year group that generally comes to the Chapel and we will need to do a year group Mass. Or we would do Adoration with a reconciliation ... It becomes part of the fabric of our school. We haven't been able to do Masses and liturgies together as a school for nearly two years, and that really impacts the community. (Teacher)

For some of the boys, I guess, in Years 7 and 8, with some of those initiation processes or the first time they see a school Mass, for example, and hear the singing, those sorts of things which we have had a long tradition of doing and promoting and invest time and effort into, those sorts of things couldn't happen. So, Mother's Day Mass and things like that, for the boys, is in some ways, a rite of passage that they go through and learn what it means to be a Marist man ... or Marist person. But the Opening Mass and the celebrations, those types of activities we couldn't celebrate as a whole school community, that was the difficult thing. (Teacher)

The lack of engagement with the religious dimension also affected parents who usually came to face-to-face liturgical celebrations in the school. School connections within the local community and those built with overseas communities were also impacted. As one principal explained:

We do active volunteering here, and kids were asking me online, "Miss, can we still Zoom the brothers in Sri Lanka and Timor-Leste?". The problem with that is simply we couldn't do that Zooming because of the child protection issue, but they were still keen to do it. You know, we had so much lined up with our active volunteering that, unfortunately cos of remote learning, we couldn't do it, but they were so keen. (Principal)

Most schools had to make an extra effort to make the students feel connected during online learning. Some built that connection through regular faith activities like morning and afternoon prayers and links to local online events. Others purposefully built a support network and created a range of community-building or pastoral care activities:

We did a little bit more in the pastoral space, where the boys with their homeroom, they did a little bit more sharing, a little bit more—we just called them fun activities—but they were essentially just things that the boys could do together whilst they were online, to learn a bit more about each other ... We were really conscious of the fact that being online and being behind a computer screen can be really isolating, particularly if they're at home with no siblings and mum and dad are working long hours, that maybe their only connection out would be just through the screen. And we wanted the boys to feel like there was a community behind them that actually cared for them. So, we wanted to make sure that we use the learning management system in as many ways as possible to connect the boys together ... just in as many ways for the boys to, you know, chat, talk about their day, talk about the fun stuff they've done, do a scavenger hunt, talk about a meal they cooked for their family. Whatever it was, even if it was non-school related, just so that they could find a connection point with other boys, other students in their year group. (Teacher)

There were ongoing challenges with gathering again as a school and rebuilding the sense of community after the pandemic as vaccination restrictions, the persistence of COVID-19 illness in the community, and isolation measures prevented some students and their families from attending such events.

Summary of findings

With the transition to remote learning, the initial task was to modify the curricula and resources for religious education to make it appropriate to the online context. Teachers responded by developing videos, worksheets and activities which could be accessed by students at home. Schools continued to encourage religious practices such as prayers at the start of lessons, daily prayers and activities such as the Rosary which students could participate in from home. Some schools live-streamed school Masses with restricted attendance.

Schools also developed resources to help parents support the faith learning journey of their child, alongside their own. Some Catholic families made extra efforts to ensure this was the case, while for other families, especially those of other faith backgrounds, these were offered as options for the family to engage in.

In some schools, it was reported that there was attention on the practice of general Catholic values, such as on kindness and care within the home, in teacher-student interactions and in the connections between the school and the local community. There was a greater emphasis on the intentional practice of Catholic values in the school that had a particular charism.

While some parish and diocesan Masses and youth group activities were adapted and streamed online, families reported that it was hard to maintain the usual level of enthusiasm and involvement from the context at home. It was also necessary to delay preparation for and the celebration of the sacraments during lockdowns, creating a backlog of recipients that schools had to support to prepare for the Sacraments on their return to in-person gatherings.

The inability to gather and pray in person and attend regularly conducted faith formation events had a significant impact for students and families on their sense of being part of the faith community at school. Some pastoral care could occur using electronic communications to help students feel connected. However, special care had to be taken with students and family members who did not have a place in the home where confidential conversations could be held. Rebuilding community was likely to require significant time and effort once the pandemic restrictions had passed.

CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Countries such as Australia benefitted greatly from the ability to move learning activities online during the initial outbreak of COVID-19 and through subsequent lockdowns designed to inhibit the spread of the virus. Similar to other research findings, this project demonstrated that much education was successfully moved online, and to some extent, normal practices of teaching and learning could take place with both teachers and students working from home.⁹⁴

The study aimed at answering the following key questions:

1. What strategies were most effective to improve learning and wellbeing outcomes for students in Catholic primary and secondary schools? What improvements do we need to make so that all students benefit?
2. How can we improve our transition to remote learning for individual students (especially those with special needs, remote students and those in boarding schools), as well as in preparation for future situations similar to COVID-19?
3. How can we apply learnings from best practice examples to the new learning landscape?

In addressing these questions, the study provided insights into three main themes: Learning and Teaching during Remote Learning (Chapter 5), Wellbeing and Support (Chapter 6) and Faith and Spirituality (Chapter 7). These are placed in the context of previous research reviewed in Chapter 2. A summary of these findings follows.

Learning and teaching during remote learning

The findings of this study supported previous research done on this topic.⁹⁵ While many students already had appropriate computers and Internet access, there were others who needed help in procuring what was necessary for online access. Schools were usually able to organise this, sometimes with the assistance from their Diocesan Catholic Education Office, although in some places schools continued to supplement support by delivering packs of printed materials. Schools also needed to make sure there were back-up facilities for ensuring the maintenance of the appropriate software and hardware. Further, staff and students also needed training in the appropriate use of the resources. Some schools used videos to explain the use to great effect.

It was necessary to re-work curricula and methods of delivery to those suitable for online use. Teachers benefitted when they could work with each other on this substantial task. Maintaining the engagement of students at home, who were often faced with a range of distractions and inadequate contexts for learning, was a common issue.

While some students indicated they adapted well to a remote learning environment, and the academic performance results of some schools were not greatly affected, overall, the workload during remote learning for teachers, principals and other school and Education Office staff was reported to be extremely high, stressful and unsustainable.

⁹⁴ Crouch et al., "It's about teaching", 42-46; Foale, "Teachers' voices", 60-62; Gore et al., *Evaluating the impact of COVID-19*.

⁹⁵ Flack et al., *Educator perspectives*; Flack et al., *Principal perspectives*; Foale, "Teachers' voices", 60-62; Gore et al., "The impact of COVID-19", 605-637; Starkey et al., "Special issue: Covid-19 and the role of technology", 1-5; White et al., "In-the-Moment Experiences", 47-59.

Wellbeing and support

Additional assistance from staff who could address particular needs was very helpful where such people were available. In some places, this included staff who could supervise students who came to school, while the teachers were dealing with their online classes. In other places, it was staff who could assist students with particular learning difficulties. Some staff focused on assisting students whose first language was not English. Others focused on students with special physical needs. In general, there was some evidence that online learning was more challenging in low socio-economic areas and areas with high numbers of recent immigrants, a finding supported by earlier research by Flack et al.⁹⁶ It was also very difficult for schools catering for students with special mental and physical needs.

Student and staff wellbeing was a major issue through the periods of lockdown experienced in many states and territories, as previously identified by Forster.⁹⁷ Having clear responsibilities for regularly monitoring both staff and students was critical to the maintenance of wellbeing. This usually meant a one-on-one phone call, by executive staff members to other staff, and by teachers to the families of the students. Again, having additional staff to whom issues could be referred was most helpful.

Perhaps the most frequently mentioned issue during lockdowns was the lack of peer contact. This was sometimes an issue for teachers as they struggled alone with the heavier demands that the lockdowns imposed. This was certainly an issue for students who missed greatly the informal contacts with their fellow students. Naidoo et al.'s investigation of the experiences of young people during COVID-19 lockdowns reported similar findings.⁹⁸ Attempts at creating social occasions online were worthwhile, but also added to the burden of additional screen and work time. A focus on wellbeing classes and wellbeing activities was really important for the students.

Faith and spirituality

Previous research in the area of religious education during the pandemic reported several challenges.⁹⁹ Although participants in this study reported facing some of these challenges, overall, the findings indicated that much religious education could be adapted readily to go online, along with some religious activities, such as prayers and some liturgical services. While there were some challenges faced by teachers during the pandemic, largely due to technological limitations, schools continued the RE curriculum similarly to that provided in the classroom or in an adapted style. Parents were provided with resources to support the faith learning journey of their child. Some Catholic families supplemented this with their own efforts in ensuring that this occurred. Additionally, some parents who did not have much previous faith exposure were becoming aware of Catholic formation through their children's religious education during the time of remote learning.

Some parishes and dioceses streamed Masses online and adapted their youth group activities to allow students to participate from home. However, sacramental preparation and celebration events were postponed until COVID-19 restrictions eased. In some cases, online sacramental preparation meetings appeared to have a greater success.

⁹⁶ Flack et al., *Principal perspectives*.

⁹⁷ Forster, "Is learning more important."

⁹⁸ Naidoo et al., "Sociality, resilience and agency," 81-96.

⁹⁹ Buchtz, Cichosz and Zellma, "Religious Education," 650; Fussell, "Gather Us In", 149-161; Mercieca, "Well-being and Community," 62-65.

A focus on Catholic values, such as kindness and the care of each other, was practised through daily activities during remote learning. There was a greater emphasis on the intentional practice of Catholic values in the school with a particular charism. The inability to gather and pray as a school community had a significant impact for some students and families on their sense of belonging and their connections to the faith, as previously identified by Charteris and Page.¹⁰⁰ Schools recognised that rebuilding community would need significant time and effort in the times ahead.

Limitations of the research

This research does not represent the experiences of all Catholic schools across Australia. Based on a small sample, its intention was to represent schools that coped well with their learning and teaching during COVID-19. Many schools contacted by the research team were experiencing workload fatigue and so did not have the capacity to participate in the research. As a result, there was an absence of data collected, particularly from Queensland and SA.

The fact that data were largely collected through interviews and focus groups meant that the positives could be overstated to some degree. In general, participants like to give a good account of themselves and their contexts through interviews and focus groups. Also, since all the interviews and focus groups were done over Zoom rather than face-to-face, this prevented more informal discussions and opportunities to collect non-verbal data.

This research was not designed to make any objective comments on the overall impact of COVID-19 on learning or on wellbeing. It would be necessary to do further research and analyse examination results and do medical studies to determine the overall consequences.

Greater collaboration between Catholic Education Offices could have benefitted the research. There appeared to be protocols in place that prevented a greater sharing of resources, and limited communication and partnerships regarding ethical requirements across states. An absence of this meant that researchers had to seek multiple approvals and make changes to research instruments numerous times. Consequently, these delays affected the timeline of data collection from schools and limited the scope of the project.

General recommendations

The research team listened to the many voices of L&T Directors, principals, teachers, parents and students and considered the findings of the study in light of previous literature to develop the following set of general recommendations for policy-makers and leaders in the field of Catholic education.

1. Prioritise planning

Our research demonstrated the critical need for advance planning in schools, ready to support remote learning during future educational disruptions. Schools which prepared for online learning, either as a strategic decision to implement technology or those who started planning for COVID-19 in the weeks prior to the pandemic's onset, were at a clear advantage. Those that had a remote learning plan in place pivoted almost seamlessly during the pandemic, and staff and students coped better than their counterparts in schools which responded more hastily. A school plan should include:

¹⁰⁰ Charteris and Page, "School bonding," 91-108.

- Organisation of the software, hardware and other resources that need to be in place for online learning, monitoring support of both staff and students and providing centralised records or instructional material of how this is to be managed.
- Identification of the responsibilities of various staff for the operation of the plan, including details of what responsibilities may be recognised as secondary during emergencies.
- The use of training videos for students and families to support the use of appropriate school software, and provision for investment in new technology as needed.
- Identification of additional support personnel that could be called in to support teachers by managing additional administrative, teaching or wellbeing duties that arise during a crisis.
- A risk management tool which identifies the short-term and long-term risks to staff and students during remote learning and which develops plans to mitigate potential risks.

2. Build a network of collaboration

Supporting teaching and learning in an online environment requires new forms of communication and collaboration to be developed at many levels throughout the education sector. A lack of these heightened uncertainty, causing frustrations and a lack of engagement. Where this was recognised as a concern, groups of people, e.g., principals, RE coordinators or teachers, formed *ad hoc* networks and began to collaborate in an informal manner to share and reflect on experiences, support one another and obtain assistance for planning. Collaborations will need to be strengthened:

- Between Catholic Education Offices—A greater sharing of curriculum materials could prevent the doubling up of resources and ease the burden of content development, especially in a time-poor situation like the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Between Catholic Education Offices and schools—Streamlining and updating current policies will better support learning and teaching in an online environment. Catholic Education Offices can provide critical advice and support to various levels of staff and ensure they are adequately resourced. Schools can provide feedback on their current experiences to help refine policies and practices. A sharing of resources across school networks would enhance pedagogical outcomes.
- Between schools and student families—Improving channels of communication during remote learning will help build trust, manage parent expectations, offer support resources to families and assist managing the learning outcomes of students. These interactions will also help identify where greater assistance may be needed for those with special needs, such as students with limited English, students with learning difficulties and those with disabilities.

3. Prioritise wellbeing and support

Student and staff welfare needs to be a priority during educational disruptions. Lack of adequate provision of support can lead to physical, emotional and mental exhaustion among staff and lack of engagement from students. Feedback from parents indicated that younger children really struggled to cope with the online learning environment. Where parents had the ability to provide assistance to children when needed, they were able to cope well. Where this support was unavailable, students had difficulty staying motivated and being engaged in learning. Services within this area, therefore, could include:

- Preparing curricular items that focus on physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing that are appropriate to the various year levels and ensuring that the timetables for use during emergencies allow appropriate time for such activities.
- Organising appropriate wellbeing supports for staff. Having organised hierarchical systems in place to

ensure staff wellbeing is being monitored through phone calls or check-ins with other personnel as required, and that staff feel valued and empowered during this time.

- Monitoring staff workloads. Setting appropriate levels of responsibilities for each staff member and ensuring adequate time for class preparation, assisting with boundary setting at home and managing parent expectations.
- Ensuring appropriate supports are provided for younger children in Year 3 and below. This might include greater access to counselling services and/or resources for parents to help them identify problems and assist their children as needed.

4. Enhance learning opportunities for vulnerable students

The sudden move from classroom to remote learning deprived many vulnerable students of educational momentum, some of whom may take years to recover. To avoid this happening in future, schools must plan ahead to identify such students and be ready to develop and refine digital pedagogies to further mitigate these risks and provide improvements for future education needs. Three groups of vulnerable communities identified in this research that need support are:

- Those in multicultural communities—Some teachers struggled to communicate with families from different language backgrounds where such support was not available. Provision for adequate language translation services needs to be organised to facilitate the flow of critical two-way communication. Catholic Education Offices could consider providing this expertise to all schools within their area.
- Those with special needs—Students in special needs schools have unique challenges, and technological, teaching and learning resources need to be adapted or improvised to help meet these challenges. Managing parent expectations within this community is a priority. Additionally, managing staffing concerns and work arrangements (which might differ from those in other schools) should be addressed. Schools that cater to these students will also need financial support to moderate the impacts if government funding to those schools should cease.
- Those in boarding schools and remote locations—Students in remote locations generally have a profound long-term impact from educational disruptions such as COVID-19. Ensuring a reliable system of communication is in place between teachers and students and their families is critical to ensuring positive outcomes. Greater support resources will need to be developed for parents to assist their children in learning especially where families have limited financial means to fund learning through the provision of home internet and computers. Boarding schools need to be supported financially and otherwise to address the unique challenges that they face such as the decline of income, the rearrangement of staff roles and responsibilities, management of operational changes to boarding schedules and lodging arrangements, management of staffing losses and assistance helping students recover from severe learning losses. Students who are unable to return to their families due to border closures and immigration policies also need specialised support.

5. Strengthen formation in faith and spirituality

The findings from our interviews suggest that the provision of religious education generally continued alongside learning in other areas. While class prayers continued, and in some cases school Masses were streamed online, a lack of in-person engagement created a disconnection from and disengagement of students with their usual faith-based activities in school. To ensure that critical faith formation is not lost during educational disruptions requires advance planning and support to strengthen outcomes in this area. This could happen through:

- Adequate occasions planned for prayer and liturgy to continue through the online environment,

particularly at important school gatherings online.

- A greater focus on the development of appropriate spiritual resources to be circulated by all Catholic Education Offices to their schools.
- The intentional practice of Catholic values built into lesson plans and reinforced through the curriculum. Occasions for students to practise these values through participation in modified community activities, and by demonstrating care for each other and other people.
- Learning plans set up for faith formation and sacramental preparation to continue in the online setting. This will require collaboration with parishes and dioceses to ensure this occurs in a suitable manner.
- Teachers modelling the importance of prayer and spirituality through a sharing of lived experiences.

6. Support schools to rebuild community

Community is an integral part of the mission of Catholic education. Catholic school communities, made up of collaborations with parents, teachers, school leaders and non-teaching staff, and connections with the local parish, diocese, service providers and other organisations work together for the formation of children. From the students' perspective, face-to-face interaction offers opportunities to build deeper relationships with teachers and friends, and participate in classroom, sport and other extra-curricular activities. The stresses of COVID-19 impacted individuals and families considerably. The length of time spent in online learning resulted in a sense of a loss of community and belonging for many. The research also uncovered frustrations and challenges being experienced in families, particularly where parents were working from home or had other small children to attend to. Family disputes, work stresses and other challenges increased tension and anxiety, resulting in family conflicts.

While more research is needed to measure impacts, it is evident that some students and their families may need considerable support coming out of this experience to help them return to effective in-person learning. Some changes will be irrevocable and long-lasting. Since schools already engage with such families and have built prior relationships with them, they are well placed to identify needs and provide critical support and assistance in these areas. These supports could be offered in conjunction with and with assistance from parishes, dioceses and Catholic social services operating in the area, drawing from their wealth of experience to enhance the wellbeing of the school community.

The experience of the COVID-19 pandemic was like no other. The research findings captured a range of innovative strategies, and attitudes of resilience and adaptability demonstrated by staff and educational leaders alike to improve wellbeing and learning outcomes for students. For teachers, newer strategies practised during the pandemic such as marking the roll online, using smaller formative assessment tasks with automatic marking, multiple choice questions and the ability to provide direct feedback, sharing the load of resource preparation, planning weekly classes in advance and giving parents the ability to monitor and support their child's learning from home, could provide opportunities to build on post-COVID-19 to help reduce teacher workload and improve teaching outcomes.

The research also raised several questions that provide avenues for future research. They are:

- What newer flexible models of learning, such as flipped classrooms, hybrid learning models and varied timetabling models are available for schools to explore to deliver a better experience for learners?
- How can schools operate a model of blended learning without overburdening their staff?
- How can online learning support crucial community building activities, especially for young students?
- What are effective ways to measure and monitor success in the online environment that take into

account both the academic and non-academic skills development of students?

- What forms of agile and flexible work arrangements are needed to support teachers in the future?

Well-organised patterns of response to emergencies and specific encouragement that life will be 'normalised' in the future are important components for hope. Improvements in the area of remote learning will likely continue to develop as more research studies examine several features of this experience. The findings of this research, along with those from other studies, have the capacity to aid the development of policies and practices in a variety of settings, including enhanced learning (gifted students), learning for children forced to be absent (e.g., due to illness) and learning for children with disabilities (especially disabilities which cause long absences from school). Additionally, they can assist in the re-engagement and learning for students in remote locations (including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students). Overall, it is acknowledged that there will be a 'new normal' which may be very different to pre-COVID-19 days, and Catholic schools which retain the skills learned during the past two years may well deliver education differently, more efficiently and more effectively in the future.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Invitation letter to State Education Commissioners



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

National Centre for Pastoral Research

10 August 2021

{Name}
Director Catholic Education Office
{Diocese}
{Address}

Email: {emailaddress}

Pedagogy Development: Positive Learnings from COVID-19

INVITATION LETTER TO STATE EDUCATION COMMISSIONERS

Dear {Name},

In October 2020, the National Catholic Education Commission requested that this office carry out research to discover successful education activities that have emerged in response to COVID-19.

The research project includes a detailed study of around ten schools identified for their innovative approaches related to online teaching (including faith formation) due to COVID-19, whose experiences could be of benefit to other Australian schools. We are seeking to study a diverse mix of schools across Australia which would include:

- A mix of urban, regional and remote schools.
- Schools who undertook emergency remote learning and those with planned blended learning.
- Both systemic and independent schools.
- At least one special assistance or special school.

We are also looking to interview Learning and Teaching Directors and Student Well-being Managers from the State Catholic Education Commissions in order to gain a broader view of the impact of COVID-19 on the Catholic Education sector.

We are seeking your agreement to carry out this research within the schools in your region, and your assistance with inviting 3-5 schools that you think might be suitable for this project. From the list of schools provided by the State Education Commissioners within Australia, we will select ten to participate in the study, based on an appropriate diversity mix as set out above.

Attached is a Letter of Invitation to the relevant school principals and a copy of the Information Letter to Participants. This provides further information about the process and what would be required of participating schools.

If you are happy to proceed, please complete the form at the end of this letter and return it to me via email (trudy.dantis@catholic.org.au) **by Tuesday, 31 August 2021**. We would be grateful if you could forward the invitation letter to schools you think may be suitable.

If you have any questions about this research, please contact me via phone (02) 6201 9812 or email at any time.

The study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at the Christian Research Association. In the event that you have any complaint or concern about the way you have been treated during the study, or if you have any query that the researcher has not been able to satisfy, you may contact the Chair of the Christian Research Association Ethics Committee, Dr Neville Carr, via email: ebedyah45@gmail.com. Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated, and the participant will be informed of the outcome.

I trust that you will welcome the opportunity to have this research conducted among the schools in your state.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,



Dr. Trudy Dantis
Principal Investigator



Enclosed:

1. Invitation Letter to Principals and Information Letter to Participants



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE
National Centre for Pastoral Research

Pedagogy Development: Positive Learnings from COVID-19

INVITATION LETTER TO SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

Dear Principal,

In October 2020, the National Catholic Education Commission requested that this office carry out research to discover successful education activities that have emerged in response to COVID-19.

The research project includes a detailed study of around ten schools identified for their innovative approaches related to online teaching (including faith formation) due to COVID-19, whose experiences could be of benefit to other Australian schools. It has been suggested that your school might be able to assist us in this research. I am therefore writing to you to invite you to be a part of this project. If you accept this invitation, your school will be included on a shortlist of schools who might be chosen to participate in this project.

If your participation is confirmed, this is what it will mean for the school:

- The coordinator of the research project, Dr Trudy Dantis, will liaise with you, or another person nominated by you, to contact relevant people in the school who could participate in the research.
- You will receive a document pack, containing copies of the various letters and other documents that will be sent to potential participants.
- The selected participants will be given an Information Letter to Participants (copy enclosed) with all details of the research and will be invited to sign a consent form before being interviewed.
- Each school study will include interviews with individuals and/or groups. We would also like to visit your school with a team of up to two researchers who will spend about two or three days in each school interviewing participants in the study. These could include teachers, religious education coordinators, parents and students.
- Interviews with participants will be conducted by members of the research team at locations convenient for the participants, or online via Zoom.

The researchers who will visit the school will be drawn from the full research team, whose members are as follows:

- Dr. Trudy Dantis (Principal Investigator)
- Mr. Stephen Reid (Research Officer, ACBC National Centre for Pastoral Research)
- Mr. Paul Bowell (Research Officer, ACBC National Centre for Pastoral Research)
- Ms. Leith Dudfield (Research Officer, ACBC National Centre for Pastoral Research)

This study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Christian Research Association. In the event that you have any complaint or concern about the way you have been treated during the study, or if you have any query that the researcher has not been able to satisfy, you may contact the Chair of the Christian Research Association Ethics Committee, Dr Neville Carr, via email: ebedyah45@gmail.com. Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated, and the participant will be informed of the outcome.

If you are willing for your school to be involved in this project, please advise your State Education Coordinator who has sent you this invitation. We will be in contact to advise whether your school has been shortlisted for the study.

I trust that you will welcome the opportunity to have this research conducted in your school.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,



Dr. Trudy Dantis
Principal Investigator

9 August 2021



Enclosed:

1. Information Letter to Participants

Appendix 3 – Confirmation letter to school principals



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE National Centre for Pastoral Research

{Date}

{Name}
{Title} of {School}
{Address details}

Pedagogy Development: Positive Learnings from COVID-19

CONFIRMATION LETTER TO SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

Dear {Salutation},

Thank you for your willingness to allow your school to be a part of the research we are undertaking at the request of the National Catholic Education Commission to discover successful education activities that have emerged in response to COVID-19

We would like to confirm your school has been shortlisted for participation in this project, and provide more information about the next steps:

- Attached is a copy of the Participant Information Sheet and a Consent Form for Principals. If you are happy with what is being asked of you, please sign the consent form and return it to this office. This indicates your agreement for this project to take place in your school, and for you to be interviewed as part of that study. If you would prefer another staff member, such as a Deputy or Assistant Principal, to be interviewed as the person who has oversight of the remote learning strategies followed in your school, do not tick that box on the consent form. We will make separate arrangements with your preferred person.
- Please nominate a person, either yourself or another member of staff, to act as the liaison for this project. This person will be responsible for communication with the research team, facilitating contact with relevant people to participate in the research, and ensuring that all necessary protocols – such as safeguarding or COVID policies – are met.

The signed consent form and details of the liaison person can be sent to the Principal Investigator:

Dr. Trudy Dantis
Australian Catholic Bishops Conference
National Centre for Pastoral Research
GPO Box 368, Canberra ACT 2601.
Ph: (02) 6201 9812
Email: trudy.dantis@catholic.org.au

Once you have signed the consent form and nominated your chosen liaison person, we will organise to undertake the research study. Up to two researchers will arrange to visit the school, drawn from the full research team, whose members are as follows:

- Dr. Trudy Dantis (Principal Investigator)
- Mr. Stephen Reid (Research Officer, ACBC National Centre for Pastoral Research)
- Mr. Paul Howell (Research Officer, ACBC National Centre for Pastoral Research)
- Ms. Leith Dudfield (Research Officer, ACBC National Centre for Pastoral Research)

We would like to interview the following people, who should be familiar with the particular aspect of remote learning practice being performed in the school:

- Principal or Deputy/Assistant Principal
- Religious Education Coordinator
- 1 or 2 Teachers

In coordination with the research liaison person, we will then arrange focus groups with parents and students. For students under 18 years, parental or guardian consent will be required. For students aged 16-17 years, we will also seek the student's explicit consent to participate. We would seek to run the following focus groups, of approximately 90 minutes per session.

- A focus group with approximately 5-7 parents;
- One or two focus groups with students of approximately 5-7 people per group.

We would like student focus groups to be made up of students of a similar age (e.g. years 7 and 8) rather than having a broad cross-section. Where it is valuable to talk to students in different age ranges, we can organise separate focus groups.

Additional details of this research have been included in the Information Letter to Participants which I have enclosed along with this letter. This study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Christian Research Association (CRA HREC No. 68). In the event that you have any complaint or concern about the way you have been treated during the study, or if you have any query that the researcher has not been able to satisfy, you may contact the Chair of the Christian Research Association Ethics Committee, Dr Neville Carr, via email: ebedyah45@gmail.com. Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated, and the participant will be informed of the outcome.

If you have any questions or need any further information about this process, please feel free to contact me. I thank you again for your cooperation in conducting this research in your school.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Trudy Dantis
Principal Investigator

Enclosed:

1. Participant Information Sheet
2. Consent Form for Principals



ACBC National Centre for Pastoral Research
GPO Box 368 Canberra ACT 2601

T: (02) 6201 9812



ncpr@catholic.org.au
www.ncpr.catholic.org.au



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

National Centre for Pastoral Research

Pedagogy Development: Positive Learnings from COVID-19

INFORMATION LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

Title of project: Pedagogy Development: Positive Learnings from COVID-19

Names of investigators: Dr. Trudy Dantis (Principal Investigator)
Mr. Stephen Reid
Ms. Leith Dudfield
Mr. Paul Bowell

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in this research project which explores the changing landscape of Catholic education as a result of COVID-19. Catholic Education developed a number of innovative approaches related to online teaching (including faith formation) during COVID-19. The focus of the project will be on learnings during COVID-19 primarily from emergency remote learning practices but also from planned blended learning, with a particular focus on Religious Education.

This research project includes a detailed study of around ten schools which have been identified as ones which developed particular innovative strategies related to online learning. Each school study will include interviews with individuals and groups. A team of up to two researchers drawn from the above research team will spend two to three days in each school interviewing principals and teachers, and doing focus groups with parents and students from the school community. We will also be interviewing Learning and Teaching Directors and Student Wellbeing Managers from the state Catholic Education Commissions.

The selected participants will be invited to sign a consent form before being interviewed. In the case of participants below the age of 16, parents will be asked to provide consent on their behalf. For student participants aged between 16 and 17 years, both the student and their parent will be asked to provide consent. Parents may remain with their child during the interview if they or their child wishes.

The interviews will cover matters such as:

- Well-being impacts of COVID-19 on students, parents and school staff
- Remote learning
- Faith formation / Religious education
- Communication / Learning and Teaching Resources

Individual interviews will be conducted with principals, teachers, Learning and Teaching Directors and Student Wellbeing Managers. These will be about one hour long.

We intend to conduct focus groups with parents and students. Each focus group will have about 5-7 participants and will run for around an hour and a half.

It is intended that interviews and focus groups will be conducted in person at the school. Where this is not possible, these may be run online via Zoom with the permission and assistance of the school. These interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed.

This research project is an opportunity to share the successes of participant schools with the rest of the Catholic Church in Australia. The National Catholic Education Commission and others in the Church are interested, and wish to learn about the experiences and innovative practices developed by Australian Catholic schools during COVID-19. Research results will add to the body of knowledge about the impacts of COVID-19 and subsequent remote learning on education, with a particular focus on religious education. The research output will take many forms, including research reports, articles, discussion papers and other print publications as well as digital and web-based publications. The intended audience will be the NCEC, Catholic Education staff, school principals, teachers, educational researchers, bishops, and others interested in Catholic education.

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- Ask any questions about the study at any time during participation.
- Decline to answer any question.
- Choose to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.
- Be given access to a summary of the research findings when the project is concluded.
- Request that the voice recorder be turned off at any time during the interview.
- Preserve your confidentiality with regards to participation in this project.

The nature of this study requires that some participants will be identifiable (e.g. school principals). Since one of the aims of the project is to publicise innovative learning strategies, we expect that principals will be pleased to be invited to participate in this project and will be eager for the good news about their schools to be publicised.

Nevertheless, we recognise that interviews will cover a wide range of topics and that you may well say some things that need to be kept confidential. We therefore want to make you aware that you might be identifiable — indeed, we would often want to include the name of the person who made a particular comment or carried out a particular action, just as in, say, a school newsletter — when we obtain your consent prior to your being interviewed. However, we also want to make sure that no published comment or action can be attributed to you without you being aware of what we intend to publish and giving your consent to its publication. This means that further consent will be obtained from you for the release of data from interview transcripts and from all documents with identifying information.

Any other identifiable information that is collected about participants in connection with this study will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission, or except as required by law. For this reason, we also ask that participants respect the confidentiality of others during focus group sessions, and that any information that is discussed within the session is not shared outside it.

We also acknowledge the current pandemic situation and ask that all participants and observers (such as parents accompanying a student) complete the COVID screening tool. If you answer “yes” to any of the questions in that tool, please do not attend your session but notify the research team as soon as you can.

Any questions regarding this project should be directed to the Principal Investigator:

Dr. Trudy Dantis
Australian Catholic Bishops Conference
National Centre for Pastoral Research
GPO Box 368, Canberra ACT 2601.
Ph: (02) 6201 9812
Email: trudy.dantis@catholic.org.au

This study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Christian Research Association. In the event that you have any complaint or concern about the way you have been treated during the study, or if you have any query that the researcher has not been able to satisfy, you may contact the Chair of the Christian Research Association Ethics Committee, Dr Neville Carr, via email: ebedyah45@gmail.com. Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated, and the participant will be informed of the outcome.

If you agree to participate in this project, you should sign both copies of the Consent Form, retain one copy for your records and return the other copy to the Principal Investigator.



.....
Principal Investigator



Pedagogy Development: Positive Learnings from COVID-19

Interview Questions for Learning & Teaching Directors

Background

I am a researcher with the National Centre for Pastoral Research, and the National Catholic Education Commission has commissioned us to undertake some research investigating the changing learning landscape in Catholic education as a result of COVID-19, with a particular focus on Religious Education.

I am particularly interested in your honest opinions and your experiences. Whatever you say just between us. (Unless a criminal offence is disclosed or something else is said which I legally have to report.) I will be writing a general report which will take into account all the things that I hear from different people, but no one will specifically be identifiable in any way. If you may be identifiable, or we want to use a direct quote, we will give you the chance to read what will be published and we'll seek your further consent to use that. In order to get an accurate account of what we discuss, is it okay if I record this conversation and take a few notes?

If there is anything I ask that you don't want to talk about, that is fine. You don't have to say anything if you don't want to. This interview will go for no longer than 60 minutes. But if you want to cease involvement at any time before that, you are free to do so. If you have any complaints about the process, then the information sheet gives you a contact person to follow it up with.

Thanks for agreeing to be interviewed. Are you happy to proceed?

[Note: comments in italics are prompts]

Introduction

1. What happened for you when COVID-19 first emerged in early 2020?
2. How did that impact your role as a Learning and Teaching Director?
3. How did the emergence of COVID-19 affect the schools in your area?

Theme 1 – Remote/Online learning

4. Could you describe what your state did when there was the shift to remote learning?
5. Of these actions what worked well?

Theme 2 – Support by Catholic Education

6. What resources were sent out to schools?
7. How were those resources selected/created?
8. How did you incorporate Catholic ethos and values into resources?
9. Did you do anything differently for students with special needs?
10. What actions if any did you take to support students who were identified before the pandemic as needing extra support?
11. What actions if any were taken to monitor the wellbeing of staff and students during the pandemic?
12. From your perspective, what is considered best practice in this field?

Theme 3 – Faith & Spirituality

13. What values of Catholic education are promoted in your schools? [*Values of Catholic Education may be specific to each school, but may include: having a holistic approach to education; key values such as: compassion, cooperation, fairness, forgiveness, freedom, integrity, justice, peace, respect, responsibility, service, tolerance, truth and wellbeing*]
14. Do you think these values were practiced during remote learning? Can you give me some examples of how they were practiced?
15. Where there any pastoral supports offered to the staff or students during the pandemic?
16. What challenges did you face in the area of religious education during the pandemic?
 - a. Were things done differently, how?
 - b. Have there been any changes proposed for the future in the light of this experience?

Final Comments

17. Do you have any suggestions for how things could be done differently in the future?
18. How well-prepared are schools now to return to remote learning quickly?
19. Would you like to add anything else?

Pedagogy Development: Positive Learnings from COVID-19

Interview Questions for Principals

Background

I am a researcher with the National Centre for Pastoral Research, and the National Catholic Education Commission has commissioned us to undertake some research investigating the changing learning landscape in Catholic education as a result of COVID-19, with a particular focus on Religious Education.

I am particularly interested in your honest opinions and your experiences. Whatever you say just between us. (Unless a criminal offence is disclosed or something else is said which I legally have to report.) I will be writing a general report which will take into account all the things that I hear from different people, but no one will specifically be identifiable in any way. If you may be identifiable, or we want to use a direct quote, we will give you the chance to read what will be published and we'll seek your further consent to use that. In order to get an accurate account of what we discuss, is it okay if I record this conversation and take a few notes?

If there is anything I ask that you don't want to talk about, that is fine. You don't have to say anything if you don't want to. This interview will go for no longer than 60 minutes. But if you want to cease involvement at any time before that, you are free to do so. If you have any complaints about the process, then the information sheet gives you a contact person to follow it up with.

Thanks for agreeing to be interviewed. Are you happy to proceed?

[Note: comments in italics are prompts]

Introduction

1. What happened for you when COVID-19 first emerged in early 2020?

Theme 1 – Remote/Online learning

2. Could you describe what your school did when there was the shift to remote learning?
3. Of these actions what worked well?
4. Could you describe how the shift to remote learning affected you?
5. How did it affect the staff and students in your school?

Theme 2 – Support by school / Catholic Education

6. Did you feel supported by your school and Catholic Education during the pandemic?
7. Did you do anything differently for students with special needs?
8. What actions if any did you take to support students who were identified before the pandemic as needing extra support?
9. What actions if any did you take to monitor the wellbeing of your staff and students during the pandemic?

Theme 3 – Communication / Learning & Teaching Resources

10. How were the changes to remote learning communicated to the school community?
11. What part of this communication worked well? What was more challenging?

12. What Learning and Teaching resources did your school use during periods of remote learning? [e.g. part of current curriculum, from a website, from Catholic Education Office, developed by individual teachers]

Theme 4 – Faith & Spirituality

13. What do you think are the values of Catholic education? [Values of Catholic Education may be specific to each school, but may include: having a holistic approach to education; key values such as: compassion, cooperation, fairness, forgiveness, freedom, integrity, justice, peace, respect, responsibility, service, tolerance, truth and wellbeing]
14. Do you think the values of Catholic education were practiced during remote learning?
15. Where there any pastoral supports offered to the staff or students during the pandemic?
16. What challenges do you see to religious education in the wake of the Coronavirus?

Final Comments

17. Do you have any suggestions for how things could be done differently in the future?
18. Would you like to add anything else?

Pedagogy Development: Positive Learnings from COVID-19

Interview Questions for Teachers

Background

I am a researcher with the National Centre for Pastoral Research, and the National Catholic Education Commission has commissioned us to undertake some research investigating the changing learning landscape in Catholic education as a result of COVID-19, with a particular focus on Religious Education.

I am particularly interested in your honest opinions and your experiences. Whatever you say is just between us. (Unless a criminal offence is disclosed or something else is said which I legally have to report.) I will be writing a general report which will take into account all the things that I hear from different people, but no one will specifically be identifiable in any way. If you may be identifiable, or we want to use a direct quote, we will give you the chance to read what will be published and we'll seek your further consent to use that. In order to get an accurate account of what we discuss, is it okay if I record this conversation and take a few notes?

If there is anything I ask that you don't want to talk about, that is fine. You don't have to say anything if you don't want to. This interview will go for no longer than 60 minutes. But if you want to cease involvement at any time before that, you are free to do so. If you have any complaints about the process, then the information sheet gives you a contact person to follow it up with.

Thanks for agreeing to be interviewed. Are you happy to proceed?

[Note: comments in italics are prompts]

Introduction

1. What happened for you when COVID-19 first emerged in early 2020?

Theme 1 – Remote / Online Learning

2. Could you describe what your school did when there was the shift to remote learning? *[Fully online teaching from home, teaching online from school, blended learning with both face-to-face students and remote students]*
3. Of these actions what worked well? What was more challenging?
4. Could you describe how teaching remotely affected you?

Theme 2 – Support by School / Catholic Education

5. Did you feel supported by your school and Catholic Education during the pandemic?
6. Did the school support you in managing your family situation? *[e.g. if your own children were learning from home]*

Theme 3 – Communication / Learning & Teaching Resources

7. How were the changes to remote learning communicated to you?
8. What part of this communication worked well? And what were the challenges?
9. Where did you look for Learning and Teaching resources during the period of remote learning? *[e.g. website, email, developed your own]*
10. How easily were they available to you?

Theme 4 – Well-being / Support of students

11. How did you monitor the wellbeing of your students during remote learning?
12. Did you do anything differently for students with special needs?
13. What actions if any did you take to support students who were identified before the pandemic as needing extra support?

Theme 5 – Faith & Spirituality

14. What do you think are the values of Catholic education? [*Values of Catholic Education may be specific to each school, but may include: having a holistic approach to education; key values such as: compassion, cooperation, fairness, forgiveness, freedom, integrity, justice, peace, respect, responsibility, service, tolerance, truth and wellbeing*]
15. Do you think the values of Catholic education were practiced during remote learning?
16. Was it difficult to engage students in religious education through remote learning?

Final Comments

17. Do you have any suggestions for how things could be done differently in the future?
18. Would you like to add anything else?

Pedagogy Development: Positive Learnings from COVID-19

Focus Group Questions for Parents

Background

I am a researcher with the National Centre for Pastoral Research, and the National Catholic Education Commission has commissioned us to undertake some research investigating the changing learning landscape in Catholic education as a result of COVID-19, with a particular focus on Religious Education.

I am particularly interested in your honest opinions and your experiences. Whatever you say in this group is just between us. (Unless a criminal offence is disclosed or something else is said which I legally have to report.) I will be writing a general report which will take into account all the things that I hear from different people, but no one will specifically be identifiable in any way. If you may be identifiable, or we want to use a direct quote from these sessions, we will give you the chance to read what will be published and we'll seek your further consent to use that. In order to get an accurate account of what we discuss, is it okay if I record this conversation and take a few notes?

If there is anything I ask that you don't want to talk about, that is fine. You don't have to say anything if you don't want to. This group will go for no longer than 90 minutes. But if you want to cease involvement in the focus group at any time before that, you are free to do so. If you have any complaints about the process, then the information sheet gives you a contact person to follow it up with.

Let's do our best to try to keep the focus of the discussion on the topic, which is the effects of COVID-19, online learning and religious education. However, if there are other things that you do wish to talk about, there are a number of leaders from the school who would be more than happy to chat with you further.

Thanks for agreeing to be part of this discussion. Are you all happy to proceed?

[Note: comments in italics are prompts]

Introduction

1. What school years are your children in? *[Remind them that we are focusing on the children who attend this particular school]*
2. What happened for you when COVID-19 first emerged in early 2020?

Theme 1 – Remote/Online learning

3. What was your experience of your child/children learning from home?
4. What worked well?
5. What aspects did you find challenging?

Theme 2 – Support by school / Catholic Education

6. Did you feel supported by your school *[name of school]* and Catholic Education?
7. Do you think that the wellbeing of your child/children was supported during the pandemic? *[consider spiritual/mental health/other needs]*
8. If you have a child that had any special needs before the pandemic, were these needs catered for during remote learning?

Theme 3 – Communication / Learning & Teaching Resources

9. How were the changes to remote learning communicated to you?
10. What part of this communication worked well? What was more challenging?
11. Where did you access Learning and Teaching resources during periods of remote learning?
[e.g. given by the teacher, from a website, developed it yourself]

Theme 4 – Faith & Spirituality

12. Do you think the values of Catholic education were practiced during remote learning?
[Values of Catholic Education may be specific to each school, but may include: having a holistic approach to education; key values such as: compassion, cooperation, fairness, forgiveness, freedom, integrity, justice, peace, respect, responsibility, service, tolerance, truth and wellbeing]
13. Prior to the pandemic, what religious activities did your children engage in at school?
14. What happened during remote learning in regards to religious activities? [Were resources sent home? Did you do something special you wouldn't have done otherwise? Was it ignored entirely?]
15. [Primary school parents only] Were any of your children receiving sacraments or had sacraments postponed during 2020? How did that affect you or your child?

Final Comments

16. Do you have any suggestions for how things could be done differently in the future?
17. Would you like to add anything else?

Appendix 9 – Focus group questions for primary school students

Pedagogy Development: Positive Learnings from COVID-19

Focus Group Questions for Primary School Students

Background

I am a researcher with the National Centre for Pastoral Research, and the National Catholic Education Commission has asked us to undertake some research about it was like learning from home over the last year or so.

I want to know about your honest opinions and your experiences. Whatever you say in this group is just between us. (Unless you tell me about some things that I have to report by law, such as if a child is being hurt by adults.) I will be writing a report which will take into account all the things that I hear from different people, but no one will specifically be identifiable in any way. If you may be identifiable, or we want to use a direct quote from these sessions, we will give you the chance to read what we write and we'll seek your and your parent or guardian's okay to use that. In order to get an accurate account of what we discuss, is it okay if I record this conversation and take a few notes?

If there is anything I ask that you don't want to talk about, that is fine. You don't have to say anything if you don't want to. This group will go for no longer than 90 minutes. But if you want to stop being part of the group at any time before that, you are free to do so. You don't have to give a reason if you don't want to answer a question, or if you want to stop being part of the group.

If you're unhappy about anything that we do in this session, please let us know, or talk to a grown up you trust.

Thanks for being part of this discussion. Are you all happy to go on?

[Note: comments in italics are prompts]

Theme 1 – Remote/Online learning

1. What was it like for you when you were learning from home?
2. What did you like about it?
3. Was there anything you found hard about learning from home? If yes, what?

Theme 2 – Support by school

4. Did you feel like your teacher was there for you while you were at home?
5. Was there anything your teacher gave you that helped while you were learning at home?

Theme 3 – Faith & Spirituality

6. What religious activities did you do at school? *[e.g. talk to God, read the Bible, pray, attend Mass]*
7. Did you do any of those things when you were away from school?
8. Did your teacher give you anything to help you do those activities while you were learning from home?

Final comments

9. Is there anything you would have changed about learning from home?
10. Is there anything else that you would like to tell us about learning from home?

Pedagogy Development: Positive Learnings from COVID-19

Focus Group Questions for Secondary School Students

Background

I am a researcher with the National Centre for Pastoral Research, and the National Catholic Education Commission has commissioned us to undertake some research investigating the changing learning landscape in Catholic education as a result of COVID-19, with a particular focus on Religious Education.

I am particularly interested in your honest opinions and your experiences. Whatever you say in this group is just between us. (Unless a criminal offence is disclosed or something else is said which I legally have to report.) I will be writing a general report which will take into account all the things that I hear from different people, but no one will specifically be identifiable in any way. If you may be identifiable, or we want to use a direct quote from these sessions, we will give you the chance to read what will be published and we'll seek your further consent to use that. In order to get an accurate account of what we discuss, is it okay if I record this conversation and take a few notes?

If there is anything I ask that you don't want to talk about, that is fine. You don't have to say anything if you don't want to. This group will go for no longer than 90 minutes. But if you want to stop being part of the group at any time before that, you are free to do so. You don't have to give a reason if you don't want to answer a question, or if you want to stop being part of the group.

If you have any complaints about the process, then the information sheet gives you a contact person to follow it up with.

Let's do our best to try to keep the focus of the discussion on the topic, which is the effects of COVID-19, online learning and religious education. However, if there are other things that you do wish to talk about, there are a number of leaders from the school who would be more than happy to chat with you further.

Thanks for agreeing to be part of this discussion. Are you all happy to proceed?

[Note: comments in italics are prompts]

Introduction

1. What happened for you when COVID-19 first emerged in early 2020?

Theme 1 – Remote/Online learning

2. What was your experience of learning from home during COVID-19?
3. What did you enjoy?
4. What did you find challenging?

Theme 2 – Support by school

5. Did you feel supported by your school?
6. Did your school offer you any supports while you were learning at home?

Theme 3 – Communication / Learning & Teaching Resources

7. How were the changes to remote learning communicated to you?
8. What part of this communication worked well? What was more challenging?

9. Where did you access Learning and Teaching resources during periods of remote learning?
[e.g. given by the teacher, from a website, developed it yourself]

Theme 4 – Faith & Spirituality

10. Did being socially distant from school and church affect your relationship with God?
11. Did your school offer you any supports to help you stay connected to God while you were learning from home?

Final comments

12. Is there anything you think should have been done differently?
13. Is there anything else that you would like to tell us about learning from home?

Appendix 11 – Document analysis websites and portals

The following is a list of websites accessed between 19 January 2021 and 16 February 2021 for the purpose of the document analysis:

Australian Capital Territory

<https://cg.catholic.edu.au/>

Northern Territory

<https://www.ceont.catholic.edu.au/>

New South Wales

<https://www.csnsw.catholic.edu.au/>

<https://sydcatholicschools.nsw.edu.au/>

<https://lism.catholic.edu.au/>

Access also provided to Learning Resources Portal.

Tasmania

<https://catholic.tas.edu.au/>

Access also provided to internal website 'Learning @ Home'.

Western Australia

<https://www.cewa.edu.au/>

South Australia

<https://www.cesa.catholic.edu.au/>

Queensland

<https://qcec.catholic.edu.au/>

<https://www.bne.catholic.edu.au>

<https://www.cns.catholic.edu.au/>

<https://www.tsv.catholic.edu.au/>

<https://www.rok.catholic.edu.au/>

<https://www.twb.catholic.edu.au/>

Victoria

<https://www.cecv.catholic.edu.au/>

<https://www.macs.vic.edu.au/>

<https://dobcel.catholic.edu.au/>

<https://www.ceosale.catholic.edu.au/>

<https://www.ceosand.catholic.edu.au/>

Appendix 12 – Christian Research Association notification of ethics approval



Human Research Ethics Committee

NHMRC Registration Code: EC00354

PO Box 206 Nunawading LPO 3131

E: secretary_HREC@cra.org.au

Notification of Ethics Approval

HREC Application number: 068

Date of Approval: 12 July 2021

Approval Reference Number: 20210712-068

Project Name: Pedagogy Development: Building on Positive Learnings from COVID-19

Principal Researcher: Dr Trudy Dantis

Organisation: Australian Catholic Bishops Conference National Centre for Pastoral Research

Rev Professor Philip Hughes

Secretary

Christian Research Association

Human Research Ethics Committee



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE National Centre for Pastoral Research

Pedagogy Development: Positive Learnings from COVID-19

SUPPORT SERVICES

Participation in this project is completely voluntary and you may, without any penalty, decline to take part, refuse to answer a question, request that the voice recorder be turned off, or withdraw at any time without providing an explanation.

If after the interview you, or your child, want to talk to someone about what was discussed, if this has raised any issues for you that make you feel uncomfortable, or you wish to talk to a counsellor, please see the range of contact numbers provided in this sheet.

If you, or someone you are caring for, is in imminent danger, please call 000.

- Lifeline 13 11 14 <https://www.lifeline.org.au/>
- Kids Helpline 1800 551 800 <https://kidshelpline.com.au/>
- Beyond Blue - support for anxiety and depression 1300 224 636
<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/>
- Headspace - support for young people experiencing mental health issues 1800 650 890
<https://headspace.org.au/>
- Mensline Australia 1300 789 978 <http://www.mensline.org.au/>





AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE
National Centre for Pastoral Research

Pedagogy Development: Positive Learnings from COVID-19

CONSENT FORM FOR STATE EDUCATION COMMISSIONERS

Title of project: NCEC: Positive Learnings from COVID-19

Names of investigators: Dr. Trudy Dantis (Principal Investigator)
Mr. Stephen Reid
Mr. Paul Bowell
Ms. Leith Dudfield

- I have read and understood the information provided in the Letter to State Education Commissioners and the Information Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.
- I agree to research being carried out in the schools in the region of and school staff, parents and students participating in this research.
- I nominate the schools below to participate in the study, and I confirm that each school has accepted the invitation to participate and has been informed that not all invited schools will be able to be included in the final study.

NAME OF STATE EDUCATION COMMISSIONER:
(Block letters)

TITLE:

SIGNATURE: DATE:

School name:

Principal: Phone:

Why do you recommend this school?

.....

.....

School name:

Principal: Phone:

Why do you recommend this school?

.....

.....

School name:

Principal: Phone:

Why do you recommend this school?

.....

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School name:

Principal: Phone:

Why do you recommend this school?

.....

.....

School name:

Principal: Phone:

Why do you recommend this school?

.....

.....





AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE
National Centre for Pastoral Research

Pedagogy Development: Positive Learnings from COVID-19

CONSENT FORM FOR SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

Participant copy Researcher copy
(Two forms to be signed by each participant)

Title of project: NCEC: Positive Learnings from COVID-19

Names of investigators: Dr. Trudy Dantis (Principal Investigator)
Mr. Stephen Reid
Mr. Paul Howell
Ms. Leith Dudfield

- I, have read and understood the information provided in the Letter to School Principals and the Information Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.
- I agree to research being carried out in the school and school staff, parents and students participating in this research.
- I agree to participate in this activity, realising that I can withdraw at any time. I give my consent for the interview to be digitally audio recorded.
- I agree that the researchers will use their discretion to remove any sensitive data.
- I agree that research data collected for the study may be provided to other researchers in a form that might enable me to be identified.
- I agree that research data collected for the study may be published in a form that might enable me to be identified and that I will have the option to review all remarks made by me before they are reported in the study.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT:
(Block letters)

SIGNATURE: DATE:

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:

DATE:



ACBC National Centre for Pastoral Research
GPO Box 368 Canberra ACT 2601

T: (02) 6201 9812



nepri@catholic.org.au
www.nepri.catholic.org.au



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE
National Centre for Pastoral Research

Pedagogy Development: Positive Learnings from COVID-19

CONSENT FORM FOR ADULT PARTICIPANTS

Participant copy Researcher copy
(Two forms to be signed by each participant)

Title of project: NCEC: Positive Learnings from COVID-19

Names of investigators: Dr. Trudy Dantis (Principal Investigator)
Mr. Stephen Reid
Mr. Paul Bowell
Ms. Leith Dudfield

- I, have read and understood the information provided in the Information Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.
- I agree to participate in this activity, realising that I can withdraw at any time. I give my consent for the interview to be digitally audio recorded.
- I agree that the researchers will use their discretion to remove any sensitive data.
- I agree that research data collected for the study may be provided to other researchers in a form that might enable me to be identified. *(Optional)*
- I agree that research data collected for the study may be published in a form that might enable me to be identified and that I will have the option to review all remarks made by me before they are reported in the study. *(Optional)*

NAME OF PARTICIPANT:
(Block letters)

SIGNATURE: DATE:

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:

DATE:



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GPO Box 368 Canberra ACT 2601

T: (02) 6201 9812



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www.ncpr.catholic.org.au



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE
National Centre for Pastoral Research

Pedagogy Development: Positive Learnings from COVID-19

CONSENT FORM FOR PARENT PARTICIPANTS OF FOCUS GROUPS

Participant copy Researcher copy
(Two forms to be signed by each participant)

Title of project: NCEC: Positive Learnings from COVID-19

Names of investigators: Dr. Trudy Dantis (Principal Investigator)
Mr. Stephen Reid
Mr. Paul Howell
Ms. Leith Dudfield

- I, have read and understood the information provided in the Information Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.
- I agree to participate in this activity, realising that I can withdraw at any time. I give my consent for the interview to be digitally audio recorded.
- I agree to keep confidential any information shared by other participants in the focus group.
- I agree that the researchers will use their discretion to remove any sensitive data.
- I agree that research data collected for the study may be provided to other researchers in a form that might enable me to be identified. *(Optional)*
- I agree that research data collected for the study may be published in a form that might enable me to be identified and that I will have the option to review all remarks made by me before they are reported in the study. *(Optional)*
- I advise that my child/ren are in the following school year group/s:

NAME OF PARTICIPANT:
(Block letters)

SIGNATURE: DATE:

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:

DATE:



ACBC National Centre for Pastoral Research
GPO Box 368 Canberra ACT 2601

T: (02) 6201 9812



ncpr@catholic.org.au
www.ncpr.catholic.org.au



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE
National Centre for Pastoral Research

Pedagogy Development: Positive Learnings from COVID-19

CONSENT FORM FOR PARENT / GUARDIAN

Parent/Guardian copy Researcher copy
(Two forms to be signed by each parent/guardian)

Title of project: NCEC: Positive Learnings from COVID-19

Names of investigators: Dr. Trudy Dantis (Principal Investigator)
Mr. Stephen Reid
Mr. Paul Bowell
Ms. Leith Dudfield

- I, *(the parent/guardian)* have read *(or, where appropriate, have had read to me)* and understood the information provided in the Information Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.
- I agree that my child, nominated below, may participate in this activity, realising that I can withdraw my consent at any time. I give my consent for the interview to be digitally audio recorded.
- I agree to keep confidential any information I become aware of shared by other participants in the study.
- I agree that the researchers will use their discretion to remove any sensitive data.
- I agree that research data collected for the study may be provided to other researchers in a form that might enable my child to be identified. *(Optional)*
- I agree that research data collected for the study may be published in a form that might enable my child to be identified and that I will have the option to review all remarks made by my child before they are reported in the study. *(Optional)*

NAME OF PARENT/GUARDIAN:
(Block letters)

SIGNATURE: DATE:

NAME OF CHILD:
(Block letters)

CHILD'S SCHOOL YEAR GROUP:

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:

DATE:



ACBC National Centre for Pastoral Research
GPO Box 368 Canberra ACT 2601

T: (02) 6201 9812



nepr@catholic.org.au
www.nepr.catholic.org.au

ASSENT OF PARTICIPANTS AGED 16-17 YEARS

- I, (the participant aged 16-17 years) understand what this research project is designed to explore. What I will be asked to do has been explained to me. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.
- I agree to participate in this activity.
- I understand that I can withdraw from participating in this study at any time, or choose not to answer any question, without having to give a reason for my decision.
- I agree for the interview to be digitally audio recorded.
- I agree to keep confidential any information shared by other participants in the focus group.
- I agree that the researchers will use their discretion to remove any sensitive data.
- I agree that research data collected for the study may be provided to other researchers in a form that might enable me to be identified. (Optional)
- I agree that research data collected for the study may be published in a form that might enable me to be identified and that I will have the option to review all remarks made by me before they are reported in the study. (Optional)

NAME OF PARTICIPANT AGED 16-17 YEARS:
(Block letters)

SIGNATURE: DATE:

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:

DATE:



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AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE
National Centre for Pastoral Research

Pedagogy Development: Positive Learnings from COVID-19

CONSENT FORM FOR USE OF INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

Participant copy Researcher copy
(Two forms to be signed by each participant)

Title of project: NCEC: Positive Learnings from COVID-19

Names of investigators: Dr. Trudy Dantis (Principal Investigator)
 Mr. Stephen Reid
 Mr. Paul Bowell
 Ms. Leith Dudfield

- I confirm that I have had the opportunity to check and amend the transcript of the interview/s conducted with me/my child *(for parents/guardians only)*.
- I agree that the edited transcript may be used for analytical purposes and that extracts from this transcript may be used by the researchers in reports and publications arising from the research.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT:
(Block letters)

NAME OF PARENT/GUARDIAN
(for participants under 18 years only):
(Block letters)

SIGNATURE: DATE:

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:

DATE:





AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE
National Centre for Pastoral Research

Pedagogy Development: Positive Learnings from COVID-19

INFORMATION LETTER FOR STUDENT PARTICIPANTS UNDER 16 YEARS

Title of project: Pedagogy Development: Positive Learnings from COVID-19

Names of investigators: Dr. Trudy Dantis (Principal Investigator)
Mr. Stephen Reid
Ms. Leith Dudfield
Mr. Paul Bowell

Dear Student,

We are researchers who are looking at the new ways that students, teachers, parents and schools did things when schools needed to move to online teaching last year.

We are studying a number of Catholic schools around Australia, including your school. You have been picked as someone who would be good to talk to about what your school did, what it was like for you learning from home, what things were harder to handle and what you think should have been different.

We are going to have a focus group, which is where you and a number of other students (around 5 to 7 people) will meet with a researcher who will ask you a number of questions. You can share as much or as little as you want. You can also choose to have a parent or guardian stay in the room with the group if you like.

You can choose to stop being part of the group at any time and you do not have to give a reason. You can also choose not to answer a question if you do not want to.

We will be recording our discussion and making some notes so we can remember what was said. We will not share that recording or the notes unless we have to by law.

We know that you or another student may talk about things in the focus group that you don't want other people to know. So, other than talking to your parents or guardians, we ask that you respect each other and do not talk to other people about things you have heard being said during the group.

If you have any questions about this, please talk to your parent or guardian.

Principal Investigator



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Appendix 21 – Brisbane Catholic Education notification of ethics approval

From: [Research Brisbane Catholic Education](#)
To: [Leith Dudfield](#)
Cc: [Trudy Dantis](#)
Subject: Re: CEC consent and nominations - NCPR Pedagogy Development: Positive Learnings from COVID-19
Date: Friday, 4 February 2022 3:19:49 PM
Attachments: [image005.png](#)
[image006.png](#)
[image007.png](#)
[image008.png](#)
[image014.png](#)
[image018.png](#)
[image019.png](#)
[Outlook-d-d image0.png](#)
[Outlook-d-d image0.png](#)
[Outlook-02 utawill.png](#)
[Outlook-d-d image0.png](#)
[Outlook-d-d image0.png](#)
[Outlook-22m hosh.png](#)
[Outlook-d-d image0.png](#)
[Outlook-d-d image0.png](#)
[Outlook-ks05 lm0c.png](#)

Good afternoon Leith

I am pleased to inform you that your application to conduct research titled Pedagogy Development: Positive Learnings from COVID-19 has been provisionally approved.

Prior to contacting schools, all researchers who have contact with students, in person or virtually, will need to provide copies of their blue cards and completed [Volunteer & Other Personal training form](#). Please return these to this mailbox: (research@bne.catholic.edu.au). Once these documents have been provided, you may contact Principals.

Please note that due to the covid situation in Qld, no research activities are permitted to be conducted face-to-face during Term 1. Research may continue online / via Zoom. We will review this decision in March to determine whether face-to-face research may resume in Term 2.

Could you please provide a copy of the final report to this email address within one month of completion.

All the best for the research project and if you have any questions, please contact me on this email address and reference research application 506.

Kind regards
Bethany Fitzsimon



BCE Research Secretariat | Strategy and Sustainability
Strategy and Performance
Brisbane Catholic Education
2A Burke Street, Woolloongabba QLD 4102 | GPO Box 1201, Brisbane QLD 4001
Phone 3033 7000 |
Email research@bne.catholic.edu.au | Website www.bne.catholic.edu.au



Brisbane Catholic Education acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the Land and pays respects to Elders past, present and future.

From: Leith Dudfield <leith.dudfield@catholic.org.au>
Sent: Thursday, 3 February 2022 3:45 PM
To: Research Brisbane Catholic Education <Research@bne.catholic.edu.au>
Cc: David Greig <dgreig@bne.catholic.edu.au>; Linda Lloyd <Linda.Lloyd@bne.catholic.edu.au>; Donalee Moriarty <dmoriarty@bne.catholic.edu.au>; Trudy Dantis <trudy.dantis@catholic.org.au>
Subject: Re: : CEC consent and nominations - NCPR Pedagogy Development: Positive Learnings from COVID-19

Good afternoon,

Please find attached our application to undertake research in schools in Brisbane.

Please also find attached a document with the relevant appendices. These are:

- Formal approval letter from ethics committee
- Evidence of public liability insurance
- Copy of the ACBC privacy statement.
- Invitation letter to principals
- Confirmation letter to principals
- Sample letter to parents
- Participant information sheets (all participants, participants under 16 years of age)
- Consent forms (adult participants, adult focus group participants, parent focus group participants, parent/guardians including an assent for students aged 15-17 years, further consent for use of information)
- Covid screening tool
- Support services sheet
- Interview questions (parent focus group, primary school students focus group, secondary school students focus group, Learning & Teaching directors, Principals, Teachers)

I note that while all our researchers have the relevant working with children/vulnerable people checks in their home states, that we have not yet applied for a blue card. We undertake to provide the blue card and the relevant training/registration forms in due course.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards,



MS LEITH DUDFIELD
Research Assistant, National Centre for Pastoral Research | Australian Catholic Bishops Conference
GPO Box 368, Canberra ACT 2601
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E: leith.dudfield@catholic.org.au | W: ncpr.catholic.org.au | bne.catholic.org.au



Appendix 22 – Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools (MACS) notification of ethics approval

From: [Research](#)
To: [Trudy Dantis](#)
Cc: [Leith Dudfield](#); [Research](#)
Subject: RE: Pedagogy Development: Positive Learnings from COVID-19
Date: Friday, 3 September 2021 9:29:00 AM
Attachments: [image001.png](#)
[image003.png](#)
[image005.png](#)
[image007.png](#)
[image008.png](#)
[image009.png](#)
[image011.png](#)
[image012.png](#)
[image013.png](#)
[image014.png](#)

Dear Trudy

Thank you for responding to our 3 points, it all sounds reasonable.

1. We have saved your HREC approval on file.
2. Yes, please send details of follow up support should participants need it.
3. Fantastic if you could separate out some of the consent statements and re-send, and understood about using de-identified data in pseudonym form.

Appreciate you helping to resolve these small issues now, so you do not need to submit a formal MACS Research in Schools application later.

I understand the 3 MACS schools nominated are quite excited about the chance to participate in the research and share their learnings!

Kind regards,
Shani

Shani Prendergast

Senior Research Analyst

Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools (MACS)

T: 03 9267 0261 (internal ext. 4261)

E: sprendergast@macs.vic.edu.au

www.macs.vic.edu.au



Prayer Resources for Advent

This is a collection of prayers and reflective practice for the season of Advent for families and children.

[Caritas Advent Resources](#)

Caritas resources incorporating some activities, prayers and liturgy outlines grounded in the hope, peace, joy and love

[Holding Children in Prayer – An Advent Guide](#)

A Prayer resource created by the Children's Defense Fund in the USA which advocates for children at the margins. Scripture, prayer and reflections daily through Advent.

[Resources for Advent from the Jesuit Institute](#)

General information, prayers and video resources for Advent

[Brisbane Catholic Education Advent Prayer resources](#)

A prayer for each of the 4 weeks of Advent

[A Kid Friendly Advent](#)

A prayer and Advent resource for younger children developed by the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand

[Praying Advent – from Creighton University](#)

Some resources for parents and older secondary students for their own formation and prayer and to develop ways of breaking open Advent for younger children

[Advent resources for leading prayer and reflection with children](#)

NCEA is pleased to offer Advent resources that enable Catholic educators to help celebrate this season of Advent with students. Filled with research-based strategies, publications, website and technological tools, these resources will provide Catholic educators with insight and best practices during this Advent season.

[Christmas Family Faith Trail](#)

A resource from the Uniting Church South Australia exploring the events of the Christmas story through five interactive stations across the four weeks of Advent. Each station has a

theme, Bible passage, questions to chat about, activity ideas for different ages including adults, and prayer ideas that use locations and items from around the home. This is a great opportunity to grow faith at home for people of all ages, particularly families with children under 12. We hope this resource equips your family to play, talk and pray together so that you may grow in faith, especially as you celebrate the birth of Jesus, God's great gift.

[Advent & Christmas](#)

The season of Advent begins four Sundays before Christmas and is a time of prayerful preparation. During Advent we recall the Israelites' long wait for the Messiah's birth and remember that Jesus was born into the world and will come again. Each year Mission Together produce engaging and fun resources to help children keep Jesus at the heart of this exciting season. Our resources are free to download and include scripture, prayer, craft activities and a call to action.

[Comfort My People – Advent 2020](#)

Resources from Emmaus Productions.

The Advent cry from the Prophet Isaiah holds new meaning for our times and greater urgency because of the global COVID-19 pandemic. In the face of such extreme suffering and heartache as a result of COVID-19, as well as the economic, political, social unrest and uncertainty across our world, together with the devastating impact of climate change on our planet and our lives, we hope and pray these video and music resources will comfort you and your communities in your waiting, hoping and longing!

[Advent & Christmas Resources](#)

A selection of prayers, resources and activities curated by Jesuit Resources

[Advent Resources](#)

Ignatian Spirituality Advent Prayers

[Prayer ideas from Worship Times](#)

20 creative ways to celebrate Advent

[Advent Resources](#)

Some resources compiled by the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to use or adapt for prayer, liturgy, and reflection.

[Prayer Resources](#)

The resources below are meant to assist in selecting the best prayers for children, some of these are specifically for Advent and others for creating interactive prayer spaces

[Catholic Activity: Resources for Celebrating Advent in the Home](#)

Some prayers & activities for opening up conversation about Advent



REPORT PREPARED BY

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