

School life to see a more flexible approach endure

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At The Knox School, we *Position* our students for their long-term success as adults in a complex and uncertain world. Part of long-term success for students at TKS is tertiary study, a resilient and entrepreneurial mindset and the development of key skills and attributes.

Analysis of past major disruptions, such as that we are hopefully close to ending, shows that life never returns to what it was but the changes that settle into place are often not the obvious ones forecast by pundits at the time. Perhaps we are still too close to the event to be able to predict clearly what will occur in 2021 and beyond in the broader Australian community, though it is clear the community of Melbourne will have had a significantly different experience to the remainder of the country.

If only to ensure we have the skills, attitudes, and processes to thrive in another pandemic or episode of disruption, we must sustain aspects of our current flexible online and offline approach to learning and teaching, in age-appropriate ways, well beyond this COVID-19 phase. Given our experiences, we must assume that the risk of further pandemics and/or future lockdowns is high.

We have shown we are adaptable enough to make successful changes in a matter of weeks. There is a human toll for this type of speedy shift, and we cannot undertake such rapid adaption regularly, but we have shown it is possible and successful.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, an estimated 2.7 billion working adults, and similar large numbers of school students around the world have been affected by lockdown and stay-at-home measures.

The effect here in Melbourne has been pervasive, as it is proving to be in many other places world-wide, even if other parts of Australia have not been so affected.

Our initial response was a traditional crisis management response, which then morphed into a significant collaborative effort to see your children, our students, benefit as much as possible as we successfully turned towards new ways of working, of 'doing' school.

Now, as we look to 2021, we must begin to shape our ‘COVID normal’ (a hackneyed phrase already, but accurate nonetheless). This will not simply be a return to the old ways of doing business. What has been created is an imperative and an opportunity to adapt how we do school, perhaps especially for older students.

The most positive feedback from parents around our *Home Campus* model was the capacity of students to manage their time in age appropriate ways and the feedback from students showed they most valued the greater level of control over their time. Of course, managing time and work expectations around deadlines is an important skill for adult success.

In preparing young people for a complex and uncertain world, schools must balance the need for stability and routine that every child needs with the challenge of developing new skills and attitudes as they get older and, ultimately, require post-school. These skills and attitudes often take years to develop and need to be started young, in an age appropriate manner.

The views circulating among experts, media commentators, and my peers on how schools need to emerge from the COVID-19 context certainly vary, but many acknowledge that young people have generally shown their capacity was underutilised in the pre-COVID world and when we set our expectations high, they will rise to the occasion.

The nature of the pandemic has shown that character formation and skills around resilience, and responsibility to ensure achievement are critical. This focus allows us to guide young people in our care to connect with their world, understand their place in it, and empower them to live a life of positive purpose.

The pandemic has thrown the spotlight on the benefit of schools as public institutions. Glen Savage, Education Policy Lecturer at the University of Western Australia, highlights the critical role schools play in the socialisation of young people.

Some people talk about not needing a traditional classroom anymore. I think that’s rubbish,” he says. “If anything, COVID has taught us that schools provide much more than a young person’s learning program ... they’re where future citizens are created.

Schools are about people, their learning, their relationships, and their community. While online has its advantages and teaching and learning can take place effectively, we cannot replace the physical experience of school.

Students are repeatedly telling us they “miss their friends and teachers”, yet the vast majority have competently demonstrated that they can successfully engage with independent learning, within boundaries and structures suitable for their age.

The experiences of The Knox School’s *Home Campus* have been resoundingly positive. Students have demonstrated remarkable self-efficacy and interest in a more flexible mode of teaching and learning.

Our students are asking for greater independence and options for their learning for the future. There are elements that they identify as immensely helpful for their learning. For example, being able to control the pace of learning by using a teacher’s pre-recorded learning segment that can be replayed to check for understanding or revision.

We will provide blocks of time for development of this independence and responsibility in 2021. The blocks of time will grow as age increases. Teacher presence will be strong with the younger students as they learn and practice the skills of independent schoolwork and responsibility.

Within boundaries and structures suitable for their age, we will implement some Flexible Learning Periods (FLP) with the aim of capturing the very best aspects of the *Home Campus* program. This will allow us to structure time and place arrangements to optimise the experiences of learning exposed this year by a global pandemic for students old enough to benefit. We see this occurring from Year 4 (10 year of age) and upwards to varying degrees.

The blocks of time will occur on a regular basis, so students have surety in their planning. Discreet supervision will ensure that a culture of focus on achievement and responsibility is maintained. Students can choose what they work on but cannot choose not to work.

Teachers will work with students on an individual or small group basis, checking on progress and in the case of VCE students, along with teachers, our Alumni Tutors will be also present on a regular basis.

Students exiting The Knox School at the end of Year 12 will be better practised in managing their time and place arrangements and to meet the demands of further study and/or work with minimal institutional support. We see these as positive practice, positioning our students for success post school.

Our successes this year have been developed and implemented by a highly professional teaching group, supported and amended through feedback from our close-knit TKS parent community, and our collective sense of connection, partnership, and communication. We will work to see this continue in 2021 and beyond.