

# Bullimbal School

## Learning from home

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation



### Learning from home journey

#### Getting ready for disruptions to face-to-face teaching

- Researched online learning platforms that would meet the needs of the school
- Provided staff with professional learning on Seesaw

#### Learning from home

- Around 90% of students learnt from home, using online learning or hard-copy learning packs
- Students attending school were placed in one class and completed online learning with supervision from a teacher and an SLSO<sup>1</sup>
- All staff (excluding high-risk staff) attended school three days each week under a roster system
- Established infection control procedures for staff, including visual reminders for personal protective equipment requirements for activities such as personal care procedures

#### Transition back to face-to-face teaching

- Students attended in class groups one day a week between 11-22 May 2020. One junior class and one senior class attended each day
- Established staggered drop-off and pick-up times to meet social distancing requirements

### Challenges to overcome

#### Engaging students in a new way of learning with little preparation time:

Students were not used to online learning, many students had difficulties understanding COVID-19 restrictions, and some students find adjusting to change difficult.

#### Implementing a new approach that was accessible and appropriate for the school's context:

Teachers had to quickly adjust and innovate their practices using a new online learning platform to meet the varying needs and capabilities of students.

#### Ensuring parents and carers felt supported to facilitate their child's learning from home:

Many students need close supervision and support with learning, and parents had varying levels of confidence and skills for supporting their child's learning.

### School context

Bullimbal School is a School for Specific Purposes for Kindergarten to Year 12 students with moderate or severe intellectual disabilities. The school is located in Tamworth and has a current enrolment of 51 students distributed over eight classes. About 42% of the student population identifies as Aboriginal, and the school has a FOEI<sup>2</sup> of 143. Bullimbal School is committed to working with parents and carers to actively contribute to their child's education and encourage students' lifelong learning.

<sup>1</sup> Student Learning Support Officer

<sup>2</sup> Family Occupation and Education Index – a school-level index of educational disadvantage with a mean of 100 and a standard deviation of 50. Higher values indicate greater levels of need.

## What has worked to maintain learning continuity

### Setting students up for successful learning from home

The sudden transition to learning from home was challenging for many students due to difficulties understanding COVID-19 and the associated restrictions and/or difficulties adjusting to change more generally. To make the transition easier for students, the school:

- Gave every student a learning from home kit which included a social story to help explain why they were learning from home, visual schedules for the daily sequence of activities in each key learning area, a timetable template and visual work contract card to use with visual aids, a choice board for real-world learning tasks, and aided language number and alphabet displays.
- Kept delivery of learning from home simple and accessible by using only one online platform, Seesaw. Teachers created individualised low technology learning packs for any student who experienced difficulties engaging in online learning.
- Minimised changes to student learning and routines by structuring the learning from home routine to be as similar as possible to the face-to-face teaching routine, and holding virtual versions of planned school events (for example, assemblies and Easter hat parade).
- Used delivery and modelling procedures that were familiar to students. For example, students continued to see and hear their teacher in pre-recorded videos for all learning tasks and daily class activities, and teachers continued to use and model the school's augmented alternative communication system.

### Frequent communication with parents and carers throughout the disruption to face-to-face teaching

The school prioritised communication with parents and carers to ensure they felt supported to facilitate their child's learning. The school loaned iPads to students who needed them, and assisted parents and carers to use Seesaw. The school hosted in-person, outdoor information sessions about using Seesaw, and then, as COVID restrictions increased, recorded video tutorials that explained how to download and use the platform.

The school also recorded a video message for parents and carers explaining the school's learning from approach. The video explained the resources in the learning from home kit, explained how learning would be continued, provided information about how

to contact the school, and reassured parents and carers that the school was there to support them.

In addition, the school used emails, notes, school wide text messages, and Facebook posts to keep parents and carers informed of key information and updates. Classroom teachers called parents and carers every day to check-in on student learning. They were asked how engaged students were during learning tasks, if students were enjoying their learning, and if they thought modifications or adjustments were needed to help their child's engagement. Parents and carers could also use the messaging system on Seesaw to contact teachers to clarify or seek advice about their child's learning.

### Ensuring staff had the skills to use Seesaw effectively

Seesaw was nominated at the outset as the school's learning from home platform, however the school recognised that teachers and SLSOs needed training in how to use the platform if it was to be used effectively. The school provided a week-long series of professional learning sessions to train teachers and SLSOs to use and understand the platform. Following these sessions, video tutorials and model lessons were recorded and shared with teaching staff to facilitate a consistent approach to online lessons across the school. These resources were added to the staff website so they could be easily accessed by staff irrespective of their location.

As teaching staff became more proficient in using Seesaw, they were able to leverage more of its

features. For example, the audio recorded feedback feature allowed teachers to provide timely and accessible feedback to students, and the parent inbox messaging provided a quick and convenient way for parents and carers to communicate with teachers about learning tasks.

Teachers checked Seesaw engagement data daily to inform their teaching practice and conversations with parents and carers. The ability to monitor levels of student engagement allowed teachers to more easily make individualised adjustments for students to ensure all students were supported to engage in learning.

Video for parents and carers



Morning circle video for a junior class



“We saw a lot of our parent and staff relationships really blossom because we were communicating daily. And that engagement has carried on now. I feel like most of our relationships now are really strong and open, which is really important.”

Tanya Haddad, Assistant Principal

Learning from home social story

*Social Story – What is happening?*

|  |   |
|--|---|
|  | My school is closed at the moment because of an illness called COVID-19.                  |
|  | I have to stay home with my family to make sure I stay healthy.                           |
|  | While I am at home, my teachers have given me school work to do to help me keep learning. |
|  | Soon I will be able to go back to school with my friends and teachers.                    |

Example literacy visual schedule

*Literacy visual schedule*

Words of the week

|                          |                          |                          |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
|                          |                          |                          |                          |
| Introduce the words      | make the words           | talk about the words     | choice time              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Self-selected Reading

|                          |                          |                          |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
|                          |                          |                          |                          |
| choose book              | find a space             | read                     | choice time              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

“We also found it very difficult as teachers to find activities and lessons and educational resources to engage some of our students due to their varying learning needs and abilities. So we had to really think out of the box and try to think how we can hook our students in if they’re just not engaging in online learning, because some of them just weren’t.”

Alex Stewart, Assistant Principal

CESE would like to thank Assistant Principals, Tanya Haddad and Alex Stewart, for their valuable input to this snapshot.