



## **CEWA – DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY IN EDUCATION HEARING PREPARED FOR THE EDUCATION AND HEALTH STANDING COMMITTEE**

---

### **PURPOSE**

As a follow-up to the Inquiry into Digital Innovation in Secondary Education completed in November 2019, the Education and Health Standing Committee is conducting several hearings with the education sector to get a better understanding of the role of digital technology during pandemic conditions. The Committee is interested in finding out:

1. what has been learnt in WA and other jurisdictions in regard to delivering education during the COVID-19 pandemic; and
2. how these experiences may inform future approaches.

*Provide some specific examples indicating the range of approaches and experiences of Catholic Education Western Australia (CEWA) secondary schools, including those that are well-resourced and those where resources and/or internet access are more limited.*

In early March 2020 a group of system leaders (CEWA staff and representatives of Principal/Deputy Principals/Assistant Principal Associations) collaborated to prepare a support document for each school to use to create a *School Response Plan (SRP)* to provide for ongoing educational delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic. The process for the plan is based on connected autonomy – each school preparing their own plan to respond to their local context and to the voice of the community – staff, students and parents. Schools were encouraged to support each other through existing networks and to also access support through CEWA staff.

All CEWA schools planned and implemented their SRP in mid-March 2020. The SRP outlined key operational and educational considerations required of CEWA schools. A key focus of the plan was the continuation of learning for students by prioritising learning outcomes, determining mode of delivery, facilitating feedback on learning, ensuring clear communication practices and catering for students at risk.

In many CEWA secondary schools, students have individual devices; however, this is not the case in some low-socio economic, Curriculum and Reengagement in Education (CARE) schools and remote schools. CEWA schools with existing one to one device programs and adequate student and family access to internet at their home were able to plan and implement remote learning relatively smoothly given the circumstances.

In some cases, particularly low socioeconomic schools, students were given access to school devices for home use. Some schools gave students wireless internet dongles where they did not have access to the internet. CEWA surveyed secondary schools to ascertain the number of students without suitable access to the internet to continue learning in a remote context. As a result of the survey, internet enabled wireless dongles were provided to students and families across the state to enable the continuation of learning for these students.

Where students had access to a device and the internet, teachers were able to communicate and deliver learning with students through the use of online tools with a combination of synchronous and asynchronous learning. Hard copy packs were used in some cases, to cater for individual needs.

In the case of at least one CARE school, social media platforms were used to communicate and disseminate work. These students generally used their phones for access and were more likely to use social media than other system platforms.

Schools used a variety of structures for remote learning. Some schools replicated the school timetable in an online environment, others used regular check-ins with times in between for independent work and a teacher available online. Schools reflected on their learning after the first week and made adjustments as a result of this. Schools were encouraged to ensure regular pastoral interaction, including phone calls by home room teachers to parents and regular virtual home room gatherings, where possible. Where schools used physical packs only, teacher to students and student to student interaction was more challenging. In addition, providing feedback to students was more challenging where a digital solution was not possible.

A challenge for some students, particularly in regional and remote areas was that their homes are located in internet blackspots, so while they might have a device the internet could not be accessed. These students had to download work before schools closed and they also received work packs.

### **Students With Disability**

A priority in the move to remote learning was to make learning accessible for all students, including students with disability, and for schools to continue to meet their obligation under the Disability Standard for Education (2005). CEWA supported staff to provide online learning activities and work tasks that continued to support the learning objectives articulated in the student's Individual Education Plans (IEPs).

The provision of meaningful and relevant activities with specific and measurable learning objectives connected to educational outcomes from WA Curriculum and Abilities Based Learning Education, Western Australia (ABLEWA) enabled students with disability to continue to receive reasonable adjustments albeit via a remote learning platform. The goal was for best practice in online instruction to be the same as for in-person, in-school instruction. This included using multiple ways to present content, assess progress, provide feedback, and engage students (the hallmark of Universal Design for Learning). Digital tools enabled face-to-face interactions as it was important for students with disability to have virtual face-to-face interactions with their teachers. The use of video allowed teachers to pick up verbal and physical cues and gauge the student's confidence and understanding during online instruction.

For some students with disability remote learning provided an opportunity for them to engage in self-directed and self-paced learning tasks. Others struggled with the disconnect from their teachers and peers. For students, particularly on the Autism Spectrum, a lack of routine and structures gave rise to an increase in anxiety.

### **Students in Remote Communities**

In many cases COVID-19 has resulted in significant impact on students in remote communities. Students in remote communities were encouraged to return to school at the beginning of Term Two; however, there were complexities from both student and staff perspectives in recommencing school. Some families moved to different locations due to concerns re COVID-19 and consequently the children did not attend school or may have attended a different school. In the case of some of the border communities some families crossed into the Northern Territory where they have close connections. Border closures and other factors have complicated the return to local communities and schools. Attendance continues to be lower in some Kimberley schools where families have not returned to the community. Life in many communities also changed during this period of time with people returning to communities from outside areas, including towns. This has resulted in different household and social dynamics and some disruption to young people's routines. Schools provided students with some contextually appropriate material to learn at home. Due to border restrictions and the Kimberley Biosecurity zone, some

teachers and leaders were unable to return to communities at the commencement of term. When they were able to re-enter the Kimberley they had to self-isolate for two weeks. Some staff from Kimberley schools and from the Broome Regional CEWA Office self-isolated during the holiday break so they could fulfil leadership/teaching roles in Kimberley communities until staff returned.

### **Learning Support**

Many schools continued to offer teacher/education assistant small group learning support through online platforms. Schools endeavoured to provide differentiated learning, whether via online means or physical packs. CEWA consultants provided professional learning to support staff in catering for individual needs.

### **EALD Students**

Communication with EALD parents during remote learning presented some challenges during the time of remote learning. Students requiring extra support, were at a disadvantage if language barriers impacted on parents being able to assist students or to understand school expectations due to language barriers. Schools endeavoured to put measures in place to support these students.

*Information related to CEWA school closures would also be useful e.g. how long school campuses were closed for, how many secondary schools encouraged students to return to onsite learning at the start of term two, how many students were still learning from home after May 18 when students were ordered back to school.*

During the first three weeks of Term Two, the number of parents choosing to send their children back to school steadily increased. The rate of attendance varied greatly from school to school and during the first three weeks of term attendance rates varied between 20% and 80% for students in Years 7 – 10. Individual attendance by students was inconsistent e.g. some secondary students chose to only attend school on certain days of the week - perhaps dictated by the subjects they had timetabled on that day or their level of engagement with online learning.

At the commencement of term students at school and at home in Years 7 - 10 were engaged predominantly in online learning. As some students returned to school while others remained at home, some schools streamed lessons. In a memorandum to Principals on 4 May, CEWA's Executive Director advised schools that if they reached a 'tipping point' where the number of parents choosing to send their children back to school was such that it warranted a return to face to face teaching, then schools had the freedom to review their modes of delivery (in collaboration with staff) and advise parents that face to face teaching was resuming at their school. This happened progressively and numerous schools returned to face to face teaching rates prior to 18 May – the date when the State government subsequently advised that all students should return to school. From 18 May, with the exception of boarders, schools had regular attendance rates. Small numbers of students have been able to continue online learning for a longer period of time if they or a member of their family is medically vulnerable.

*We are interested in how schools planned for a term of online lesson delivery, and the extent to which online programs were used for lesson delivery both off campus and on campus.*

Many schools used a hybrid model in the weeks leading up to 30 March (when remote learning commenced for all students) as there were growing absences due to concerns regarding COVID-19. Students in Years 11 and 12 were engaged in full remote learning for only 1 – 2 weeks and Years K – 10 students for 4 weeks. Most Year 11 and 12 students returned to school at the beginning of Term Two and students in K – 10 gradually returned through Weeks 1 – 3, with the large majority of students (other than boarders) having returned to face to face teaching by the commencement of Week 4. A relatively small number of students remained at school for

the whole period as they were unable to learn at home due to parent work commitments or other factors. Small numbers of students have been able to continue online learning for a more extended time if they or a member of their family are medically vulnerable. Prior to the full-scale return to school in Week 4 Principals completed a school readiness survey through which they evaluated the extent to which their schools were ready for the return of all students. Considerations included health and safety, modes of learning and staffing.

To support schools in preparing and implementing their contextualised response plan there was a clear communication strategy. CEWA Executive Team members held regular online meetings with Principals and there were frequent memos detailing updates. CEWA office staff facilitated regular calls with school leadership teams and teachers through Microsoft Teams. The Teaching and Learning and Religious Education Teams worked together to facilitate targeted professional learning and online network meetings. Existing networks were harnessed for the purpose of providing support and sharing resources and ideas.

In Week 10 of Term One, staff had a full week to plan online learning for the following term (some secondary schools did continue online classes for Year 12 students during this time). During this week CEWA consultants facilitated a programme of professional learning to support school staff in delivering remote learning. This support included curriculum delivery and catering for students with disability and students at risk. Sessions were recorded and available for on-demand viewing, enabling all staff to participate. CEWA regional and remote schools provided feedback that the access and quality of this support was invaluable in their planning. Teachers were encouraged to maintain their focus on the Vision for Learning and the Five Teacher Practices, paying attention to curriculum and pedagogy, rather than devising a lot of tasks/activities. The emphasis was on quality rather than quantity.

Digital resources were shared between schools using collaborative tools. In addition, school leaders and teachers shared ideas regarding organisation and approaches to learning, including assessment and feedback. Schools were also able to request access to resources that had been curated for the CEWA Virtual Schools Network (ViSN) through which some students access online Year 11 and 12 courses. CEWA students also had access to resources through the Department of Education site, *Learning at Home*.

Online delivery was used by the majority of secondary school students. The main exceptions were those who were unable to access the internet, particularly those in regional and remote areas. Teachers worked incredibly hard over the last two weeks of Term One and the April holidays to prepare for online learning and teaching for at least the first four weeks of Term Two. This followed advice that they should prepare to teach online for at least four weeks at the beginning of term. Subsequent discussions with school personnel suggest that teachers and administrators had very little vacation time and spent considerable time in the April holiday period preparing for remote learning.

***We are also interested in whether digital technology is assisting students who are exempt from attending onsite classes, as well as students who have become disengaged from their education during the pandemic.***

Digital technologies were used prior to COVID-19 to support students who were unable to attend school for short periods of time. During this current crisis students who are medically vulnerable or who have family members who are medically vulnerable are, in most cases, able to access learning using digital means if required.

Boarding school students were engaged in remote learning for a longer period of time and some boarding students, particularly those from remote communities, are yet to return to their boarding schools. Biosecurity and border restrictions, closure of boarding schools and restrictions on reopening, as well as concerns re COVID-19 have prevented some boarders returning. Staff in

Boarding schools have continued to provide work for these students, where possible through online learning, but if this is not possible, through provision of work packs. The boarding schools have also worked in partnership with local Catholic schools in remote communities to provide support for boarders who are unable to return to schools. In some cases, the boarding students have been able to access lessons via streaming or to view recorded lessons if internet was unreliable.

Attendance rates continue to be lower in remote communities due to the disruption of COVID-19. Provision of digital learning for those not attending school is not a viable option in remote communities.

### ***What has CEWA learned from COVID-19 and delivering education during the pandemic?***

A robust digital ecosystem has served CEWA well during these challenging times, supporting communication and remote learning. Digital tools were used for instruction, to share resources and for collaboration.

The relatively short period of time spent learning remotely meant that many teachers were just beginning to gain confidence with online learning and were beginning to explore digital pedagogies when face to face learning resumed. The prospect and advent of remote learning resulted in some rapid gains in digital skills in staff and students. The next stage of learning required is to focus further on digital pedagogies. This will enable more effective digital learning if schools need to close again and will also serve students well in their learning into the future. This is paramount as learning always needs to be the driver, rather than the tool.

Schools have been provided with resources and professional learning to engage staff, student and parent voice in reviewing their educational response to the disruption caused by COVID-19. The purpose of reviewing the response is both to prepare for the possibility of a return to remote learning and also to reflect on what has been learned and how this may shape education beyond the current crisis. This includes the capabilities that best served students in adapting to remote learning (e.g. digital skills, critical thinking, independence). Teachers have also expressed interest in learning more about feedback and assessment in an online context.

If schools were to return to online learning many schools may also use more flexible timetables. A learning from the first period of online learning was that it is not practical to simply transfer the face to face timetable to an online format. After the first week of online learning some schools used more flexible structures with shorter and regular times of formal contact combined with periods of independent work.

The 'new normal' may be very different to pre-COVID-19 days, with schools suggesting that the skills learned during recent months will enable them to deliver education differently in the future. Lessons learned since February include, students who are absent from school for a variety of reasons are likely to be better equipped and better supported by teachers in learning remotely during the course of any absence – provided their health condition allows them to study online and they have access to devices and the internet.

Discussions with schools indicate that the overwhelming feedback from students and parents reflects a very high degree of satisfaction with the way in which schools in the CEWA system adapted with relatively short notice to the challenges of remote learning. CEWA benefited from already having in place a robust digital platform that facilitated communication between teachers and students. Overall schools responded with agility to the disruption to education caused by the pandemic and received positive feedback from their communities.



**CATHOLIC  
EDUCATION**  
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

## Remote Learning

# ESTABLISHING EDUCATIONAL CONTINUITY

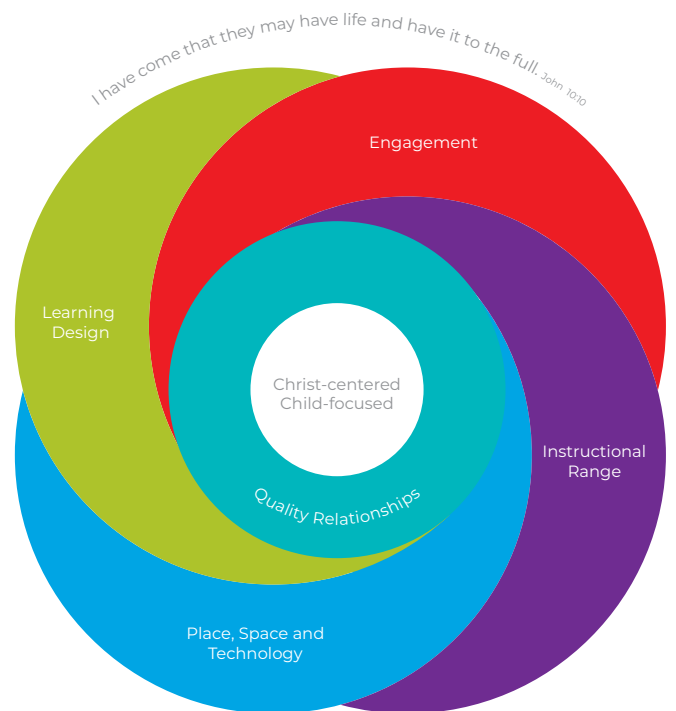
### Purpose

The purpose of this resources is to enable schools to continue to deliver high quality education in a remote context.

Underpinning this is Catholic Education Western Australia's Vision for Learning and Five Teacher Practices. As a system we make a commitment to enabling students to continue to engage in a Catholic Education which is Christ-centred and child-focused whether their learning environment is at school or at home.

Guiding the decisions and actions articulated in this document is the dignity of each member of the school community.

This resource builds on the previous communication 'Educational Delivery in the Event of School Closures or Other Major Disruptions'



In developing resources to support schools it is important we provide a platform that demonstrates what high quality remote pedagogical practices and learning look like.

The Five Teacher Practices and accompanying resources can be found [here](#).



## 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?

