

March 23rd, 2020 and lockdown 1 is announced. Students were at home; teachers were at home and we started our online learning journey using Firefly and Microsoft Teams. None of us realised then that we would teach in this way for many months. I was so impressed during this time by how quickly we all adapted to this new normal, joining online lessons, watching recorded assemblies, submitting Team assignments, Zoom breaks, reading clubs, virtual concerts and even a sports day that we competed in from our own homes.

Since our first closure our teachers have coped magnificently with the demands of teaching in this way. We have switched seamlessly between live teaching, guided home learning and blended learning during this time. Without the face-to-face contact in school we have found new ways to deliver our online lessons in ways that are engaging, stimulating, active, fun, challenging and supportive.

Microsoft Teams has allowed us to record our lessons so that students can 'catch up' outside of the lesson. Teachers have become very confident in sharing their screen and live resources with students and students have become online presenters also. The introduction of large gallery view means we can 'see everybody' easily and we have all accepted that cameras on keeps us together more than cameras off. Virtual hands up have become normal, students even racing to be the first with their hand up. The recent addition of breakout rooms is a very quick and easy way to collaborate in lessons and is being used extensively in lots of subjects.

Firefly, our virtual learning environment, has continued to be used by the Prep School, its visual and easy to use links provide younger students with a clear and easy way to access live lessons and learning resources. This platform has also been used extensively with Senior School and College students when sharing assemblies and dedicated days such as our Year 7 World of Work Day and the Year 11 Future Aspirations Day. Teachers have been able to access the GDST Positive Project using Firefly and the platform was extensively used last summer with the Year 11 ARCH and Year 13 Next Steps programmes.

Teachers have been keen for students to be 'off screen' where possible, setting written tasks, practical tasks and creative assignments to support this. The use of Class Notebook and Team Assignments has allowed students to easily exchange photographs, scanned images, video recordings, animations and a range of Office documents with their teacher to have regular and detailed feedback. Again, teachers have adapted to marking in this way, either using an Apple pencil with their iPad or a graphics tablet with their laptop.

January 7th, 2021 and school closures announced again. The challenge this time was our Year 13 spring assessments that students were expecting to sit in the sports hall as a 'mock' examination. Once again, we adapted our physical arrangements to an online platform. Exam papers were sealed and delivered to students. Invigilators were on Team meetings with each class and all written answers scanned by students with their mobile phone and submitted within 15 minutes of the end of the assessment. The organisation, invigilation and support provided has allowed students an experience of a formal assessment, which will stand them in good stead beyond Year 13.

Much of the above has not been achieved easily. It has taken meticulous planning, support in abundance and an open mind from all members of the Howell's community. Together we have stayed connected and cannot be prouder of all we have achieved.