



St Liborius School Community
In The Midst Of A Pandemic

19-10-2020

I hope this report finds you all fit and well and coping in the midst of this unprecedented pandemic. We are presented with uncharted waters on every level of our lives and the impact on individuals and families has been quite diverse for each individual setting. Worldwide we are hanging out for a solution to this pandemic and keep praying that it comes soon as so many lives depend on it. My heart goes out to all those families who have lost everything and loved ones as well as the children in our care who, whatever way you look at it, have been deprived of such precious moments in their development.

The challenges that Covid 19 has presented are too long to list and with everyone looking through their own lens of work life, family situation, education and social interaction the interpretations of these challenges vary greatly. At the core for everyone is the need to be able to return to some normality, whatever that will look like. For myself, a major lens is education and the way forward for St Liborius and the people in our care.

If we were to look globally, the United Nations, in their August Policy Brief “Education during COVID-19 and Beyond”, provide us with the following

- ***The COVID-19 pandemic has created the largest disruption of education systems in history, affecting nearly 1.6 billion learners in more than 190 countries and all continents.***
- ***Closures of schools and other learning spaces have impacted***
 - ***94 percent of the world’s student population,***
 - ***up to 99 percent in low and lower-middle income countries.***

This highlights the magnitude of the pandemic and the fact that the UN focused on the impact of our global education on future generations provides even more onus on doing everything in our capacity to have continuity of learning for our children. Further to these statistics, the UN state



“The crisis is exacerbating pre-existing education disparities by reducing the opportunities for many of the most vulnerable children, youth, and adults – those living in poor or rural areas, girls, refugees, persons with disabilities and forcibly displaced persons – to continue their learning. Learning losses also threaten to extend beyond this generation and erase decades of progress, not least in support of girls and young women’s educational access and retention. Some 23.8 million additional children and youth (from pre-primary to tertiary) may drop out or not have access to school next year due to the pandemic’s economic impact alone.”

I have drawn your attention to this because our community is part of this narrative, and we share this with our local, national and international brothers and sisters. However some major factors are in our favour. We are in Australia! Our education system is well established and in many ways had good bones to be able to quickly adapt to this crisis. The technical infrastructure that St Liborius had in place allowed for instant communication to a high percentage of our families and the delivery of instruction to ensure that we were able to begin this new concept of remote learning with urgency and substance. The fact that we had time to see the impact in countries in Europe and America gave us some insight into what was coming across the seas but there was no game plan sent with it.

Remote learning was a new concept for everyone, and the redesign syllabus that was created by our unit teachers took the important elements of the curriculum and transformed them into practical and achievable lessons and processes. Once presented to individual families the variations of these lessons began to widen with simple things like the area the students were working, if they had siblings to help or hinder their learning, an adult who was focused on the remote learning or adjusting themselves to working full time from home whilst coordinating remote learning in their house hold plus many more variables.

I take my hat off to our staff and the way they have banded together to create the remote learning academic environment, linked homes with school and school with homes, provided support to each other in the constant planning and creation of lessons, videos, etc. However there have been many elements of a normal teaching day that have been difficult to replace.

From our teachers point of view, they are missing

- relationships with their students and colleagues,
- the instant unspoken feedback that is gleaned from every lesson in the classroom,
- the subtle cues given by students,
- teaching at the teaching moments,



- assisting at the time of need,
- providing a level playing field for all their students with the same access to support, technology
- out of school activities - this is also something that has been truly missed by many

If we were to think positively, the GOOD coming out of this Pandemic has been

- being forced out of our comfort zone,
- learning new technologies - virtual classrooms, videoing (teachers are trained to teach, not necessarily to be in front of a camera!),
- teach an old dog new tricks (this definitely reflects me!),
- glad to see the world slowing down for students - out of school activities have reduced the hectic lives of students,
- teachers do more than just teach the 3 R's (Reading 'Riting and 'Rithmetic) Our St Liborius school community can clearly see that we offer an environment of comfort, support, nurturing, connectedness and love for their children,

This year has revealed to us the true meaning of the word 'school' and the important role that school has in all aspects of a child's development and wellbeing.

From a principal's perspective the pandemic has confirmed the necessity to continue to equip our teachers and students with technology tools and knowledge which is needed to be able to set up and utilise in homes so that quality teaching and learning could take place. No techo' on the doorstep to rectify any issues during lockdown!

In many households, parents have taken on a number of teaching tasks and been in the box seat to witness the way their children learn, attend to tasks, are motivated to complete particular tasks, areas of challenge and areas of success. Many Parents plan to get a better understanding of what their children are expected to learn in their year level, find more time to communicate with their children about their daily assignments, and seek a better understanding of where their child stands academically. As challenging as school closures have been for them, they are looking to next year as an opportunity to engage even more deeply with their children's teachers and schools. It's heartening to see continued hope and optimism from parents amid this pandemic despite the enormous pressures it has presented.



It is important that St Liborius is responsive to the concerns that parents have expressed, and it is critical that investments are made in family engagement to further strengthen family-school partnerships and improve outcomes for all of the children at St Liborius.

It has confirmed the power of St Liborius having such a strong understanding of personalised learning to allow our students to transfer their learning to their home environment and have the confidence to think outside the box. This was even more evident when we went into the second remote learning period. There are limits to what technology can do and families soon worked this out as they reverted to their gardens and recycle bins to provide hands on experiences to explain concepts. Such fantastic initiatives from so many households. It highlights that students can learn any time anywhere.

Moving forward I see that we need to build on our technical achievements rather than hang our hat on them and be as proactive as possible to allow for new doors to be opened. Rather than stepping outside our comfort zone, we have literally been pushed but it is important to take responsibility to lead a process that is as effective and equitable as possible in tackling any challenges ahead and to ensure we have the clearest channels of communication as possible.

Education infiltrates all of our lives as parents, teachers or students, whether at kinder, primary, secondary or tertiary level. It is important to remember that we need to be thinking clearly about what is truly important. With two tertiary students at home connecting remotely with their universities I have confidence that they will continue to progress and achieve in their degrees. The most important element is that they look after themselves, that issues beyond their control are not taken to heart and that they understand that we will get through all of this.

I expect 2021 to be more predictable, less challenging and a year for innovation and experimentation within the delivery of the curriculum. We have seen the value in human interaction, face-to-face communication, understanding, active listening and all the aspects of the curriculum that no assessment could ever evaluate. We always attempt to give our students the confidence to try something new whilst building their resilience in a way that allows them to fail and try again.



Two months ago Sir Ken Robinson, a visionary who has inspired teachers and leaders around the world to challenge the status quo and bring about meaningful change in education, passed away. He said in one of his many presentations that

“The key is not to standardise education but to personalise it, to build achievement on discovering the individual talents of each child, to put students in an environment where they want to learn and where they can naturally discover their true passions.”

We need to value the strength of our St Liborius community, the resilience of teachers and the adaptability of students during testing times. I have been amazed with what has been achieved over the past 6 months and have every confidence that we will continue to achieve great things

in the coming months and years. I know that there is now a much greater appreciation of the role that teachers and schools play in educating the ‘whole child’ than there perhaps was nine months ago. I am so proud of everyone at St Liborius and the support, ranging from Food Share continuing for families who require this through to the on-site supervision by staff that has taken place every day for the children of essential workers.

We are fortunate to have staff who are passionate, love what they do, value their role as educators, feel privileged to be educators and valuing each student & their uniqueness. I love the way they are positive and find ways to modify and make each learning opportunity meaningful and enjoy celebrating the little and big successes.

It has been fantastic to be able to recommence term 4 with students onsite and back in the midst of their peers and teachers. The excitement of reuniting with classmates and falling back into routine has never been celebrated so much by everyone. Although there are still many restrictions on regional Victorian residents we are starting to step forward on our road to recovery. I have the confidence that we will continue to adjust and create a positive pathway forward. Please stay safe and keep up the positive mindfulness.

