**Coronavirus (COVID-19) Community Update – Friday 27 March 2020**

**Academic Life**

**Online Learning: It's Not School at Home!**

Barker students moved to fully online learning this week. While schools technically are open, most students in the country are staying at home and different jurisdictions are wrestling with how to best teach the curriculum remotely. Barker is no different.

Last week we conducted a trial of a number of different strategies to teach students online. We surveyed staff, students and parents about the trial the following day. From this trial, feedback received from these groups, and our experience of teaching and learning and wellbeing practices, we developed a revised Secondary School Shape of the Day, which was put in to place on Wednesday.

There has been some questions about this document and I thought I would take some time to explain why it looks the way it does.

Firstly, the trial showed us that maintaining the regular timetable through an online learning practice was not going to be sustainable in the medium to long term. While most people managed successfully with it for the one day trial, it became apparent from conversations with staff and students and the more formal feedback sought, that it was a very tiring way of delivering content. It also exposed students (and staff) to a significant amount of time in front of a computer screen (about 5 hours). Parents in their feedback made it clear that we needed to limit this screen time, and this backed up our own experience, that 5 hours in front of a screen day in, day out, over a long period of time would have a detrimental effect on student wellbeing.

In a typical day, students walk between periods (sometimes pretty large distances at Barker!), do practical work, change activities within a class, go outside, socialise with their friends, do physical things like PDHPE, music, visual arts and drama classes, build and design, write and record, brainstorm with class mates, answer questions, listen to their teacher – the list goes on. A student isn't physically writing and working for 60 minutes in each hour. Sometimes they daydream, sometimes they just listen, sometimes they get distracted. Online learning can never simply be 'school but at home'.

For this reason, the panel deciding how the online day should look tried to plan a day that had variety, an opportunity to catch up with their teachers, time to work for a longer period without interruption and a chance to interact with their class mates, albeit in an online environment.

A big area of focus was to design a day that allowed for routine and could work for a school closure of indefinite length. To provide routine, we didn't want to change the structure of the day from week to week to respond to whatever decisions were being made by our governments at the time. We tried to design a structure that would work now and, heaven forbid, over a longer period of time.

There's been much discussion in the news and around the area about the place of video and live streaming in online learning. There was almost no live streaming performed during the trial while we concentrated on other tools. It became apparent that live streaming and video have a natural place in this style of lesson delivery. It's important for students to see and hear their

teachers. Humans are social animals and so this kind of contact is vital for the wellbeing of students. Experience has made it clear that an hour of live streaming is too demanding on the concentration of both staff and students. Our Shape of the Day has tried to limit live streaming to 30 minutes per class and then once or twice a week. We need to give our students time to actually do the work!

Consequently, we have changed the timetable to four 30 minute blocks in the morning that run parallel to the regular timetable. Teachers who have a class in Periods 1 – 4 of the regular timetable can live stream a 'catch up' with their class. These catch ups are meant to be short periods where they can touch base with their class, talk about different aspects of the set work and then 'teach' one or two of the trickier aspects of the course. In later weeks a teacher might look at the work completed by students and use some of this time to talk to the class about what the students found challenging or misunderstood.

At other times teachers can pre-record short videos to explain or describe parts of their course or the set work.

This period structure created some confusion in the early days as the session lengths were different to that of the regular class. We also decided to keep Year 12 to their usual timetable. We acknowledge that there was this confusion and produced an explanatory video that can be found with the Shape of the Day document on the School website. It's worth a look. We are hoping that once students get into the swing of things then they'll get the hang of their daily 'catch ups'.

Our plan is to have a blend of synchronous and asynchronous learning to minimise the impact of screen time on staff and students. Synchronous learning involves students receiving immediate feedback, video and messaging with their teachers, while asynchronous learning doesn't occur in real time.

Students can continue to contact staff using chat in Teams or even email. We're trying to limit the flow of emails as Middle School students aren't used to that medium and some have been overwhelmed by the traffic. However, we encourage students to contact their teachers if they have a question using any of the tools we've promoted. For the wellbeing of staff, students need to recognise that their teachers also need a break and so it might not be possible to reply outside of office hours. Many staff have families to look after as well and need to have quality time with them in this difficult time. We expect staff to respond within 24 hours, but do not demand that they be answering emails and chat questions around the clock.

Staff have quickly improved their skills recording video and live streaming classes. We're now even holding faculty, Heads of Houses and Heads of Department meetings using live streaming, as social distancing makes it impossible for large groups of staff to congregate. Mr Heath and other Senior Staff produce daily briefings to staff and students in this way.

The upskilling of staff has been phenomenal over the last few weeks. Our philosophy is simple, to use a few online tools very well and not overcomplicate things. Consequently we have kept to distributing work through our Learning Management System, Canvas. Our staff have been using this for a number of years now and already had course content in Canvas years before the current situation. With Canvas, staff have quickly adopted OneNote as the "workbook" for online learning in many classes, and Teams for live streaming. Zoom has had much press lately and a number of other schools use it for streaming, but we've made the decision to use what we currently have in place in order to provide good IT support. Recent data privacy concerns with Zoom have also made us cautious (https://www.afr.com/technology/zoom-is-the-next-privacy-challenge-20200324-p54dff).

Today is Day 4 of online learning at Barker and we haven't got everything perfect yet. We know we need to do better to make our instructions clearer to younger students and have staff stick to the Shape of the Day timetable so as not to double book students. No school has it perfect at

the moment, but we continue to work on our delivery and are grateful for the many emails of support sent to us by our parents. Our decisions are based on the wellbeing of our students and staff and we continue to work hard to make the online learning environment as seamless as possible and a rich and rewarding experience.

Schools are a social place and already we're finding that our students miss being here and that we miss not having the students around. They bring great joy to our school and no doubt they are craving the social contact of one another.

We pray that this passes quickly.

There's lots of articles and advice on how to best conduct online learning. Here's one that we found particularly insightful and aligned to our thinking.

The evolution of remote learning or 'What the heck is it?'

**How Parents can Access Student Live Streamed Videos**
If parents would like to also view the videos being live streamed to students, please use this link https://student.livestream.barker.college. Parents will then be asked to authenticate, and should use their login used to access the Barker portal / MyBarker - username@barker.college


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