

# THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: AN EXTRAORDINARY YEAR IN NEWCASTLE GRAMMAR SCHOOL'S HISTORY



Newcastle  
Grammar  
— SCHOOL —



# **THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: AN EXTRAORDINARY YEAR IN NEWCASTLE GRAMMAR SCHOOL'S HISTORY**

How NGS adapted to the new educational environment wrought by a global pandemic.

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# THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: AN EXTRAORDINARY YEAR IN NEWCASTLE GRAMMAR SCHOOL'S HISTORY

## How NGS adapted to the new educational environment wrought by a global pandemic

The year 2020 heralded a remarkable chapter in Australia's history as the country faced what was arguably the greatest public health threat in a century: the coronavirus (COVID-19) global pandemic.

The education sector was far from immune from the impacts of COVID-19, with schools across the nation forced to close for extended periods to contain the spread of the deadly virus. This saw both teachers and students embark on an unforeseen journey into a new educational environment of remote online teaching and learning.

This publication outlines the many challenges faced by Newcastle Grammar School as it made the biggest and most rapid changes to the School's operation in its 100 years.

Most importantly, it documents the School's remarkable achievements in successfully continuing both to educate students and to foster their connectedness and wellbeing throughout these most difficult of times.

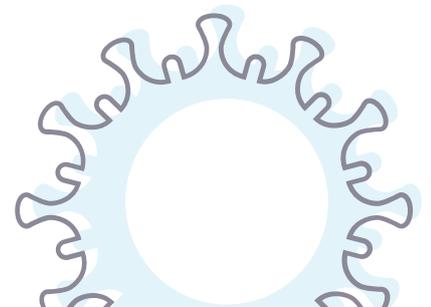
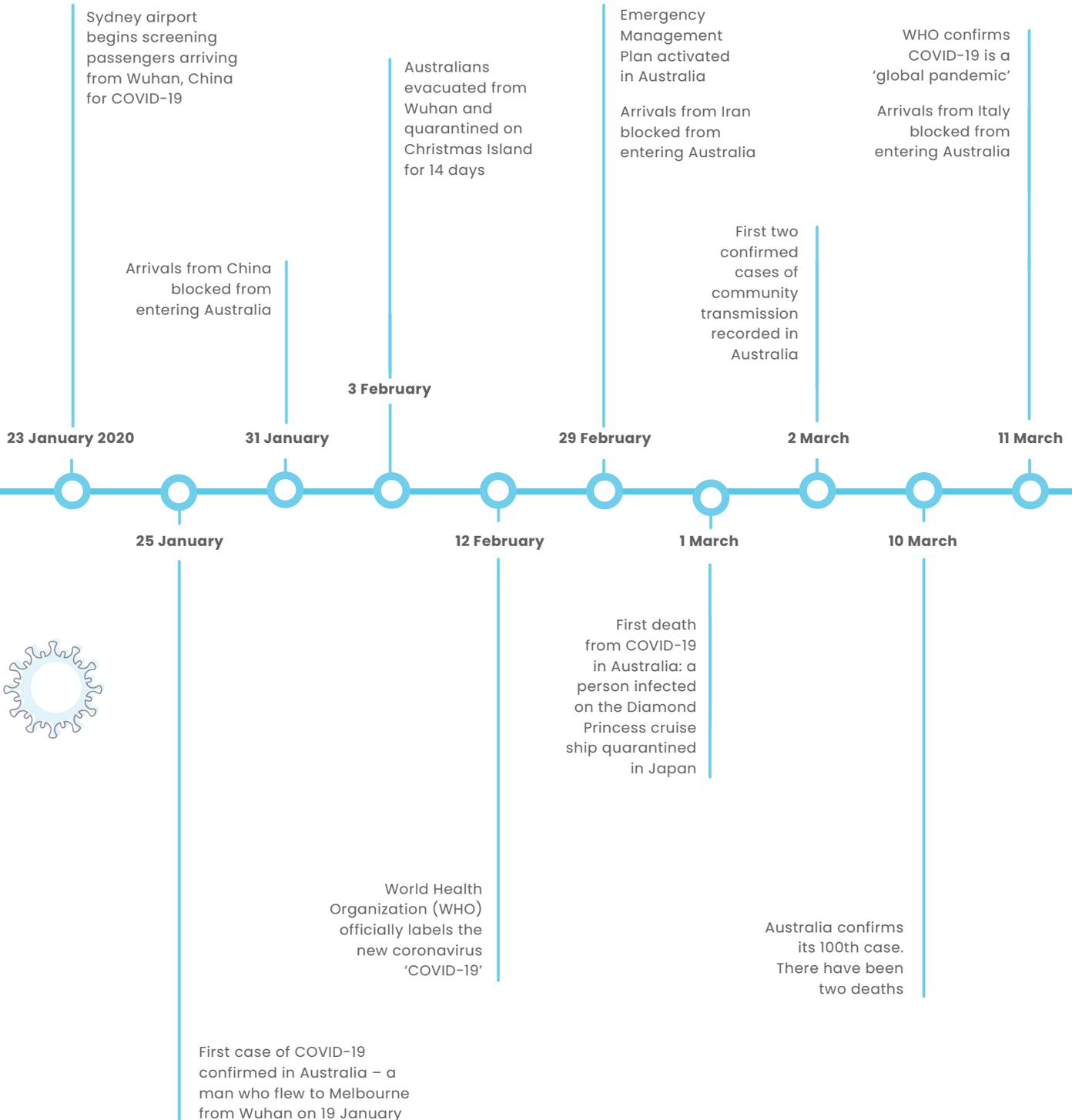
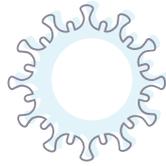
Mrs Erica Thomas  
Head of School, 2020

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.

*Charles Dickens, A Tale of Two Cities*

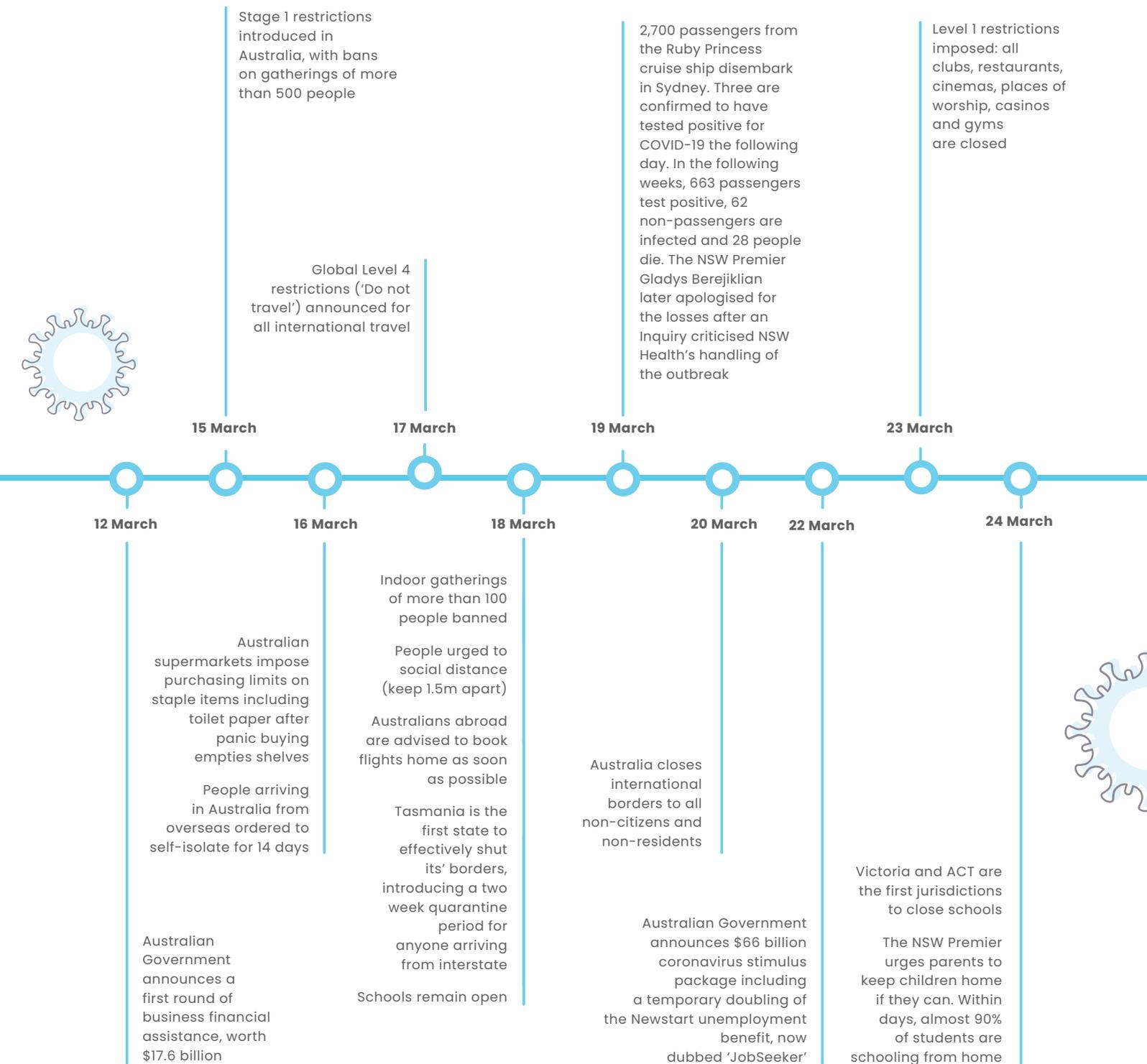
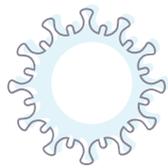


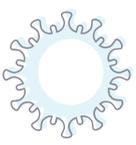
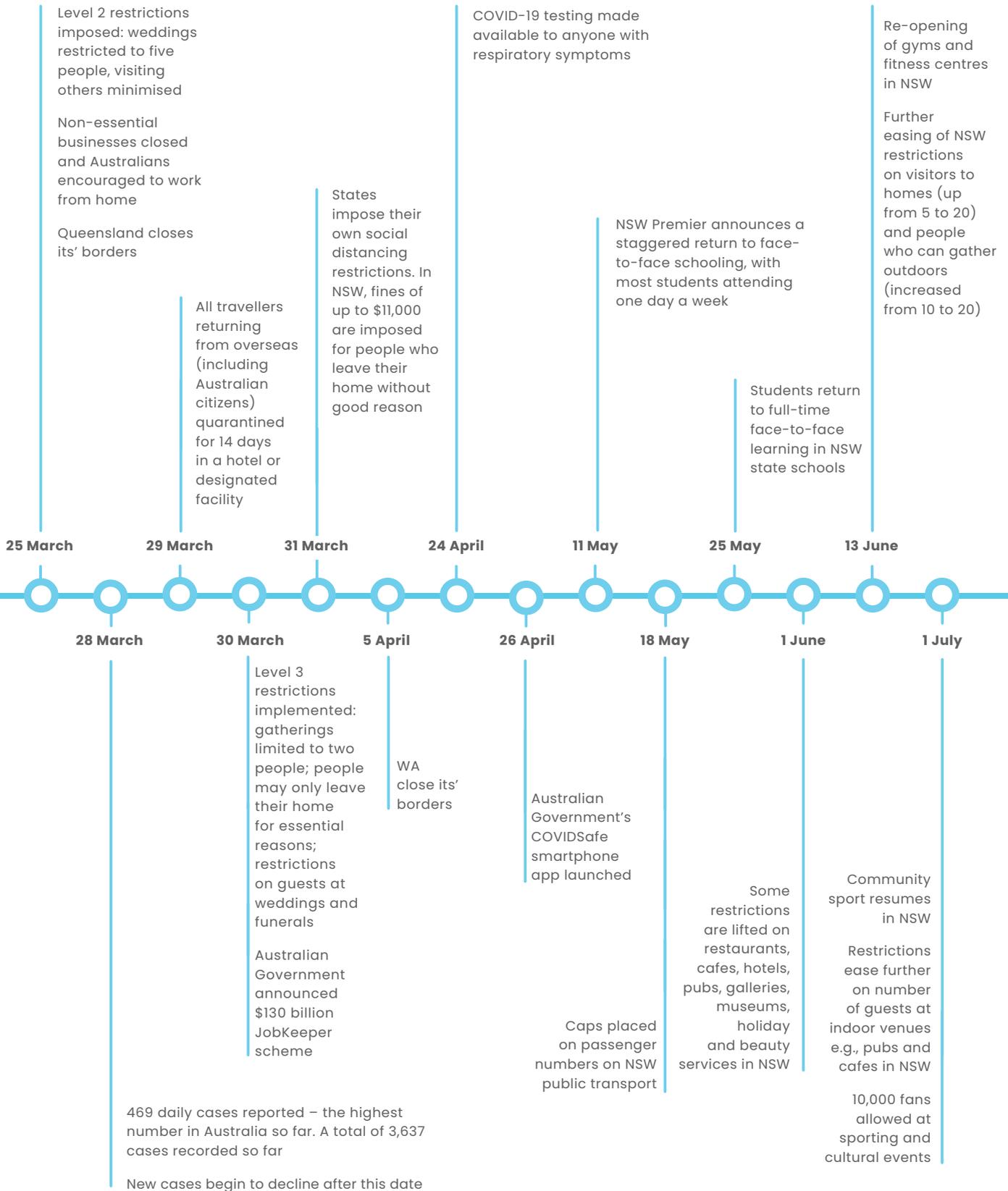
# 2020: A TIMELINE OF EVENTS

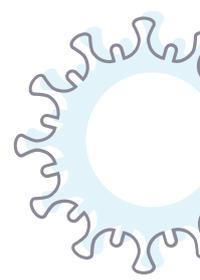
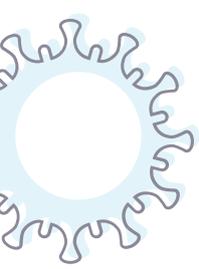
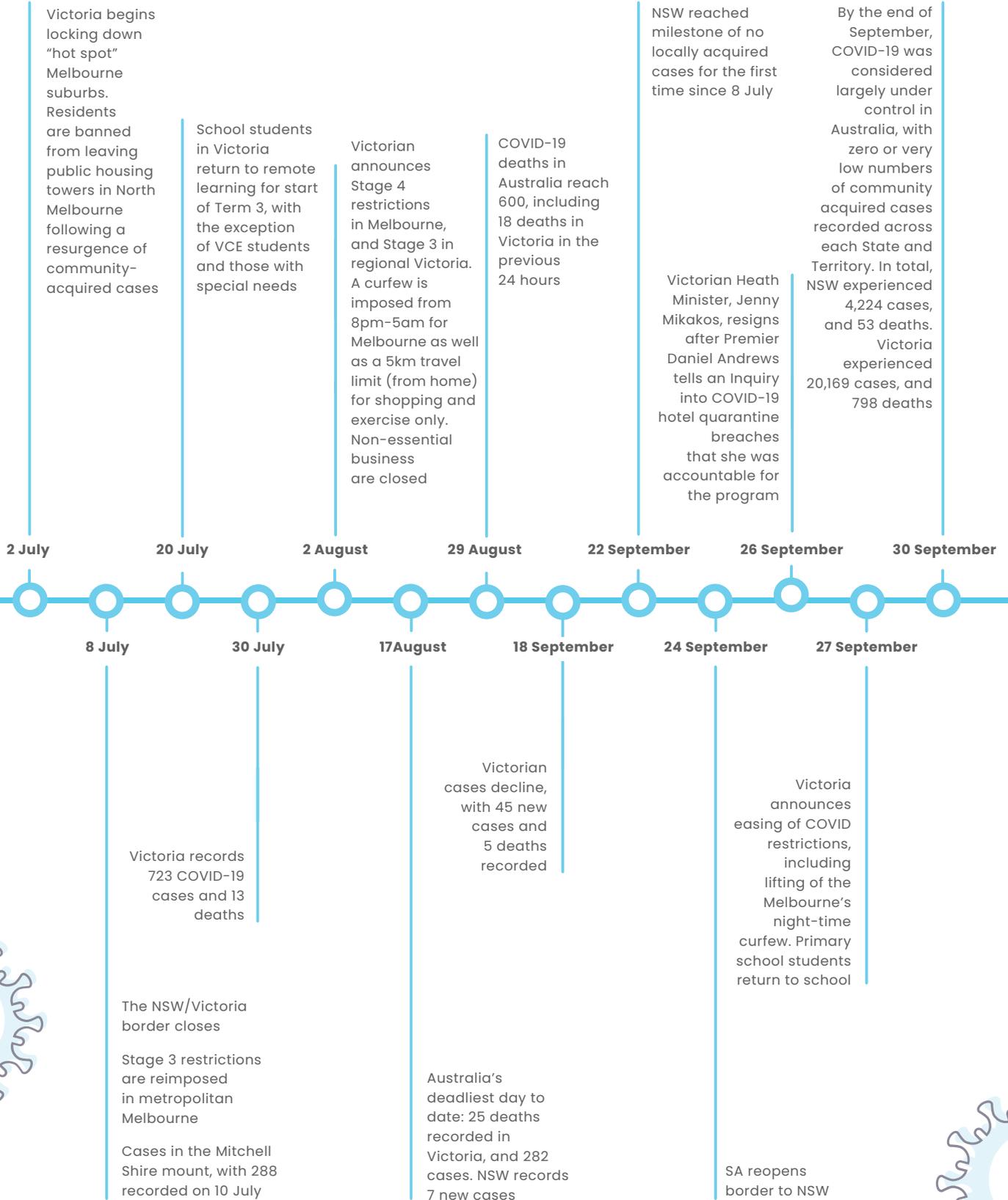


Life is changing in Australia, for every Australian. And life is going to continue to change. For many, young and old, 2020 will be the toughest year of our lives.

*Australian Prime Minister, Mr Scott Morrison, 23 March 2020.*







## WHAT NEXT?

By early October 2020, when this publication was finalised, NSW had recorded zero community acquired cases of COVID-19 for a number of days. Australia was again in a promising position with regard to controlling the spread of the virus.

International borders and some state borders remained closed. Life was still far from 'back to normal', with quarantine requirements, social distancing and limits on public gatherings still in place.

No COVID-19 vaccine was commercially available at this stage and the global toll of the pandemic continued to rise.

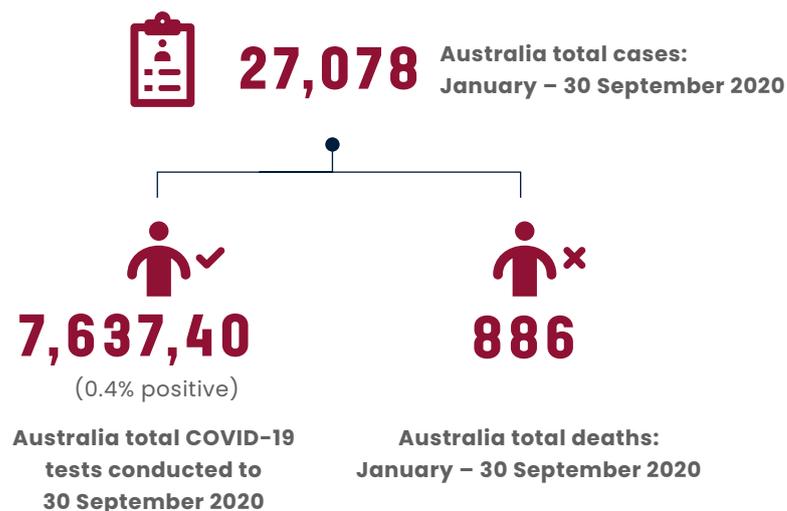
US President, Donald Trump, and the First Lady, Melania Trump, had just tested positive to COVID-19 and the US had recorded the greatest number of deaths from the virus worldwide – more than 209,000 deaths.

In India, there had been more than 100,000 deaths and cases were again rising in many countries such as Brazil, the UK and France.

COVID-19 had changed people's lives dramatically across the globe and there remained no end to the pandemic in sight.

## COVID-19 SNAPSHOT

Figures to 30 September 2020



International total cases to 30 September 2020:  
More than 32 million

International total deaths to 30 September 2020

**990,000**



# NGS ONLINE: HOW WE RESPONDED TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

As the pandemic took hold and a shutdown was ordered, the Newcastle Grammar School Board met frequently to assist the School in managing the looming crisis. Business continuity plans and revised budgets were formulated and the Board focused on those families who needed assistance at this time. The Board met more frequently, focusing on areas such as communication and support of the School Executive. Our volunteer Board worked tirelessly to ensure the success of the School, bringing their unique skills to problems as they presented.

The NGS Executive and a newly established COVID-19 Response Team met regularly and worked quickly to respond to the ever-changing situation as the pandemic reached Australian shores, heeding advice from NSW and Federal Governments and the Association of Independent Schools of NSW.

Changes that would usually take years to implement were developed in the space of two weeks.

NGS Online delivered a range of programs and services to parents and teachers online, including new models of teaching and learning for all students from Kindergarten through to Year 12.

This was supported by Sport Online to keep students physical, Assembly Online to bring parents into the School in an unprecedented way and modifications to our wellbeing program to continue to support students through these difficult times.

It was no doubt the biggest and most rapid change to the way the School has operated in its 100 year history.

The Secondary School adopted a model of real-time, online learning in a virtual classroom. Primary students connected to their online classroom for several hours a day, with teachers giving lessons in a whole class, grade or small group setting to provide a quality, differentiated curriculum for all students.

This is a new adventure that we are on together and I want you to know that all teaching staff here are doing their absolute utmost to provide engaging lessons that you will find really help progress your learning over the coming weeks as we are in this awful time. But we are in it together, and we are going to come through it at the other end.

*Mrs Erica Thomas, Head of School, in video message to parents and students, March 2020.*

A Learning Continuity Plan was developed to guide teachers in the practices and pedagogies appropriate for online learning. Teachers worked tirelessly to familiarise themselves with the technology and how best to deliver engaging, relevant and meaningful learning experiences in the new online environment.



## THE RAPID TRANSITION TO NGS ONLINE

**15 March:** The first COVID-19 update was provided to the School community. While lessons continued as normal, we adopted increased hygiene and social distancing interventions, putting planned overseas trips and exchanges on hold and cancelling some excursions.

**19 March:** We advised students and families that large gatherings including face-to-face Assemblies and Chapel would be cancelled. Some music programmes were suspended, water bubblers were closed and classrooms and learning spaces were cleaned daily with medical grade disinfectant. We began to sanitise students' hands upon entry to school and introduced staggered lunch times and bell times on Hill campus to reduce congestion.

**24 March:** The decision was made to keep the School open until end of Term 1 for those students who needed to attend. In line with advice from the NSW Premier, we encouraged NGS parents to keep their children at home if possible. NGS Online was introduced and students started accessing learning online using our existing communication and learning management platform, SchoolBox.

**27 March:** A staff professional learning day was held to prepare all our teaching and learning staff for the rapid shift to a full online learning model.

## NEW TECHNOLOGY, NEW TIMETABLES AND NEW WAYS OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

In line with advice from the Federal and NSW Governments, teaching and learning transitioned to online models for all students for the final two weeks of Term 1 (30 March onward). The vast majority of students undertook learning from home, with around 10% of students attending school, where they followed the same online learning programme as their peers under supervision. The changes included:

- Years 5-12: Students learned how to use the online audio and video platform Microsoft Teams to enable real-time online learning in their regular classes with their teachers and peers.
- Years K-4: Parents and students were sent home learning packs and comprehensive guides for online learning.
- A new three-period per day timetable was introduced for Years 5-12 to enable staff and students adjust to the live model of online learning.
- Students with additional needs continued to be supported online by staff in the Learning Support Team.
- The Pre-School remained open.
- A wide range of wellbeing and social connection activities were launched via our SchoolBox platform (see Wellbeing in Focus, page 39).
- A number of programs were quickly developed to support the NGS Online platform, including Sport Online, Assembly Online and a School Captains page of activities.
- Our information evenings and parent-teacher evenings were adapted to be held online, while students attended virtual excursions, online study conferences and remote study skills sessions.

Thanks to dedicated teaching staff, the support of the IT team and our students' resilience, the shift to online learning proved a great success, with high levels of engagement and positive feedback from students, parents and staff.

NGS started Term 2 with a continuation of the parent choice model (lessons delivered online for all students, with parents deciding whether their child took part from home or school). Teaching staff also had the choice of working from home or school, in line with Government advice.

An amended four-period per day timetable was introduced for Years 7-12 from Term 2, following feedback that some students found the 90 minute periods too long.

Our rapid and successful transition to NGS Online was the result of an incredible team effort. It could not have happened without the support and dedication of all our staff.

I especially want to thank the School Board for their support, Mrs Lisa Peterson, who had the vision for NGS Online, Mr Lee O'Brien who ensured our information technology was ready to go, Mrs Amy Falconer who oversaw the Primary School online learning platforms and Ms Renee Mackay who designed our SchoolBox online learning pages.  
*Mrs Erica Thomas, Head of School*

## NGS ONLINE LIVE: AN INFORMATION HUB PARENT RESOURCES AND ONLINE LEARNING GUIDES



The School's existing communication and learning management platform, SchoolBox, proved to be a vital tool in helping students and parents navigate the new world of online learning.

A new 'Online LIVE' hub on the secure SchoolBox website was updated constantly by staff throughout the home learning period, as well as hosting the many videos and posts contributed by students.

Through this hub, parents and students could quickly access all the information they needed including Head of School communications, Primary and Secondary online learning pages, resources and guides, Online Assemblies, information from the School Captains, Wellbeing, Sport Online and PDHPE resources, videos and interactive pages.

NGS produced a comprehensive range of resources and online learning guides to support students and parents with the move to online learning.

Information on how best to set up the home for learning, new timetables, how to access online applications being used by students and how to ensure safety whilst online were included in resources for Primary parents and students.

For Secondary students, resources included checklists on setting up safely online, as well as guides on to how to manage technology and get the most out of learning from home.


Newcastle Grammar  
EST. 1863

# LEARNING AT HOME

Get into a Good Routine and Establish Positive Work Habits

**STAY CONNECTED**

**ICT SUPPORT**  
[itsupport@ngs.nsw.edu.au](mailto:itsupport@ngs.nsw.edu.au)

**WELLBEING SUPPORT**  
 Your Head of House

**LEARNING SUPPORT**  
 Your classroom teacher or Head of Department

**HSC ASSESSMENT SUPPORT**  
 Mr Fielden: [Philip.Fielden@ngs.nsw.edu.au](mailto:Philip.Fielden@ngs.nsw.edu.au)

**YOUR HEALTH**

Make sure you are eating and drinking water regularly. If you are not well get your parent to contact the School.



**STAY UP TO DATE**

Check SchoolBox, your email & Microsoft Teams to help plan your day.



HOW SHOULD I SET UP MY SPACE?

**CONNECTION**



Make sure your device is charged and connected to WiFi.

**COMFORT**



Set up your space as if you are at a school desk. Ensure your area is free from distractions, has good lighting and access to fresh air. Avoid using your bedroom!

**DRESS**



Dressing in appropriate smart casual clothes or sports uniform will help you get in the right frame of mind to work productively.

**TOOLS**



Check you have everything you need for your lessons near by.

## TERM 2: A STAGED RETURN TO THE CLASSROOM

Following advice from education authorities, a staged return to face-to-face teaching was instituted from Week 2, Term 2 (4 May), with Year 12 students the first to be welcomed back full-time. From Week 3, other year groups returned on designated days for one or two days per week to limit the number of students on campus each day.

We've been absolutely delighted to welcome so many students back at school on the days they've been designated to. It's been incredibly successful.

*Mrs Erica Thomas, Head of School, video message to parents and students, May 2020.*

The Primary School reopened for full-time face-to-face teaching on 18 May, with provisions remaining in place for students who chose to continue learning from home. Face-to-face teaching increased to three days per week for students in Years 7-11. From Week 5 of Term 2, Year 11 students returned full-time.

After eight weeks of online learning, full-time face-to-face learning on campus resumed for all students across the School from 1 June. The canteen and library reopened and parents were surveyed about online learning to capture the strengths and weaknesses of the program's delivery.

Throughout the rest of the year, we continued to facilitate live streaming of lessons for students who were forced into self-isolation following possible contact with COVID-19 cases.

## A DIFFERENT ENVIRONMENT



Life at NGS looked somewhat different following the resumption of on-campus lessons, with students and staff taking steps to remain safe in the COVID-19 era.

All students and staff had their temperature checked and sanitised their hands upon arrival at the school gate each day. The parents of any student who was found to have a temperature above normal were contacted and the students were sent home.

Staff continued to maintain social distancing, keeping a 1.5m safe space between each other and students at all times. Assemblies and large student gathering remained online and the four period per day timetable continued.

There was a gradual return to co-curricular activity, including music ensembles, rehearsals for the school musical and some sporting competition.

Term 3 started with the same measures in place, although Secondary School students were thrilled to be able to attend their Athletics Carnival in August – the first large gathering of students since March.

## TERM 3: HIGH ALERT AND RENEWED RESTRICTIONS



In early August 2020, the School was again on high alert after two students at nearby schools were diagnosed with COVID-19. St Francis Xavier and St Pius High School were temporarily closed for deep cleaning and the many close contacts of the affected students were advised to self-isolate for 14 days and undergo COVID-19 testing. Fortunately, no further cases were reported in schools in the region in connection to the initial cases.

Students were encouraged to wear masks on public transport and school buses. The NSW Government subsequently introduced new restrictions for schools from the second half of Term 3. These included: schools were banned from travelling outside their local community or zone for activities; interschool sport and carnivals were restricted to 100 people; singing, chanting and use of wind instruments in group settings was banned, as were school formals and graduations held outside the school or with external guests.

Many NGS co-curricular activities were again put on hold or amended for the rest of Term 3 to comply with the new regulations.

In early August 2020, the School was again on high alert after two students at nearby schools were diagnosed with COVID-19.

# THE ACADEMIC IMPACT OF COVID-19

## NAPLAN

The COAG Education Council meeting of Commonwealth, State and Territory Ministers announced in March that the NAPLAN (National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy) tests scheduled to take place between 12–22 May for all students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 were cancelled. This decision was made to help principals, teachers and school staff focus on student learning during the COVID-19 outbreak. As a result, My School, a website that allows parents to search and compare school results, was not updated in 2020.



## CHANGES TO THE 2020 HSC

In April 2020, NESA (NSW Education Standards Authority) committed to going ahead with the 2020 HSC written exams for Year 12 students, with results to be released on December 18 as originally planned. However, several changes were introduced in response to COVID-19, including:

- Extending due dates by two weeks for major projects in Design and Technology, Industrial Technology, Textiles and Design and Visual Arts. Teachers were required to mark those projects, rather than external markers.
- Dance: External HSC exams for Major Study Composition and Dance and Technology Film and Video were cancelled, with students receiving a mark based on an estimate provided by the School.
- Drama: Group performance external exams were cancelled and audiences were banned for individual performances.
- Music: Students were unable to perform with more than one other musician; Music Extension performance ensembles were cancelled.
- English Extension 2 – Major Work Multimedia – Short Film: Students were advised their final film would not be examined. Instead, students were required to provide documentation related to their project.
- HSC exams started slightly later than originally planned to give students more face-to-face preparation time with their teachers. Students were advised they would need to stay home if they had any symptoms of COVID-19 before an HSC exam. Performance and Oral tasks were able to be rearranged within a week; however, written exams could not be rescheduled. In these circumstances, students were required to lodge an HSC Illness/ Misadventure Appeal.

## ASSESSMENT MODIFICATIONS

In mid-March, NGS students were advised that the assessment policy was changing so that all assessment tasks for Year 7-12 students would become either hand-in or online tasks, enabling students to complete them from home.

NESA gave all schools permission to make late, or even retrospective, alterations to their HSC Assessment Schedules if they believed a task was compromised by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, NGS chose to take a conservative course of action and see what happened with assessment task scheduling. In the end, there was no need to change the weighting or nature of any assessment tasks as there was no evidence that any were compromised.

The School made every effort to support any students who were struggling. HSC students were encouraged to lodge formal Illness/Misadventure Appeals if they were unable to complete or submit a task due to circumstances beyond their control.

## ONLINE EXAMS A FIRST FOR YEARS 7-10

In a first for NGS, Year 7-10 Semester 1 exams were held online, given that it wasn't possible to guarantee that students could make it to School.

As a result, the exams were 'open-book', with students able to use whatever resources they had to hand in completing the questions.

The school learning management system, SchoolBox, was used to create online tests that were written, completed and marked online. Science used a different platform called STILE.

Despite a few teething problems, the exams went well and helped NGS to carry on with 'business as usual' during the challenging period.

## HSC TRIAL EXAMS

The HSC Trial Exams in Term 3 were able to be completed in the traditional pen-and-paper way, with the School required to adhere to social distancing rules of 4m<sup>2</sup> between students. As a result, more rooms and teacher supervisors were needed.

The exams were a great success, with 100% student attendance across the two weeks.

## YEAR 11 PRELIMINARY HSC EXAMS

The Year 11 Preliminary HSC Exams in Term 3 were also conducted as traditional pen-and-paper tests. Arrangements were put in place for any students that had to miss exams as a result of a positive COVID-19 test or close contact with a COVID case.

In a first for NGS, Year 7-10 Semester 1 exams were held online ...

## A CHALLENGING TIME FOR HSC STUDENTS



Learning remotely presented unique challenges for Year 12 students as they prepared to sit the HSC in October.

The initial shutdown period raised uncertainty about the HSC and university entry. Disruption to usual routines challenged students to maintain their focus and motivation.

Fortunately, NGS was able to minimise the impact of the shutdown period for Year 12 students by prioritising their return to the classroom.

The students demonstrated great resilience and persistence in coping with the challenging situation.

Year 12 student, Tom Conlon, agreed it was a difficult period, saying that learning remotely made it difficult to remain motivated due to the repetitive nature of his home environment and disconnection from his mates. Commenting in mid-2020, Tom was hopeful the situation wouldn't impact on the HSC exams.

We were extremely lucky that the HSC was still a few months away and I've found that, with the large number of events cancelled due to COVID-19, I now have more time to study than I would have had previously.  
*Tom Conlon,  
Year 12 student*

## NEW COVID-19 SAFE HSC PROTOCOLS

The School was required to introduce new protocols for the 2020 HSC exams to keep students, staff and exam supervisors safe from COVID-19. Measures included:

- Hand sanitiser was provided and every student had their temperature checked on arrival for their exams.
- NESAs advised students not to attend an exam if they had any symptoms of COVID-19 and to immediately get tested. If they missed an exam, there were no catch-up exams and they were required to submit a formal Illness/Misadventure Appeal.
- Exam supervisors were advised to wear masks.
- The School was required to have an alternate venue for the HSC exams in case a student, staff member or supervisor contracted COVID-19. NGS decided the best form of risk mitigation was to move the HSC exams completely off-site. As a result, exams took place at the former Newcastle East Infants School building on Bolton Street. This move was made possible thanks to a great deal of work from the IT team to link the site to our network, the Maintenance team to set the building up and the Cleaning team to make the venue presentable.
- In the event of a positive test result, the School planned to move back to the Hill Building where HSC exams usually take place.
- Accurate records were kept of exactly where each student sat for every exam, in case of a need to track close contacts.
- The School was asked to nominate a 'School Delegate' for the duration of the HSC exams. Director of Studies, Mr Philip Fielden, filled this role, which involved making a determination as to whether any student with flu-like symptoms could continue or be withdrawn from the exam.
- Any students removed from an exam due to illness were required to provide evidence of a negative COVID-19 test result before being allowed to return.
- NSW Health reassured HSC students that any COVID-19 tests would be fast-tracked so they could receive results quickly to minimise disruption to their study or exams.

# PRIMARY SCHOOL: WHAT DID A TYPICAL DAY OF ONLINE LEARNING LOOK LIKE?



 <b>Newcastle Grammar SCHOOL</b>		
<h2>PRIMARY LEARNING ROUTINE</h2>		
 <p><b>8:45am - 9:00am</b></p> <p><b>ROLL CALL</b></p> <p>Access Zoom to start the day &amp; mark attendance. Zoom Teacher IDs are available through SchooBox.</p>	 <p><b>9:00am - 10:00am</b></p> <p><b>LITERACY HOUR</b></p> <p>Access Zoom for explicit teaching &amp; lesson instructions with your teacher. Your teacher will let you know how to submit your work.</p>	 <p><b>10:00am - 10:15am</b></p> <p><b>MOVEMENT BREAK</b></p> <p>Time to get moving! This can include playing in the backyard, dance, fitness apps and circuits.</p>
 <p><b>10:10am - 10:45am</b></p> <p><b>RECESS</b></p> <p>This is to be screen free time! Please include a 10-minute session of sustained reading using quality literature from home.</p>	 <p><b>10:45am - 11:45am</b></p> <p><b>NUMERACY HOUR</b></p> <p>Access Zoom for explicit teaching &amp; lesson instructions with your teacher. Your teacher will let you know how to submit your work.</p>	 <p><b>11:45am - 12:15pm</b></p> <p><b>INQUIRY TIME</b></p> <p>Access Zoom for explicit teaching &amp; lesson instructions with your teacher. Your teacher will let you know how to submit your work.</p>
 <p><b>12:15pm - 1:00pm</b></p> <p><b>LUNCH BREAK</b></p> <p>Time for some lunch &amp; screen free time! Please include a 10-minute session of sustained reading using quality literature from home.</p>	 <p><b>1:00pm - 2:00pm</b></p> <p><b>SPECIALIST SUBJECTS</b></p> <p>Please see SchooBox for information. Specialist subjects include: Languages, Art, STEM, Positive Education, Music &amp; Health.</p>	 <p><b>2:00pm - 2:30pm</b></p> <p><b>PERSONALISED LEARNING TIME</b></p> <p>Personalised Learning is for Years 5-6 only and is optional. This is the time to complete unfinished work, instrumental practice, coding, etc.</p>

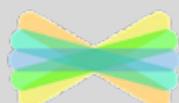
Students connected face-to-face with their teachers and other students for real-time lessons, either delivered to the whole grade, class or in small group settings.

**How our youngest students became tech-savvy**  
Primary students from Kindergarten upwards (and many of their families) became experts in using a range of online apps including:



#### **SchoolBox (K-6)**

- An overview of the day's lessons were posted each morning.
- Information communicated to parents and carers.
- Specialist staff lessons posted on the online learning portal.



#### **Seesaw (K-4)**

- Students receive lesson instruction, submit work and receive feedback.
- Even the youngest of students can use it independently.
- Parents were linked to their child's account to be kept up-to-date with their learning.



#### **Zoom (K-6)**

- Students connected face-to-face with their teachers and other students for real-time lessons, either delivered to the whole grade, class or in small group settings.
- Use of the platform helped promote social interaction and wellbeing.



#### **Mathletics (K-6)**

- Curriculum aligned tasks were set by class teachers through this online Mathematics programme.
- Students could track their own progress and improvement.



#### **Lexia (K-4)**

- An online program providing fundamental literacy skills for students of all abilities.
- Students work in a structured, sequential manner.



#### **Reading Eggs (K-2)**

- This is an online reading application for younger students, with interactive reading games, guided reading lessons, fun activities and digital story books .
- Students received instant results and detailed progress reports.

# THE IMPACT ON STAFF AND FAMILIES

## TEACHING STAFF RISE TO MEET NEW CHALLENGES

The NGS teaching staff were faced with adapting to a completely new way of teaching the curriculum and engaging with students virtually overnight. Many teachers worked weekends and additional hours to prepare for the new model of online learning, developing a huge array of innovative ways to engage their students online.

For a small number of staff, the shutdown of face-to-face learning and loss of students on campus meant reduced working hours.

In total, 15 of the School's 170 staff had their working hours temporarily reduced. Ten operational staff and five Primary teachers working in specialist areas of Music, Art, Mandarin and Technology were affected as the Primary learning model focused on literacy and numeracy and some specialist subjects were put on hold.

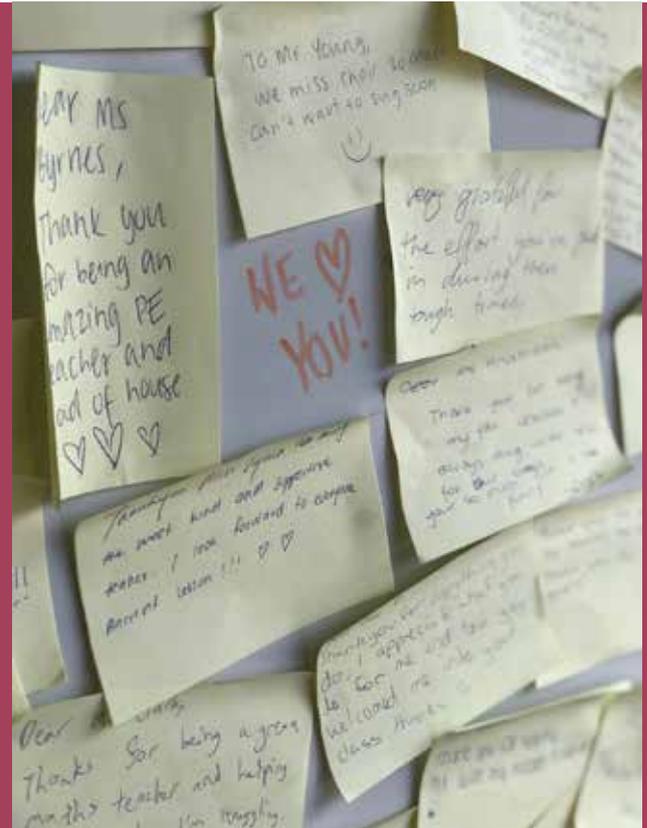
*The Newcastle Herald* reported on the changes.

"When we don't have students here it's very difficult to provide a level of work for every member of staff," Head of School, Mrs Erica Thomas, commented.

Our teachers have achieved remarkable things since the decision was made to move learning to an online platform. During a time of crisis, they have come together, working as a team to make this rapid shift.

*Mrs Lisa Peterson, Director of Learning and Teaching*





## THE PERSONAL IMPACT ON STAFF

Many staff also experienced the impact of the pandemic on a personal level.

A number of staff were required to self-isolate at home for 14 days after contact with either a COVID-19 case or with a person who had travelled to areas considered to be at risk.

Many staff with young children of their own faced the challenge of assisting them with learning from home at the same time as teaching.

Other staff with medical conditions needed to continue to work remotely to remain safe, even after face-to-face teaching resumed.

## STAFF APPRECIATION WEEK

A special staff appreciation week was held in June to thank the staff for their outstanding effort and the many sacrifices they made during the COVID-19 school shut-down. Staff enjoyed a special morning tea to mark the week and students wrote their teachers notes of appreciation.

## HARDSHIP SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES

One key initiative the Board put in place was a financial hardship support package for families, recognising that COVID-19 had resulted in unprecedented business and/or income impact for many people in the community. The School worked with families experiencing financial difficulties to help them navigate and transition through the period.

# ONLINE LEARNING TRIUMPHS

The rapid transition to online learning was embraced by NGS staff and students, with remarkable results. Below are some of the many highlights from the School's move to innovative new ways of teaching and learning.

## HIGHLIGHTS BY NUMBERS



During the COVID shut down and the staggered return to school, NGS experienced its **lowest absentee rate** from staff and students on record.



More than **1,000** staff, students and family members joined one Online Assembly from their homes or workplaces.



Years 7-12 adapted to **3** different timetables.



The drive through Easter Bunny wave, treat and learning pack delivery saw **250** packs delivered to Primary children.



Year 12 only missed **3** weeks of face-to-face teaching.



The capacity of our communication and learning management platform, SchoolBox, was increased twice. It started at: 4 CPUs, 1.5TB of storage and 12GB of RAM and ended up at **24 CPUs, 3TB** of storage and **48GB** of RAM.



An estimated **18,000** temperature checks were conducted in one month alone.

# HIGHLIGHTS OF ONLINE LEARNING

During the online learning period, Primary School students benefited from a dual learning platform: they took part in live, interactive lessons for three hours each day, as well as using resources provided in comprehensive home learning packs.

The period was marked by high attendance rates and students became increasingly independent as they embraced student-centred learning.

The School also saw a jump in Primary enrolments as families sought out the positive online learning experiences provided by NGS.

## PRIMARY SCHOOL

- Home learning packs: Staff put together a pack for every student, including books, activity resources such as handwriting books, a reflection diary and other materials to complement their online learning. The packs were picked up by families in a 'drive through' session outside Park Campus.
- Kindergarten students enjoyed a virtual excursion to a farm and an online chat with a farmer as part of their 'Paddock to Plate' Inquiry learning unit.
- Year 5 and 6 girls started a book club with the help of teacher Mrs Amy Falconer, to promote reading and as an opportunity to interact with one another. Initially they met online one morning a week before school, but, once face-to-face learning resumed, they continued to meet at lunchtimes. The girls even managed to arrange a live online discussion with author Martin Chatterton about his book, *The Tell*.
- Year 4 teacher, Mr Ian Gunter, was the Park Campus technology king, setting up three screens on his classroom desk – along with his phone – to make the most of the many online learning platforms.
- Learning support continued online: All students who usually received learning support at School continued to access that support online, either in small groups, or one-on-one, to ensure they could continue to access the curriculum.

We were ahead of the game and provided a high-quality package of online learning.

*Head of Teaching and Learning  
K-6, Mrs Amy Falconer*



## SECONDARY SCHOOL

### PDHPE

The PDHPE Team created a popular 'Move and Groove' practical workout page, inspiring students to take part in activities ranging from high intensity interval training to yoga, dance and movement challenges – all from their lounge room or backyard.

Students were invited to join 'Live at Lunch' online movement sessions.

Year 12 PDHPE students used the COVID-19 pandemic as a reference point to discuss the role of healthcare facilities and services in online groups sessions and breakout rooms.

### STEM: Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

Staff packaged up electronics kits so iSTEM students could continue their project work at home with the help of online teacher instruction.

Food Technology students watched video demonstrations made by teachers so they could complete cooking tasks at home, then sharing videos of their efforts. Science students watched livestreamed demonstrations of experiments from the School laboratories.

Design and Technology students sent electronic files of design work to their teachers to have them tested on the School laser engraver, receiving live video and images to enable them to evaluate and further develop their projects.

Mathematics teachers used the digital stylus to demonstrate examples of complex equations online in the same way that they would on a smart board in the classroom.

Year 12 Biology students were asked to build a model explaining the second line of immune defence using what they could find at home. They came up with many imaginative ideas within the 20-minute deadline.

### Languages and Literacy

Students studying Japanese completed a home scavenger hunt, requiring them to read a list of objects in Japanese (e.g., three shoes, six spoons), then quickly find them at home, take a photo and upload it.

In French lessons, students were able to practise their speaking skills through online 'conversation rooms', while students studying Mandarin sped through the content and key activities quicker than ever.

Year 9 English students became 'online detectives' for a lesson with the use of a digital breakout. Inspired by the 'escape room' craze, students completed online activities, found clues then entered codes to unlock the 'locked' room.

Another Year 9 class had a fun, hands-on lesson solving a crime. Over the course of the lesson, the students were emailed different clues related to the crime; sharing clues online and collaborating to try to solve the case.

Year 7 students put pen to paper to further develop their creative writing skills, taking inspiration from the pandemic. The following are examples of their work:

... students studying Mandarin sped through the content and key activities quicker than ever.



**Sam Lane, Year 7**  
**COVID-19**

t'was an autumn day when things changed for the worse  
The world left behind its past cocoon that it knew and loved  
Nestled warm and sweet, comfortable like a precious antique  
To emerge as a slug, or just like a bug and ruin a good week  
COVID was its name.

It succeeded in its quest and completely changed the game  
It forced the people to stay indoors against their will  
And created a barrier from the student and the teacher  
But could not stop this new wonderful feature  
Zoom was its name.

It succeeded in its quest and completely changed the game  
The conferencing tool that we all know and love  
From school lessons to random hangouts this tool could do it all  
Though through all of these problems we decided not to fall  
And we overcame these issues though with appalling grace  
Together united as the human race.



**Julian Feltrin, Year 7**  
**COVID-19**

The boom of my grey clouds signals the beginning  
of the storm. The yellow lightning streaks across the  
purple sky as the clouds roll through. Screams below  
issuing from the mouths of helpless people as they  
run for their lives. The unlucky lay weak and still,  
now being drowned by the water from my mouth.  
Swallowed by my dangers. The rest inside hiding,  
waiting for it to end. But it doesn't.

My lightning burns the ground. Charred. My austere  
ways of hurting numerous people have spiked up  
now thousands lay dead. Most are unfortunate losing  
loved ones, but my ruthless emotions aren't affected.  
Weeping people lay beside the fallen. Tears streaking  
down each's face like an open wound. Schools shut  
down. Students staying at home. Left to learn online.  
Each shop, business and store closed.

My severe emotions slicing the happiness left inside  
several others. My cold, cruel words smashing  
down peoples hope. And still, I am unaffected. I  
see the bright sun in the distance and dread pours  
through me. The only one that will get rid of me.  
The heat burning my skin. Melting me away. I feel  
myself disappearing. Squeezed through the hole of  
disappearance. Now gone.

Schools shut down.  
Students staying at  
home. Left to learn  
online.

*Julian Feltrin, Year 7*



**Harriette Arnall, Year 7**

Dear people of the world,

I'm sure you've heard about me by now. I am the Coronavirus. I came a couple of months ago and messed up your lives, and since then you've tried everything to stop me. Some countries succeed in slowing me down others still need a bit of help even if they won't admit it. I know I came and destroyed the way you live your life.

I made you miss the things you love doing like, celebrating family events, hanging out with friends, or playing sport on the weekend. Most importantly kids have missed out on school, missed the face-to-face interactions with teachers and students they need to thrive, missed the feeling of accomplishment when they get home from school and reflect on the day they had. And for that I'm sorry. But instead of focusing on the bad things focus on the good things that have come out of this.

Sure, I stopped you from doing the things you love but with all this going on, you stopped and thought about the simple things in life. You started to think about all you took for granted and how you didn't realise how much you needed or loved something until it was taken away. You started to treasure the friends you have and those little moments with your family that seem to light up the world.

Everyone's also started to think about the bigger things in life, look at the air pollution before I came and now look at it after I'd arrived. The Himalaya mountains have been visible from northern India for the first time in 30 years. Although I have had a positive impact on the environment there has also been a surge in the waste that families are throwing out because they have now been ordering in and spending more time at home.

There are lots of negatives to me arriving but in some places, it is starting to look up. In Australia, kids have started to go back to school and get that social interaction everyone so desperately needs. Restaurants, beauty salons, and shops have started to open, the amount of people you can have indoors, and outdoors is rising.

The rugby in Australia has also started again but with tight restrictions in place. I know it was not easy getting to the point you are at now and that there is still a whole lot more to come. Whilst I still don't know when I'll be gone or when your life will go back to normal, I know that if you stick with your friends and family your world will start to look a whole lot brighter.

Sincerely, Coronavirus

## Global Studies

Innovative approaches including online webinars were used to enable a seamless transition to online learning across Global Studies subjects.

In Geography, there was a strong focus on project-based learning online, with Year 7 working on liveability projects, Year 8 on tourism, Year 10 on The Great Barrier Reef and Year 11 on their senior Geography projects.

Year 9 Commerce students created a radio advertisement for a product of their choice as part of their study of consumer affairs, recording audio and submitting it online.

Year 11 History students were able to discuss their historical investigations with their classmates through an online class conference. Year 12 Extension students enjoyed listening to a guest speaker online.

## Visual Arts: COVID-19 sparks creativity

The online learning period saw students of all ages embrace a wide range of Visual Arts projects, helping them to express their feelings during social isolation.

Teachers prioritised practical work to give students a creative outlet away from their screens.

"We taught visual arts without the visuals," one teacher commented.

It was a huge success, with students across all years creating amazing artworks using materials they had at home.

Year 7 made incredible mixed media collage images of landscapes, as well as creating cardboard 3D 'Haring' figures inspired by artist Keith Haring's work.

Year 10 students tapped into the unusual situation they were experiencing, exploring 'a sense of self in isolation' by creating art that reflected their image in their environment. They also made journal-based artwork, documenting their experiences and feelings associated with isolation.

Innovative approaches including online webinars were used to enable a seamless transition to online learning

Year 8 students illustrated colourful superhero comics, while Year 9 students created insects using Easter egg wrappers and other pieces found around the home.

Take a look at some of the wonderful projects undertaken by students over the page.

### Getty Museum Challenge: Years 1-6

A unique art history project, the *Getty Museum Challenge*, issued by the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, saw people around the globe recreating iconic paintings with objects they could find at home during the self-isolation period.

As part of their Term 2 online Art lessons, Primary students were introduced to the Getty Challenge and challenged to think 'outside the box' to come up with their own unique re-creations of well-known artworks at home with their family.

Students from Years 1-6 shared some wonderful re-creations.



## Adapting to online learning: Year 6

Year 6 were inspired by Gregg Segal's *Daily Bread* photography series; a collection of images of children from around the globe surrounded by their week's worth of food.

Instead of food, the Year 6 students photographed themselves surrounded by the items that helped them to successfully adapt to online learning. The results gave a fascinating insight into the lives of our students.





### Mixed media collages, Year 7

Inspired by the work of author and illustrator, Jeannie Baker, Year 7 students made incredible mixed media collage images of landscapes using objects found around their homes



### Reflecting on isolation: Year 10

Year 10 students tapped into the unusual situation they were experiencing, exploring 'a sense of self in isolation' by creating art that reflected their image in their environment. Students also made journal-based artwork documenting their experiences and feelings associated with isolation.



## STUDENTS REFLECT ON THE PERIOD OF ONLINE LEARNING



**Sofia Beverley, Year 10**

"I have found the switch to online learning a very new yet challenging experience. My independence and self-regulation skills have improved greatly, however, I miss being able to interact with my teachers and fellow students."



**Isabelle Spruce, Year 6**

"My online learning experience was a bit of a roller coaster! For me I found out that I actually quite like working independently but, on the other hand, I missed socialising with my friends. I think that the teachers did an amazing job keeping us under control, although I'm sure they [thought the] mute button was helpful!"



**Luke Talley, Year 8**

"I found the switch to online learning from home challenging at first, but over the few weeks I have been using it, I have adapted to the platform. I miss seeing my friends, but the Zoom mentor periods have been a great way to socialise. In my opinion, the School has done an excellent job at making online learning fun,

accessible and clear. The switch from three periods a day to four made concentrating on the subject and learning the material much easier and more enjoyable."



**Harrison Johnson, Year 6**

"My online learning experience helped me to learn a bit more about myself. For example, I feel I get more work done with less distractions and more space to think. I found that I really enjoy more family and pet time and feel that it makes me more happy. There have been some difficulties with work, but my

teachers always have great solutions. Not being able to see my friends and teachers is very disappointing, but the second I entered our class on Thursday, it was a great joy to see my friends safe and healthy."



**Keely Rao, Year 6**

"I have found the switch to online learning not too challenging and like a new adventure of opportunities. I wouldn't say I like it more than face-to-face school, but I quite enjoy the timetable and format of online teaching."



**William Stanley, Year 6**

"Online learning was a roller coaster of emotions, but I believe that it was a good experience for people to realise things about themselves as an independent learner. Definitely for some it was hard to resist distractions, but for the majority it was a worthwhile experience."

## **CELEBRATING FOUNDERS' DAY - COVID-STYLE**

The School celebrated its 102nd birthday in July, marking the opening of the Church of England Grammar School for Girls in 1918.

However, the 2020 event was a little different to the School's usual Founders' Day celebrations, with the Assembly live-streamed from three different locations – the Cathedral, Horbury Hunt Hall and the NGS Boardroom.

The Right Reverend Dr Peter Stuart, Bishop of Newcastle, and the Very Reverend Katherine Bowyer, Dean of Newcastle, joined the online service, which was supported by the School Orchestra, Choir and Student Leaders – all online.

## **LIVESTREAM CHARITY CONCERT A FIRST**

NGS students turned their focus to the global impact of COVID-19 in June, hosting a livestream concert to raise funds for African refugees affected by the pandemic.

The Senior School Jazz Ensemble, *Brass RaZoo*, performed the concert, which was livestreamed via YouTube. Viewers were encouraged to make a donation to the Global Alliance for Peace, a Newcastle-based charity that is campaigning for peace and the rights of African refugees affected by war.

The fundraising goal of \$2,500 was well and truly surpassed, with more than \$6,000 raised towards the charity's program called SHEFRA – Stay Home Emergency Food Relief for Africa, to help women and their families originally from the Democratic Republic of Congo, who are now living as refugees in Nairobi, Kenya.

The concert was an initiative of the School's membership of Round Square, an international network of 200 schools that are committed to nurturing forward-thinking, global citizens.

Round Square teaches us to seek out, discover and embrace an understanding of different cultures and nationalities in ways that promote meaningful respect and understanding, and this event for the Global Alliance for Peace allowed the students at Newcastle Grammar School to gain a meaningful understanding of the effects of COVID-19 felt by many others around the world who are too often forgotten.

*Year 12 student James Peters,  
Chair of the Round Square  
Student Committee*

## BRINGING THE WORLD TO NGS: ROUND SQUARE LEADERSHIP INTERVIEWS



With NGS students unable to go out to the world, Chair of the Round Square Student Committee, James Peters, found a way to bring the world to NGS, with a series of video interviews with leaders from Australia and abroad.

James conducted the online interviews with community leaders from many different walks of life throughout Term 3 to gain insights into how they had used their strengths to serve others. The inspiring interviews were shared with students on SchoolBox.

His interview subjects included:

- Governor of NSW, Her Excellency the Honourable Margaret Beazley
- Founder and CEO of charity Ozharvest Australia, Ronnie Kahn
- Former NGS teacher and current Australian High Commissioner to New Zealand, the Honourable Patricia Forsythe
- 2016 Young Australian of the Year and Co-founder of Orange Sky charity, Lucas Patchett
- Professor Munjed Al Muderis, orthopaedic surgeon and human rights activist who fled Iraq during the regime of Saddam Hussein.

# STUDENT WELLBEING IN FOCUS

NGS placed a strong focus on supporting students' emotional wellbeing, finding innovative ways to maintain close connections with friends and the School community as they dealt with the disruption to everyday life by COVID-19.

In addition to schoolwork, there will be lots of opportunities for our students to connect with each other. While the Government is talking about social distancing, our version is that it should be called physical distancing, because maintaining connections during this difficult time is going to be a challenge for many of us.

*Mrs Erica Thomas, Head of School, video message to parents, 23 March 2020*



## PRIMARY SCHOOL WELLBEING INITIATIVES

The COVID-19 shutdown of face-to-face teaching didn't stop Park Campus staff leading wonderful celebrations to mark Easter, May the 4th Star Wars Day and 'Fancy Friday'; a day of fun hats and hairstyles. All these events were celebrated remotely, helping students to maintain connection with one another and their teachers.

As well as having an Easter hat parade, the Easter Bunny (a.k.a, Mr Cameron Logan) handed out 250 Easter bags to students, with families driving up to the school gates to receive the delivery. Many students held up homemade Easter messages for their teachers and staff from their car windows as they drove by. In addition to Easter treats, the bags included coloured chalk so students could create messages on their driveways and footpaths to share with their local community.

Other initiatives included:

- **Physical challenges:** PE teachers, Cameron Logan and Ryan Wood, set up physical challenges and 'Minute to Win It' challenges that students and their families could attempt, with many sharing their fun videos.
- **Reflection diary:** As part of their home learning packs, students were given a reflection diary, in which they could choose to document their time at home through writing, drawing and other activities.
- **Check-in sessions:** Many Primary students had one-one-one check-in sessions with their teachers, to check how they were coping and help them adjust to the many changes they were facing.
- **Lunchtime get togethers:** Some Year 3 students got together online using the video platform Zoom to share lunchtime, giving them a chance to chat with their friends like they usually would in the playground.
- **Pet photo competition:** Students sent in photos of their pets, with prizes awarded for: cutest, smallest, ugliest, largest, most unusual pet, as well as most pets in one photo.

What has COVID taught me?  
 It has taught me this: You must never think that a huge challenge is impossible. You must believe that no matter what, you can find solutions and get through the unknown, along with bringing those around you on the journey.  
*Mrs Aicha Dyer, Head of Primary School, video message to parents, 16 July 2020*



Above:  
 Mrs Dalal Benko-Nehme's Year 6 class enjoyed bringing their pets to online learning.

Left: Miley won the 'Cutest Pet' category.

## SECONDARY SCHOOL WELLBEING INITIATIVES

From sports to social activities, Secondary School students remained closely connected with one another via a wide range of online initiatives throughout the lockdown period. The School Captains set up a page on SchoolBox where students could share book and movie recommendations, blogs and videos about what they were doing during quarantine. Other initiatives included:

- **Online assemblies:** Weekly School Assemblies were held online, led by the School Captains. Assemblies included a wide range of contributions from students in their homes, with videos used to highlight student achievements. Parents were also able to access Assemblies, with a record 1,000+ users logging in to watch one Assembly alone.
- **The Year 11 Presentation Ball – home edition:** After the Year 11 Ball was cancelled, Head of Positive Education, Mrs Marnie Thomas, encouraged Year 11 students to participate in a 'home edition' instead. Many students took up the challenge, donning their formal wear and sharing videos of themselves dancing with family members on the Saturday night in April when the ball had been due to take place.
- **Home Olympics challenge:** Students posted videos of themselves taking on 'virtual' Olympic sports challenges, from virtual boxing to weightlifting, synchronised swimming (on land) and fencing – all done from their living rooms or backyards.
- **The 'TikTok' challenge:** Each week, a 15-second fun dance from the popular social media platform TikTok was chosen and demonstrated by staff and students for others to replicate. Staff, students, their pets, their siblings, parents and even grandparents threw themselves into the challenge, videoing their dance performances and sharing them via the SchoolBox social stream.

## 'IT MATTERS THAT WE COME TO SCHOOL EVERY DAY'

**School Captains, Jadon Routley and Evgenia Petrelis, worked tirelessly to keep students connected during their isolation. Jadon's address to the first full Assembly post isolation – held online at School – captured how students' felt about the difficult period.**

"While we may not be able to share the same hall as each other just yet, this is the first assembly that we are all viewing from school; and that in itself is a momentous achievement.

A lot has been happening around the world lately, so much so that we hardly need to describe it, but if there is one message to take with us from these terrible events it is that we are always stronger united than divided. This is a simple thing to say, but when the time comes to make good on it those words, well, it's not always an easy promise to keep. We give these messages every week as much an address to the school as it is a thank you to you.

You kept that promise and continue to make good on it every day. From Year 12s manning the gates, to every single post-it-note of gratitude to a teacher last week, it is these little things that mean a great deal. Your feelings mean the world, maybe to someone you would never have imagined."

It matters that we come to school every day. It matters that we have a place where we learn and grow, supported by a family we seldom remember to thank, but never fail to trust – and it mattered to us when that was taken away. I hope together we can rewrite the story of this year so that it is remembered for the great deeds we did together, not the dark days we spent apart.

*Jadon Routley, School Captain*

## AN IDEAL TIME TO EXPLORE EMOTIONS

Students and staff were encouraged to tune into their emotions during the home learning period through an innovative range of activities accessible online, from songs to podcasts to TikTok-style dances.

Emotional management was the focus of the School's Hunter Term (Term 2), which proved ideal given the huge changes presented by the pandemic.

A different emotion was explored each week: gratitude, fear, hope, sadness, joy, anger and love. A comprehensive page of information and interactive activities to explore the emotion was accessible via the online learning management platform, SchoolBox.

A scientifically validated 'tune in' activity was also provided, such as meditation, mindfulness and gratitude letters.

It has been an opportunity to encourage students, staff and families to tune in to their emotions and discover ways to manage how they are feeling and experiencing the world.

*Ms Marnie Thomas, Head of House: Hunter 9-12 and Head of Positive Education*

## UNDERGOING A COVID-19 TEST:

### A STUDENT'S REFLECTION

Students with any COVID-19 symptoms, such as a fever or sore throat, were advised to stay home and undergo testing before returning to school.

Year 7 student, Zoe Fielden, describes how she felt undergoing a test after developing a sore throat.

*"When the doctor said I needed a coronavirus test, I was a bit scared because I didn't want to get coronavirus, but happy I could miss school. I didn't want to end up in hospital and having needles.*

*The test: Later that day I rocked up to the testing place and even though I knew it was necessary and the tester was being perfectly nice, I couldn't help but feel secretly hurt and a bit sad that all this protection was needed against me, like I was a threat to society – she had on a big mask and face visor, a big jumpsuit covering her clothes, a face mask and gloves.*

*The test itself did not actually hurt as much as I thought it would! It was a weird stinging, like you needed to sneeze or cough sensation, when they stuck it [the swab] up your nose you couldn't cough, no matter how bad you needed to, in case you had corona. Then I got McDonalds and was happy, because it is such a rare treat.*

*The result: When I was waiting, even though, deep down I sort of knew I didn't have it because I felt fine apart from a sore throat, I felt a bit nervous at the possibility it could happen. When I got the negative result, I felt relieved and that I wasn't a nuisance to society anymore, that people wouldn't be scared of me."*

# COMMUNICATION WITH THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Maintaining clear and timely communication with parents and the broader School community was a key aspect of the School's success in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Information and resources were provided almost daily via our usual communication and learning management platform, SchoolBox. We continued to send information directly to parents via email and through our weekly newsletter.

For the first time, regular video messages were shared from the Heads of School and School Captains, helping to maintain close connections with students and families.

We also posted regular updates on social media, using the NGS Facebook page to ensure information reached families quickly.

NGS was featured in the local media on several occasions, highlighting the School's success in dealing with the crisis.



We are looking to ensure that your child is as safe as they can be at school, our teaching staff are safe and the community around us stays safe. We don't 100% know what is going to happen with COVID over the next few weeks, but rest assured our teaching staff are working really hard to ensure that our school environment is one that is clearly and easily safe for every child in our school.

*Mrs Erica Thomas, Head of School, video message to parents and students, May 2020*



It's absolutely incredible how every child in Primary School is doing their best, using Zoom to stay connected with your teachers, with your friends and your learning. I am so proud of you all. It is incredible how you have made this adjustment.

*Mrs Alichia Dyer, Head of Primary, video message to parents and students*



While we are physically distanced from all our friends, it is really important to keep the social connections that we've built over the past few years, because they are a really important part of who we are.

*Video message from 2020 School Captains, Evgenia Petrelis and Jadon Routley, to fellow students during the shutdown period*



NGS Facebook post as students returned to School following the shutdown.

## A NEW ERA OF ‘VIRTUAL’ PARENT-TEACHER COMMUNICATION

The COVID-19 restrictions also saw NGS embrace technology for many parent communications that would usually happen face-to-face.

### Online parent-teacher interviews

We trialled our first online parent-teacher interviews in May, with Year 7 parents meeting their children’s teachers via an online video platform.

A survey of parents showed that the interviews were a great success, with the majority saying they actually preferred the convenient, focused, online format.

Subsequent parent-teacher interviews for other year groups were all held online.

Other events that moved to the online environment included:

- An Information Evening for families of Year 7 students due to start in 2021.
- A ‘Bringing learning in Kindergarten to Life’ webinar for families of prospective Primary students.
- Subject Selection Evening for students moving into Year 11 in 2021.
- Webinars such as the ‘2020 The Future of Education’ webinar, in which key staff led a discussion of the many changes that had been prompted by COVID-19 in education broadly, as well as at NGS.

## PARENT REFLECTIONS

In May, a comprehensive survey about the online learning period was sent to all parents to gather valuable feedback about what worked well and where improvements might be made.

Many parents voiced how impressed they were at the speed with which NGS Online was rolled out, citing the high level of communication and instruction, teachers' ability to move quickly to online platforms, as well as exploring new and innovative ways to teach.

Most of the parents indicated that the online experience was extremely positive, particularly the level of support and learning activities in the classroom, the high level of engaging learning experiences (both on and offline) and the clear instructions provided on learning platforms.

The continuation of structured lessons and timetables was also appreciated, especially during a time when the remainder of children's lives were disrupted.

Key improvement areas for consideration for future online learning periods

- Primary: limiting screen time for younger children and considering the high level of supervision still required.
- Enhanced student-teacher classroom interaction and one-on-one opportunities for students.

Innovations parents would like to see continue:

- Online access to Assemblies.
- Regular timetabled online lessons and live streaming for students who are at home sick.
- Continuation of the longer period timetable.
- Online parent-teacher interviews.

Following the parent survey, we conducted a series of in-depth interviews with parents of students ranging from Years 1 to 12. Parents described the impact that the online learning had on their children's wellbeing and academic progress, their own experiences working at home with their children, beneficial and challenging aspects of online education, the support their family received from their teachers and the school and what we might take away for the future from this experience.

I think Newcastle (Grammar School) did an exceptional job of maintaining school and maintaining the expectation that school could be maintained. And, not saying this is too hard, but simply, this is how we're going to get it done. And I think that attitude of tenacity and determination was really very admirable and there was an outstanding standard set for everybody.

*Parent of Secondary School students*

Parent comments included:

#### Academic learning

"I think that the classes that they both really enjoyed were the mixed media kind of thing, where they had to do things away from their computer as well as on their computer. And I think that was something that came into their classes towards more towards the end of the time at home."

**Parent of Secondary students**

#### Independent learning

"I thought they're going to need every minute of assistance. But actually, by the end of it, they were quite independent with their logging on and logging off, listening to what they had to do and things like that."

**Parent of Primary students**

#### Sport online

"He went from, I think, we figured it was like 10 to 11 sessions of sport a week to absolutely nothing.... it [isolation] took away all the physical stuff, which I think is why he engaged so well with Mr J's [sport] online learning platform... because he had them running up and down stairs and doing things, and they were often doing that while listening to him on one device and then chatting with one of his friends who was doing the same things at his house."

**Parent of Secondary student**

#### Appreciation for teachers

"You know, I can't imagine the effort that all of the staff went to for a prolonged and very intense period. So, you know, I really do think that they did an amazing job. And I'm grateful that they [children's names] got to continue to learn at all at home."

**Parent of Primary students**

## NGS IN THE NEWS

The School's successful switch to the online learning environment was highlighted in the local media:

- NBN News featured Head of Wellbeing, Mrs Marnie Thomas, and Director of Learning and Teaching, Mrs Lisa Peterson, discussing the move to online learning in April.
- The transition back to school was also highlighted by NBN news, with parents interviewed about their children returning to school at Park Campus.

*"One of the things we do as teachers is interact with students and being able to read the room is so important in judging the pace of a lesson. Learning how to adapt to that [online] has been a real challenge but one our teachers have risen to."*

**Mrs Lisa Peterson, Director of Learning and Teaching, NBN News, April 2020**



# THE EDUCATIONAL LEGACY OF COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed education forever. The dramatic changes to the way subjects are taught and learned will have a lasting impact, not only at NGS, but across the education sector globally.

Students of all ages will carry with them the long-term benefits of having mastered many aspects of online learning, including developing greater independent learning skills.

The experience confirmed that teaching staff have the skills to leverage digital education strategies to enrich the learning of their students.

COVID-19 has also highlighted the many opportunities digital technology offers to extend and enhance students' learning, not just locally, but globally.

The transition to online learning programmes captures the essence of the major pedagogical and delivery changes that are happening in education.

*Mrs Erica Thomas, Head of School*

This experience has opened up so many options that could increase equity and access to education for students across the world. It will be exciting to see how the global education community continues to work together to support each other and students post-COVID-19.

*Mrs Lisa Peterson, Director of Learning and Teaching*

## REFLECTING ON WHAT HELPS OUR STUDENTS ADAPT AND THRIVE

In September 2020, after reflecting on the incredible past six months, we invited parents to join a webinar to discuss the impact that the COVID-19 experience would have for our students and for the way NGS approaches teaching and learning in the future.

Head of School, Mrs Erica Thomas, Head of Primary, Mrs Alisha Dyer, Deputy Head of School, Dr Alan Parsons, and Director of Sport, Mr Daniel Kozey, outlined the key learnings from the period and some of the changes they foresaw at NGS as a result.

The parent and student surveys about online learning revealed three key elements that enabled students to adapt, thrive and become independent learners during the online learning period; a sense of autonomy and control, feeling they had mastered new skills and a sense of purpose.

Students who found the online learning period more difficult were those who struggled with self-regulation and were easily distracted. The experience reinforced the importance of students learning the difficult skill of self-regulation.

It also highlighted the importance of the model of inquiry-based learning, which was adopted in Primary four years ago. Inquiry-based learning helps students to develop skills including communication, independence, the power of questioning and research skills. Students who thrived when learning from home relied on these skills, reinforcing the value of this model of teaching and learning. As a result, we are looking at ways to implement a greater focus on the inquiry-based learning approach for our Secondary students.

The period also highlighted the important role that active play has in helping develop students' resilience and creativity. When learning from home, students embraced the opportunity to take part in a wide range of online physical activity options that were different to the organised sport they might usually play. Students loved getting involved in activities, including dances, fitness challenges and online workouts, all enhancing their wellbeing.

Students who thrived during online learning had a sense of autonomy and control. They experienced a level of mastery of new skills and they felt a sense of purpose and engagement, feeling a part of something greater than themselves.

*Dr Alan Parsons, Deputy Head of School*

## WHAT DOES THE FUTURE LOOK LIKE AT NGS?

While we continue to reflect on our teachers' and students' experiences during the past year, we are moving ahead with changes to way we do things across four areas:

- While face-to-face teaching and students' close connection with both their teachers and peers remains vital, the future will see a move towards more flexible **blended learning**; a mixture of face-to-face and some elements of online learning, especially for older students. This will help prepare our students for the future, in which much of their learning and work may be in an online environment.
- The **Co-curricular program** is being restructured to build on many of the learnings from the COVID-19 period, when students reaped the benefits of *engaging in creativity and active play at home*. *The myNGS Passport* will tap into students' curiosity and creativity – skills that are vital for their future. It will give all students from K-12 the opportunity to build leadership skills through a range of activities across areas of movement, creativity, outdoor adventure, environment and community service.
- More than ever, it is important to look at students' **pathways to the future**, with COVID-19 resulting in major changes to workforce, industry and university sectors. We will look at the way post-school pathways are changing to ensure all Year 12 students leave school looking forward to a positive future. Micro-credentialling (obtaining credentials in different skills through short courses) will be a focus of the programme.
- The way we **communicate** with parents and families changed significantly as a result of COVID-19 and many of those changes are here to stay. The Primary School has recently created a new model of video assemblies that can be viewed by students at school and shared with families to view at home. It is proving very popular, with families feeling a closer connection to what is happening at school. There may be future opportunities to parents to see what is happening in the classroom via live links. Online parent-teacher interviews and webinars for parents are also being further explored, opening up the opportunities for parents to engage with their child's education at NGS.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to the Board Chair, Catherine Wilkinson, for her leadership in 2020 and to our volunteer Board members, whose primary concern was the support of the school to ensure its future stability. The skills the Board brought to assist ensured the School not only survived, it thrived.

Thank you to the NGS School Executive and key staff who were willing to meet at any time, calmly managed changing restrictions and mixed messages and delivered an outstanding educational platform.

Thank you to the 2020 NGS staff. Every staff member was impacted in some way and the School is grateful for the way you managed change and the unknown.

Thank you to our School Captains, Jadon Routley and Evgenia Petrelis, for your leadership of the student body and thoughtful and engaging approach to all things online.

Thank you to the NGS parents and community for your wonderful support of the School during this time.

2020 was a special time to be in our School. Congratulations and thank you to the 2020 NGS students for everything you achieved.

Thank you to Dean Katherine Bowyer, who keenly welcomed us back into the Cathedral for a carol service with no congregational singing after a nine month absence in December 2020.

Finally, thank you to Megan Howe for writing this history of our School.





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