

A Spotlight on Albany Senior High School

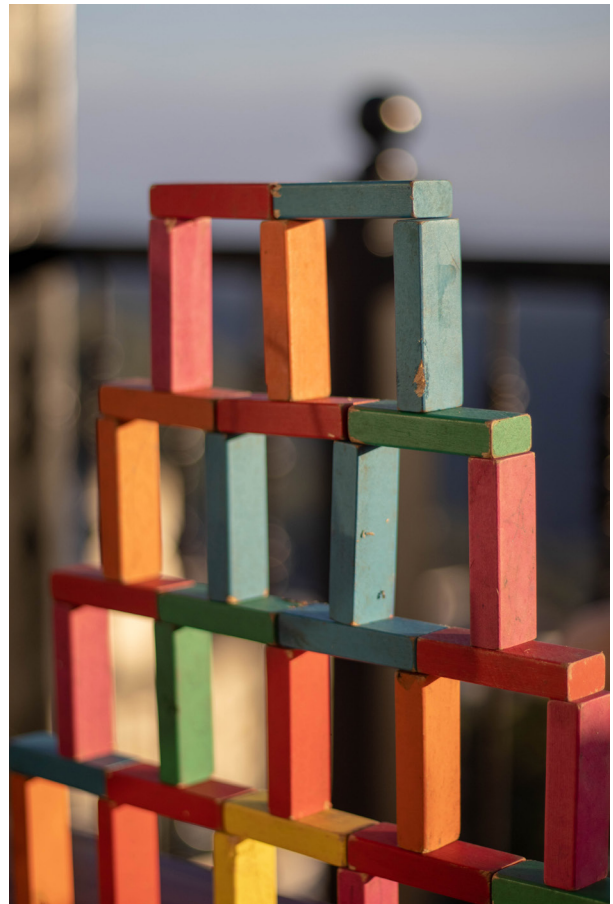
Hybrid learning and developing
learner agency by supporting
self-directed learning



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With several important building blocks already in place, Albany Senior High were able to transition quickly to online learning.

Initially they simply replicated their onsite programme online, but quickly realised that they needed to simplify their already pared back timetable even further. Students enjoyed these lockdown changes so much that some of the changes became a “normal” part of their on-site learning programmes. Their goal is long-term – to learn from the pandemic and build a schooling system designed for disruption, so that learning can be continuous no matter when and where learning takes place.



This spotlight is made up of commentary and artifacts that tell the story of Albany Senior High School’s response to the pandemic in Claire Amos’s words.

Thanks so much to Claire Amos and the school for their generosity in sharing ASHS’s story and resources that might be of use to other schools.

Why did you make this change?

Universal design for learning, responsive assessment practices, learner agency and self-directed learning have been part of a strategic focus at Albany Senior High School for the last three years. When the pandemic struck, and we entered lockdown for the first time it quickly became apparent that the initiatives we were focusing on were more important than ever when experiencing what was to become large-scale and long-term disruption.

Feedback gathered from our students and teachers over the very first lockdown suggested we could benefit from developing learner agency and designing learning that enables students to work in an increasingly self-directed manner. We realised we needed to practice for this when we were in school, so that learners could cope with the more self-directed approaches of online learning. We also needed to ensure that we designed for enhancing learning relationships, collaboration and connection both online and offline and that we would have mechanisms for ensuring that engagement with learning is tracked, so that “no-one slips through the cracks”. We also needed to review how we approached NCEA so as to maximize opportunities to curate and collect evidence of learning over time, both online and in school.

At the beginning of 2022 it became apparent that the ground had shifted and we were no longer going to all be in school or all in lockdown. We recognised that as well as focusing on increasingly self-directed learning underpinned by universal design for learning, we also needed to ensure all learning was available online anytime so as to cater for any number of students (and teachers) isolating at home for a period of time.

What did you do?

A practice run

Over the past two years, and through multiple lockdowns and then the hybrid learning of the last term, we have been through iterations of development. However, we were very fortunate because we already had in place many of the building blocks that enabled us to move fairly seamlessly to online learning when the first lockdown was announced. Before moving to lockdown, however, we were able to do an onsite practice run of what learning would look like if we did have to go into lockdown. Students came to school as usual and in each classroom, learning was delivered via Google Meets. This meant that when we went into lockdown and students had to receive their learning on Google Meet, they had already experienced it and so had teachers. This helped to allay some anxiety.

The building blocks we already had in place for remote learning

Our timetable: Though our school is fairly young (opened in 2009), we have some strong traditions that held us in good stead when we went into the first lockdown. Perhaps the most significant of these was [our timetable](#).

- » Pared back timetable which includes fewer but chunkier sessions in terms of length, rather than rushing through lots of learning sessions
- » Engagement in impact projects which takes place every Wednesday and assists young people to develop a sense of learner agency and working in self-directed ways
- » Tutorial 2 X 100min chunks of time where we do pastoral work, talk about each learner's journey and provide academic coaching. Hence, we already had an inbuilt mechanism for checking in with learners. These are small group (no more than 18 students), vertical grouping with the same whānau teachers for the 3 years young people are at the school

Online learning: We already had the following digital capabilities:

- » 1:1 devices and a focus on making sure we used 1:1 devices effectively
- » Consistent use of Google Classroom
- » Really clear protocols around how teachers used those devices effectively for teaching and learning

These building blocks assisted us to move quite seamlessly into remote learning when the first lockdown was announced. We pretty much translated our normal weekly timetable into the online environment using Google Meet.

The first lockdown

The following are some artifacts from our first lockdown which provide an overview of our approach:

Our General Expectations

- » Put your health and your family first.
- » Your week will be separated into three different blocks. Monday and Tuesday structured learning, Wednesday Impact Projects and Thursday and Friday self-directed learning (teachers available for check-ins).
- » Check your emails at least once a day and reply if necessary.
- » We will use one consistent platform (Google Classrooms) for sharing learning activities and one consistent platform for meet-ups (Google Meet).
- » It is essential that you continue with your learning and working towards NCEA assessments where possible.
- » Remember teachers will be with their families as well, so know they will respond to your emails and give feedback as they can.
- » Your "attendance" and engagement will be monitored, so please ensure you are taking an active role in your lessons. Join your Google Meets (Monday, Tuesday and Impact) and login to your Google Classrooms each day.

Our priorities for lockdown:

Wellbeing

Over this period of lockdown it is vital that everyone's wellbeing is prioritised, learners and staff.

You will be feeling a range of emotions and many of these emotions will be based on your previous experience in lockdown. How can you take care of your wellbeing over this second lockdown?

- » Emotions - don't suppress and ignore these. Name your emotions → acknowledge why you feel this way → validate these feelings and use the emotion to motivate how you respond.
- » Be active! Exercise and get out of the house every day.
- » Do things that boost your mental health (happiness) and avoid things that don't.
- » Get enough sleep.
- » Prioritise work and make achievable to do lists/ goals.
- » Stay connected to your friends and family. Share your worries, learners get in contact with your tutor teacher. Teachers get in contact with your SSL or DP.

Connectedness

Remaining connected with your Tutor teacher is essential. Tutor teachers will be working with learners to ensure they are keeping focused, tracking their progress and supporting individuals to find the best balance between wellbeing and school work.

To support learner's focus and engagement, Specialist and Impact teachers will be passing on congratulations or concerns to Tutor teachers. Tutor teachers will be holding one-on-one meetings with all learners in their tutor class, and they will also be the main connection between whānau and school.

NCEA Achievement & Assessment from Home

It is essential that learners continue with their NCEA assessments where possible. Being early in the year, your priority is making the most of your learning.

Learners, please check in with your specialist subject teachers, Impact Project Mentor and Tutor to confirm which assessments you will work on from home (note that some of these may be different than those planned for in school learning).

Note: And whilst we are focusing on continuing learning to begin assessments, it is important to stress that although we value NCEA, we value the wellbeing of our young people more!

ASHS ONLINE Student Expectations

**We might be in lockdown, but our learning continues!
Be there, be you, be awesome!**

- **Google Meetings**
 - Turn up on time, everytime. Set your calendar alerts!
 - Camera on. No avatars. Consider your background and look fab!
 - Microphones muted unless asking questions or in discussion.
 - Be respectful, inclusive and kind at all times.
- **Google Classroom**
 - Check in to Google Classroom for every tutorial and class.
 - Complete learning activities as best you can, if you get stuck contact your teacher!
 - All comments and posts should be class related!
- **Gmail**
 - Check your inbox regularly. Respond to emails.
 - Email your teachers if you need extra support.
 - Don't expect responses outside school hours, but do expect a response, we are here to help!

Reflection, feedback and taking a long-term view

We approached the pandemic with a view that this disruption would be for the next 2 – 3 years. Therefore, we had to continually learn from the experience and get increasingly better over time at responding to the disruptions.

During the first lockdown, we quickly realised that we could not simply repeat online what we did in normal onsite school. It was not sustainable practice for students or teachers. Teachers often had children at home that they were taking care of and students were learning from home and often had other responsibilities. We had to pare back our delivery without removing our structures. We decided to use the first two days of the week to set up the learning for the week so that the second half of the week could be used more flexibly.

At the end of lockdown we collected feedback from parent/whānau, students and teachers. The questions we asked included the following:

1. What did you enjoy during lockdown?
2. What would you like us to hang onto now that we are back learning at school?

It was very clear; the students had enjoyed the flexibility that came from using the first two days of the week to set up the learning with more teacher-directed instruction, so that the second half of the week could be used more flexibly with self-directed learning. This then became part of our normal, onsite learning programme. We made significant changes to our learning programme as a result of our experiences in lockdown which continue to this day.

Hybrid learning in 2022 – keeping it simple

By the time hybrid learning came around, we were very experienced at online learning during lockdowns. However, hybrid learning was much more complex and tiring and it became important to keep it simple. We had three simple requirements for hybrid learning:

1. Learning will be available for everyone, anywhere and anytime. Every lesson would be available on Google Classroom. For example, live lessons would be recorded and made available on Google Classroom for anytime, anywhere access.
2. Students isolating for only a week, will continue to access their learning through Google Classroom. They will not automatically have a 1:1 session with the teacher unless they do not understand something and need support.
3. If more than a week, teachers are expected to provide 1:1 check-ins and learning support sessions.

Remember the commitment to delivering more directed learning on a Monday and Tuesday and then more self-directed learning on a Thursday and Friday still stands. Please ensure that you are designing for this in each of your classes.

Hybrid Learning at ASHS

1. Every lesson needs to be available online regardless of who is in school and who is home.
2. Train up students to go to their Google Classroom every lesson and to do this automatically if away from school.
3. Teachers follow up by email if students miss two or more classes.
4. If students aren't engaging from home, work with the Tutor teacher to re-engage.
5. Use the Self-directed Learning Phase One (or Two) structure. We need to support every student with their sense of learner agency!

Department Examples

English Department - [2022 English strategy for hybrid learning](#)

Mathematics - [Maths Dept Hybrid Learning Key Processes](#)

Languages Department - [Strategies for Hybrid Teaching and Learning 2022](#)

Designing for learner agency by supporting self-directed learning

It has been very clear to us throughout this time of disrupted learning that student self-directedness and learner agency are hugely important to enabling students to work effectively in times of disrupted learning. Therefore, we must be very deliberate in designing learning for self-direction. Our “Developing learner agency and supporting student self-directedness” document, in [page 8](#), describes our design of learning.

What have you learned?

- » Do less better - pare back timetables to recognise that people need time and will potentially be juggling multiple responsibilities if home.
- » That you need to keep it simple
- » That you need to be consistent and repeat the message often to staff, students and community
- » That it needs to be embedded and part of your school vision, annual strategy/plan/review cycle; do not make it additive
- » That you need to resource it, (i.e., provide PD time and time for collaboration).

What was your change strategy? How did you take people on the journey with you, if appropriate?

Our change strategy is really about developmental change management, (i.e., it has all been part of long term incremental changes in which we are working towards a vision for the future). Our “Change Strategy” document, in [page 9](#), is an attempt to map out how we implement our change strategy year on year. This is a process we have refined over the last three years and is representative of a cycle rather than a linear process.

What advice do you have for other schools?

- » Close the digital divide. Have a digital strategy that focuses on consistent use of platforms, supporting learner agency, and proactively and explicitly upskilling your staff and students to use technology effectively.
- » Learner agency is fundamental to hybrid learning being sustainable.
- » You can't over-communicate to the community! They appreciate regular, informal and concise updates about what you are doing and why.
- » It needs to be seen as laying the foundation for future changes, not a temporary change until your “return to normal”.
- » It helps to be a school leader who sees themselves as a leader of learning and with a responsibility for future-proofing your school. Being passionate “future thinkers” BEFORE the pandemic meant many, if not all, strategies that became important were already in train before the lockdowns began. If you are working on a school vision and strategy that is future-focused, the chances are that you will be preparing for a disrupted education system already.

So what is next?

We keep on building on our current practice to see how we can evolve it to create learning that is fit for purpose in a rapidly changing world.

See also our [Albany Senior High School - Hybrid and Self-directed Learning document](#) for more information.

Albany Senior High School Resources

Albany Senior High School has generously shared the following resources with us:

1. Our 'Learning from Home' Weekly Learning Structure

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Period 1	Subject Google Meeting 9:30	Tutorial Google Meeting 9:30	Impact Project Google Meeting 10:00	Tutorial Google Meeting 9:30	**Subject Google Meeting 9:30
Period 2	Subject Google Meeting 11:00	Subject Google Meeting 11:00	*Self-directed learning	**Subject Google Meeting 11:00	**Subject Google Meeting 11:00
Period 3	Subject Google Meeting 1:30	Subject Google Meeting 1:30	*Self-directed learning*	**Subject Google Meeting 1:30	**Subject Google Meeting 1:30

*** Impact Project Mentors will always be available for one-on-one/drop-in support during your self-directed learning time. They may also schedule Google Meetings at this time as needed.**

**** Thursday/Friday Subject Google Meetings will be more of a check-in, if there is a meeting at all. Teachers will support you to become more self-directed on these days over time.**

Specialist Subjects

- » Monday and Tuesday Specialist Subjects will begin with an online Google Meet at 9:30am, 11:00am and 1:30pm. This will be when your teacher will set the goals and focus for the week and frame up your learning tasks.
- » Teachers will upload tasks/lessons for the day by 9:00am. Make sure that you check the classes that you would have that day.
- » Thursday and Friday Specialist Subject lessons will be more flexible but you will need to login to your Google classroom and continue with your assessments and learning.
- » Your teachers may nominate a time when they will be online and available to answer emails, questions, etc.

Tutorials

- » There will be a scheduled meetup twice a week on Tuesday and Thursday mornings. PLEASE ATTEND your Tutorial session at 9:30am via Google Meet. Every second week you will have a one-on-one chat with your tutor to support your progress.
- » Check your Tutorial Google Classroom for information at least twice per week.

Impact Projects

- » You will continue to complete your Impact Project remotely.
- » Mentors will update Google Classroom by 9:00am every Wednesday. Meet your mentor and impact project class in a Google Meet at 10:00am (unless otherwise negotiated).
- » Some projects will have clear road blocks within the lockdown world. In this case, go back to the heart of what the project or Hub focus is - how could your initial ideas be adapted towards a new project or outcome?
- » Impact Project NCEA Assessments will continue remotely.
- » Retrospective time will not take place over lockdown.

2. Developing Learner Agency and Supporting Self-directedness

Important things to note

- » All learners will continue to have a full five-day timetable each week.
- » All learners will be onsite and supervised and supported by a teacher in all periods throughout the school week.
- » All changes will be introduced in a slow and staged way with regular checking and reflecting on effectiveness.
- » All decisions about what the students prioritise will be made in partnership with their teachers.
- » Any students who want or need to continue working with their timetabled teacher throughout the week will be supported to do so.

Why are we focusing on this now?

Feedback from our students and teachers suggests we could benefit from the following things: developing learner agency and designing learning that enables students to work in an increasingly self-directed manner. We need to practise for this when we are in school, so that learners can cope with the more self-directed approaches of online learning. We also need to ensure that we design for enhancing learning relationships, collaboration and connection both online and offline and that we have mechanisms for ensuring that engagement with learning is tracked, so that “no-one slips through the cracks”. We also need to review how we approach NCEA so as to maximise opportunities to curate and collect evidence of learning over time, both online and in school.

What is learner agency?

Learner agency is about having the power, combined with choices, to take meaningful action and see the

results of your decisions. It can be thought of as a catalyst for change or transformation. Within a school context, learner agency is about shifting the ownership of learning from teachers to students, enabling students to have the understanding, ability, and opportunity to be part of the learning design and to take action to intervene in the learning process, to affect outcomes and become powerful lifelong learners. [Source](#)

What is self-directed learning?

Self-directed learning is an instructional (teaching and learning) strategy where the students, with guidance from the teacher, decide what and how they will learn. It can be done individually or with group learning, but the overall concept is that students are supported to take ownership of their learning. [Source](#)

How do the two relate to each other?

Self-directed learning is an instructional (teaching and learning) strategy and learner agency is something that the learner demonstrates. The two are interdependent in that, by experiencing self-directed learning, students are supported to develop greater learner agency. The greater the sense of learner agency a student has, the more capable they will become of effective self-directed learning. Experiencing self-directed learning and developing learner agency will support our young people in becoming effective life-long learners.

How will we do this in a meaningful and manageable way?

We are making this manageable for both the teacher and our learners by maintaining our timetable throughout the week and primarily focusing on self-directed learning on Thursday and Friday. All learners and all learning will be supervised and supported by a teacher every day of the school week. This is important as it will enable students who need or want to continue to learn as usual (i.e., alongside their teacher following their normal timetable) will be supported to do so.

Monday & Tuesday

Students experience structured learning in Specialist Subjects as normal and focus on setting up learning for the week. Teachers design learning and assessment to support self-direction.

Wednesday

Students participate in Impact Projects within their Impact Project Hubs whilst being supported to work in an increasing self-directed manner.

Thursday & Friday

Students are supported to work in an increasingly self-directed manner choosing where to work and what to prioritise. Teachers are available to support as needed.

3. Albany Senior High School Change Strategy

At the beginning of Term Four, all students complete the annual Teaching and Learning Snapshot which measures their experience of the things we aimed to do in the prior annual plan.

[Teaching and Learning Snapshot Form](#)

The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) began their Analysis of Variance for the current year, based on academic data and student voice, with each DP taking responsibility for the portfolio strand. AOV continues to get updated up until the beginning of the following year once grades are confirmed.

[2021 ASHS Analysis of Variance](#)

Our annual plan is co-constructed with the SLT at the beginning of Term four based on academic data and the feedback gathered from our middle leaders and the Teaching and Learning snapshot completed by all students. DPs take responsibility for leading the work on their respective strands from the current year. (In 2020, we reviewed it midyear to respond to the pandemic. Interestingly not much needed to change).

[ASHS Annual Plan 2022](#)

SLT meets to review how we function as a team and we negotiate the rules of engagement for the following year and confirm the SLT roles and responsibilities for the following year. We are working on the idea that no DP holds one portfolio for more than three years.

[SLT Rules of Engagement](#)

[2022 SLT Roles and Responsibilities](#)

Once the annual plan is confirmed, we translate that into a shared set of action plans that break down the annual plan into term-by-term sprints and we commit to actions that we share with each other via a shared doc. This gets reviewed and updated each term at a dedicated SLT strategy day.

DPs work with SSLs (HODs) to complete an annual report based on last year's department goals which then informs their goals for the new year.

[2021 BOT Annual Report HPE](#)

[2021 BOT Annual Report for Mathematics and Statistics](#)

[English BOT report](#)

