

A Spotlight on Avonside Girls' High School

Creating a working definition of
hybrid learning



Liz McDowell, Deputy Principal at Avonside Girls' High School, shares their experience with hybrid learning and making it work to their long term vision – to establish a coherent approach to programme delivery by using a common digital platform to support learner-centred pedagogical approaches.



Avonside Girls' High School (AGHS) is a large urban high school in Christchurch, New Zealand, with more than 1,000 girls from Year 9 to Year 13. It was formerly in the suburb of Avonside but moved in 2019, along with Shirley Boys' High School, to the former QEII Park site in the east of Christchurch.

What did you do?

Before anyone had heard of COVID-19, AGHS was already making a number of changes to how we delivered learning as part of a wider long-term strategy. This was because as a school, we had already recognised that we wanted to further incorporate more student agency and inclusive learning into our teaching practices, as well as being able to more effectively harness the opportunities digital technologies offer. So when COVID-19 arrived in our community, the changes we had already begun discussing and implementing were accelerated, especially during and after the first lockdown in 2020.

This has enabled us to more rapidly progress the strategic intent we had been working on as it was a part of a long term vision for our school, not simply a reactionary, short term response.

We began by working closely with staff to outline the rationale for hybrid learning before delving into the practices around hybrid learning in staff meetings. Ideas and points of discussion were then unpacked even further in department meetings. We looked at different models and discussed the benefits of a unified response using our established platforms of Office365, Teams, and OneNote.

As a staff we lived this new way of working by moving our staff meetings to an online space and establishing a Staff Team space on Teams with a specific hybrid learning channel. Our school also has an eLearning Integrator which, along with providing lots of online resources for teachers, made plenty of support available for staff who needed it.

We also worked closely with students and the community through this process. We talked about the 'why' so that the community felt included and part of this journey we were all on. We also made specific changes like turning almost all daily loan devices into term loans, and using virtual assemblies to provide consistent messaging from the principal. We created a hybrid learning structure and changed KAMAR to reflect this for ease of student comprehension as we moved to a day on day off model (2 days face-to-face, 3 days learning from home) in the first iteration. We had a Wellbeing Wednesday for pastoral care and pouako weekly check-ins with students and whānau.

Social media and the school website were used for messaging and any updates. We sought feedback halfway through the 5 week hybrid learning model from our school community to ensure we were keeping what worked, and throwing out what did not.

What was your change strategy?

Start with the why

Our “why” was health and safety for all and we used this lens to look at all the changes we made for the rest of the year. For example, we used the lens of health and safety for all to promote quality teaching and learning with kaiako and the importance of the resilience of staff.

Communication

Communicating early, clearly, and widely with all affected by the change enabled our people to feel informed and a part of the journey. As did seeking feedback from staff, students, and whānau, which we took onboard and used to iterate our hybrid learning model for the final two weeks of the first term. This provided the opportunity to have our community voices heard and ensured all felt included.

Support

We provided extra support for those who needed it, whether staff, students or whānau. This was in the form of IT support, access to digital or paper resources, access to suitable learning spaces when rostered home, or access to community or wellbeing support. We supported or connected people to support, in all the instances that we were aware of where support was needed.

What advice do you have for other schools?

My main advice is to do what is right for your unique contexts:

- » Keep the digital tools simple and streamlined to avoid confusion.
- » Ensure equity of student experience by allowing students to take school-owned devices in a more long-term way for their learning.
- » Be very clear when communicating change and ensure that communication is across a variety of different media like email and Facebook.
- » Ensure you seek feedback from those involved and be prepared to iterate if needed.

What is next?

We have an IT Committee, made up of essentially one person for each Learning Area, who will spend the rest of 2022 looking at formalising our hybrid learning practices – taking the best and discarding the rest. We will prepare digital resources that explain, support, and exemplify our kura's hybrid learning model. One resource will be kaiako facing and the other student and whānau facing. This is to be done using our previous experiences, pre-existing school made resources, as well as external supports such as Derek Wenmoth's [Codifying Teacher Practice](#) article and [Getting Started with Hybrid Learning](#) article, the [PPTA information on Hybrid Learning expectations](#) and the [MOE Hybrid Learning Digital resources](#).

We also have a plan for continued professional development in this area for our kaiako.



Reflections, observations, and learnings

It's important to understand that a single approach won't suit everyone. Any structure will provide issues in our complex situation of a shared site with some shared classes with our co-located school.

Our motto is KIS Keep it simple – complexity confuses!

Some lessons in particular include:

- » Consistency and repetition are important. For example, using announcements on Teams while still allowing for creative difference! Repetition of format so students know how to find information and what to expect it to look like.
 - » The blend of face-to-face with at home learning was much better than during the lockdowns. In our context, many of our ākonga and kaiako much preferred the opportunity to have face-to-face sessions during the week as they were great opportunities to receive feedback in person and to clear up any confusion being experienced with the learning.
 - » Our hybrid model also provided the opportunity to conduct practical lessons onsite which were then followed by theory and write ups at home.
- » We also learned about a sense of disconnection for some students in the time away from school impacting on mood and motivation to reconnect once they returned.
 - » We learned about a lot of apps and tools that support online learning like Canva, narration tool on PPT, Microsoft Learning Tools and are continuing to utilise these. And importantly, we learned to not reinvent the wheel as there are many great resources out there already on sites such as YouTube and Khan Academy. Some kaiako have created personal libraries for Flipped Learning over this time too.
 - » Term loans of digital devices are the way to go – not daily loans via our Library as we had been doing. Giving students the more equitable access to these devices results in greater levels of ownership by students and eases transition between home and school.
 - » Students' prior experiences with hybrid learning as teachers prepared for it was so valuable. By contrast, our new Y9s struggled with cognitive overload due to the lack of time spent forming relationships and using digital tools before we had to shift into our hybrid model.

