A Spotlight on Riccarton High School

A strategic, school wide approach to hybrid learning

RICCARTON HIGH SCHOOL
Te Kura Tuarua o Pūtaringamotu

RICCARTON HS

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This spotlight describes how Riccarton High School is taking a strategic, school-wide approach to implementing hybrid learning approaches that build on the foundations of what already exists.

Riccarton High School is a state co-ed Year 9 to 13 school of around 1040 students in the western suburbs of Christchurch. The school draws from a very diverse cultural, ethnic and socio-economic community.

This spotlight was written from an interview with deputy principal of Riccarton High School, Shane Morrow.

Why did you make this change?

A little background to the change

Over the last several years, Riccarton High School has focussed on increasing blended learning in our pedagogy. We introduced BYOD incrementally and it is now at all year levels. We established the use of Google Classroom as our common learning platform and teachers undertook specific professional learning in using digital tools for learning. We also have expertise in our school in flipped classrooms and mastery learning.

In comparison to 2022, 2020 and 2021 were relatively straightforward: we were either all able to be on the school site or we were all required to be at home. We knew, from our internal evaluation, that we had responded well to remote learning when the entire school was learning and working from home during the two lockdown periods of 2020 and 2021. I am fortunate to be part of the Education Review Office Leadership Partners Programme and, in 2020, joined some of the interviews of principals and BOT chairs which informed the publication Learning in a Covid-19 world: Supporting secondary school engagement.

In 2020 and 2021, we had small Alert Level 3 "learning bubbles" of Year 9 and 10 students who were the children of essential workers. These students continued their remote learning while being supervised at school. This gave us a good opportunity to understand the learning experience from the student perspective.

It was enlightening to observe how these young people accessed and worked through their remote learning activities. We also learned how important it is for teachers to structure and communicate online learning clearly and concisely and to think of the "user experience" when designing learning. We gathered student and caregiver user stories about remote learning when we returned to school in 2020.

We could see that it was likely that schooling in 2022 would look completely different to the previous two years of the pandemic. We were aware that this year might bring "rolling absences" of learners and teachers due to either isolating or being unwell. We knew it would be a challenge to keep two modes of learning, on site and at home, happening simultaneously. There were concerns about the onsite learners moving more quickly than those learning from home, and concerns about teachers' workloads.

What did you do?

Chose a common platform for online learning

The 2020 move to remote learning was sudden. We adapted the student and teacher Guidelines for Going Remote shared by Albany Senior High School. It was this experience that firmed up Google Classroom as our common platform for every class.

Chose a communication channel for staff

We quickly established a Google Site as our main communication channel for staff so that we could avoid overfull and difficult-to-navigate email inboxes. We have kept this site as our daily Updates page to supplement and declutter staff briefings.

Provided professional learning for teachers

Initially, it was seen as a big task to upskill teachers to be able to deliver effective remote learning but we were able to leverage existing blended learning pedagogies and teachers' commitment to do the best they could for their learners. I recalled some research which suggested that the most effective way to get teachers to change their practice was for them first to experience the desired practice from the perspective of being learners themselves. We took this on board and offered remote, eLearning professional learning opportunities for our teachers during the first lockdown. This included readings, videos, and some self-paced online learning modules which we chose carefully. **We tried to model good pedagogical practices through our Google Site. An example were the video tutorials made by our own team to train their colleagues.**

During the 2021/2022 summer break I looked for resources which might support 'dual-mode' learning. I knew that schools overseas were experiencing this. We began 2022 by changing our Staff Only Day to introduce hybrid learning using Resilience planning for schools: In an age of COVID-19 as a starting point. Our Kāhui Ako is working to embed New Pedagogies for Deeper Learning and we have shifted this focus to the element of leveraging digital to support hybrid learning.

Focused on hybrid learning

Hybrid learning became a focus for our Learning Design Team (our Heads of Learning and Senior Leadership Teams). We supported teachers through providing meeting and planning time and also with readings and online resources through our Updates page.

Carried out a readiness evaluation: what we found and what we did in response

In the week starting 21 February I undertook an evaluation of the school's readiness for hybrid learning. This involved interviews with each Leader of Learning and many Heads of Departments. The evaluation revealed that many teachers had yet to distinguish between remote learning and hybrid learning. My recommendations (see the link above) were, in summary:

» School-wide expectations, linked to our school Riccarton Way values, of hybrid learning were to be developed and communicated to students and whānau. We chose to call this 'learning from home' rather than hybrid learning. We figured families didn't need the 'eduspeak'.

» Our fortnightly grades system was to be adapted to take into account that learning could be happening at school or from home. Our first round went out last week. Whānau teachers are using this data to make contact with caregivers where there are concerns - and to check on health and well-being. Leveraging this established reporting system meant not having to devise another method of data gathering. The criteria now used in determining the level of attitude to learning are:

4	Attitude to learning is at an excellent level which is our goal for all Riccarton High School students. The student shows manawanui to learn. This commitment is shown by consistent engagement whether learning in class or from home. Deadlines are met, help is sought when required, feedback is used to improve, there is contribution to the class to support learning.
3	Attitude to learning usually meets expectations. The student is usually engaged in their commitment to learning, whether in class or from home.
2	Attitude to learning needs some improvement. The student is inconsistent in their engagement to commit to learning, whether in class or from home.
1	Attitude to learning is well below the standard required. The student is not engaged in their learning or connecting with their class.

» Riccarton High School staff guidelines for going hybrid This needed to incorporate a template for using Google Classroom.

» We initiated a programme of in-house facilitated professional learning on digital tools and pedagogies for hybrid learning. We felt strongly that we have expertise on our staff who know our context, and who can more easily make time to connect than, perhaps, an outside provider could.

What have you learned?

» Strongly reinforced: He aha te mea nui o te ao? He tangata, he tangata, he tangata
» The need for students to be specifically trained to access, navigate and use digital tools and trained to be more self-managing in their learning. (In hybrid learning the teacher is not present to re-focus off-task behaviour).
» Teachers remain passionate about doing the best they can for their learners but, sometimes, need help to know how to do so.
» There is expertise within our people. Resourcing time for them to help others is a challenge.
» That our people are really getting exhausted - it's hard to work constantly in unpredictable, ever-changing circumstances and have to have high levels of mental capacity to rethink practice. (We learned this, too, in the Canterbury earthquakes a decade ago)
» That uncertain times bring an increase in student pastoral and behavioural issues that we have to deal with

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

Communicate the WHY first and then the HOW. Keep connected with our people so we know how they are going. Build on our relational trust.

Cut, Keep and Create - in that order:
» What can be removed to create room, time and space?
» What do we already have that can be leveraged - e.g. eLearning, blended, remote learning?
» What do we need to do which is new and both urgent and important?

We usually use the Design Thinking methodology in our school. The need to move to hybrid learning, however, was urgent and meant we didn't have the luxury of time to use Design Thinking faithfully but we could still use most of the steps. Fortunately, we had data, resources, processes and user stories from the 2020 and 2021 remote learning experiences that we could use.

We used our own people to train their peers. The Deep Learning Team set up a Designing for Hybrid Learning Google Site to provide asynchronous professional learning.

What advice do you have for other schools?

» **Keep your learners at the centre of what you are doing - people first!**
» **Check in on the well-being of your support and teaching staff - people first!**
» **Leaders need to also look after themselves - put your own life jacket on first!**
» **Look to build on established, effective practices and tailor to your context.**
» **Keep your community informed and reassured, but not overwhelmed with messages.**
» **Be prepared to have to constantly adapt.**

So what is next?

What aspects of hybrid learning will simply become normal practice? We already had established use of Google Classroom across the school for curating learning materials and, in some cases, completing assessment tasks. My interest is in meaningfully sustaining this. I'm interested to know whether our photocopying decreases because we are using digital tools more!

There are some areas I am wanting to explore further:
» The opportunities and advantages of learners being physically and synchronously present in the school. We strongly value face-to-face relationships; the ability for students to experience pedagogies and activities which are not possible online (e.g. practical activities, synchronous in-person collaboration, access to specialist equipment); instant feedback from teachers; the ability for teachers to 'adjust' learning as it is being enacted; co-curricular activities; community events (even assemblies); the pro-social nature of school
» Further opportunities and advantages which leveraging digital can bring (SAMR taxonomy)
» How effective hybrid learning is in areas where it is hard to deliver intended programmes online: materials technologies, visual and performing arts, health and physical education