



ONLINE LEARNING POST-COVID

Is it feasible for everyone?

By Polly Nichols

Schools in other parts of the world have facilitated online learning for quite some time now, some to the point where educational professionals are considering adopting online learning and integrating it into curriculum even after the pandemic.

However, is this feasible for everyone in New Zealand?

Those of us living in New Zealand enjoyed liberties and freedoms others around the world haven't been able to enjoy for over a year, including in-person learning.

Auckland might be New Zealand's only exception considering the city has experienced numerous lockdowns since the initial, nationwide lockdown. Many students within Auckland's boundaries would have their education disrupted and implemented through online learning.

Of course, each school has had its own set of needs to address during

the various lockdowns. Nonetheless, mainstream schools don't have to make the same considerations as specialist schools.

According to the Education Review Office, the Ministry of Education provides specialist support to about 35,000 learners with special education needs including Ongoing Research Scheme (ORS) funding, School High Health Needs, Early Intervention Services, behavior services and other services.

Oaklynn Specialist School principal Louise Doyle says, "Just to put some context in on our situation: Oaklynn is a specialist school, which means that all of our students are ORS funded students. They sit in the top one percent of special education need of the student population.

"And our students are aged between five and 21 years. We've got quite a wide range of learners and they also have a range of complex diagnoses."

On top of that, Oaklynn Specialist School serves its 180 students through

its base school, satellite campuses and another 40 students in its specialist teacher outreach service. Considering the many intricacies, Oaklynn teachers still opt to take a personalised approach to each learner's circumstances.

"We learned that rather than a teacher printing off worksheets for every child and delivering them, actually, our first response is to have a phone conversation with each family and say 'what is it that you would like?'"

To call the learning that occurred during Auckland's different lockdowns 'online learning' just doesn't ring true for Louise and her school. Although Oaklynn teachers might have met certain needs electronically, Louise says online learning isn't quite what they implemented during lockdowns.

"Distance learning for us looks like sending stuff home or delivering one of the Ministry of Education's sensory packs or young learner packs that they developed in time for the second lockdown.

"For some of our guys, they actually need to see their classmates or their teacher, so they did meet them through Zoom. Or, for some where that is too overwhelming and too confusing, they might have just done a one-on-one FaceTime."

Depending on the learner's needs, some lessons were able to continue through electronic platforms. But for others, the lockdowns were so disruptive that families and teachers determined it was best for learners to use the time for recreational activities or a break from learning in general, an attitude other specialist schools in Auckland took up as well.

While some mainstream schools might consider ways to integrate online learning into their day-to-day activities in the future, Louise says online learning just doesn't suit her learners' need for a *kanohi kit e kanohi* (face-to-face) approach so she doesn't see a future for it in her school.