OUT-OF-CLASS SMALL GROUP LEARNING: ADVICE FOR SCHOOLS

GETTING STARTED

Supporting student learning in small groups is an effective strategy already used in many schools to support students who've fallen behind due to the shift to remote and flexible learning, as well as during regular on-site learning. Research indicates that a large number of students are facing disruptions to their learning as a result of the move to remote learning.[1]

Drawing on current research, this guidance outlines the benefits of small group learning outside scheduled classes as one approach to provide remedial support to students who have been disadvantaged by the move to remote and flexible learning. It begins with an overview for school leaders which includes reflections on evidence-based practice and advice on who could implement small group supports, including tutors. It then provides a practical implementation guide for tutors and teachers, which includes key questions, strategies, and resources, to support their delivery of small group learning.

OVERVIEW FOR SCHOOL LEADERS

Many schools are already actively engaged in a range of student improvement work and continue to adapt to the opportunities and challenges presented by the transition to remote and flexible learning.[2] Schools know best whether out-of-class small group support is appropriate for their students' learning, engagement and wellbeing needs, and their staffing arrangements, and should draw on this guidance as a source of evidence-based principles and approaches to strengthen and extend their efforts.

Schools are encouraged to draw on existing funding sources—such as equity funding received through the Student Resource Package—to supplement their ongoing targeted teaching and learning work.

Definition of small group learning
Small group learning, sometimes called small group tutoring, is a supplementary teaching method, delivered on a consistent basis for a pre-determined period, to support student learning in small groups (approximately 2-5 students). It is intended to reinforce classroom instruction, preferably outside of regularly scheduled classes or in the form of an elective.

Why small group learning?

Small group learning is a highly effective remedial learning and teaching strategy[3] for students experiencing educational disadvantage,[4] especially those who have faced particular barriers during remote and flexible learning that they might not have faced while at school.[5] It provides an environment in which differentiated and targeted interventions reinforce the classroom teacher's instruction[6], through tutors providing further scaffolding tailored to each student's point of learning need.

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1 Evidence for Learning (July 2020). Using technology to support vulnerable students' learning: An evidence review of system-school interventions for remote learning and transition back to school in response to COVID-19, p. 3
2 Centre for Multicultural Youth 'Learning Beyond the Bell' initiative
3 Nickow et al. (2020). The Impressive Effects of Tutoring on PreK-12 Learning: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of the Experimental Evidence. (EdWorkingPaper: 20-267)
4 Grattan Institute (June 2020). COVID catch-up: Helping disadvantaged students close the equity gap, p. 22
5 Evidence for Learning (July 2020). Using technology to support vulnerable students' learning: An evidence review of system-school interventions for remote learning, p. 3
6 Evidence for Learning (July 2020). Using technology to support vulnerable students' learning: An evidence review of system-school interventions for remote learning, p. 61

The strength of small group learning as a remedial or supplementary approach for students who have fallen behind means that it should also be understood as distinct[7] from in-class, small group work or as part of a team-teaching approach. It is preferable that students are not withdrawn from class for the purposes of small group learning. However, tutors are expected to maintain open and regular lines of communication with classroom teachers as well as parents and carers, to ensure the learning remains coherent with curriculum objectives and translates into positive in-class learning outcomes.

When should I be using small group learning?

Small group learning is expected to be of immediate benefit in the short-term, especially for students who have been adversely impacted as a result of remote and flexible learning. However, it is also broadly applicable over the mid-to-long term, to support schools in their gradual return to on-site learning and as part of their ongoing and foundational commitment to lifting learning outcomes for all students. While the evidence base is stronger for on-site delivery, the lessons from research have been adapted here for use in remote and flexible contexts. To this end, this guidance includes a checklist specifically designed for delivery of small group learning in remote and flexible learning environments.

Who can benefit from small group learning?

Evidence from the recent period of remote learning indicates that students most at risk from disengaging during remote and flexible learning, and who may particularly benefit from additional support, include:

- students from high SFOE backgrounds, particularly those students whose parents have a low level of education attainment
- students with additional needs, such as those in receipt of Program for Students with Disabilities (PSD) funding
- students receiving Visiting Teacher support
- Koorie students
- students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, particularly those with low levels of English proficiency, Pasifika backgrounds or who are from refugee backgrounds
- students studying Vocational and Applied Learning (VCAL) or Vocational Education and Training (VET) delivered to school students (VDSS)
- vulnerable students, such as those at risk of disengagement or in out-of-home care.

Student Voice and Agency in a small group learning context

Small group learning programs should prioritise students' voice, agency and their wellbeing to identify and target students' unique learning needs and maximise engagement. Empowering students to co-construct their own learning environments leads to increased levels of confidence, motivation, and self-efficacy[8], and strongly supports positive learning outcomes.[9]

Strong relationships are also an essential element of small group learning. Tutors and teachers should work together with students, as well as parents and carers, to align with students' preferred learning styles, identified goals, and overall wellbeing needs. This process should remain coherent with broader curriculum objectives, and support student progress against the curriculum as determined through teacher observations and analysis of student data.

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[7] Nickow et al. (2020). *The Impressive Effects of Tutoring on PreK-12 Learning: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of the Experimental Evidence*. (EdWorkingPaper: 20-267), p. 53
[8] Walker, L. & Logan, A. (2008). Learner engagement: a review of learner voice initiatives across the UK's education sectors. Futurelab
[9] Hattie, J. (2010). Visible learning for teachers: Maximizing impact on learning. Routledge, Milton Park, UK

Some concrete ways to meaningfully engage with student voice and agency during small group learning include:

- **Opt-in approach**: Encourage—but not mandate—students who have been identified to participate by outlining its benefits, emphasising its collegial elements, and highlighting existing peer relationships in the group (if any). Parents and carers of identified students should also be a part of this conversation.

- **Build a positive relationship** with students to better understand their interests, current levels of engagement, motivation, and overall comfort with the approach. This will enable tutors to address and strive to resolve any underlying concerns, such as embarrassment based on the perception that they are being provided with different work, or have fallen behind.

- **Co-develop learning goals** with each student to best support their learning needs. If the student has an Individual Education Plan (IEP), ensure that the plan is up-to-date for this context. Remember that developing an IEP is a collaborative effort, and parents or carers must be consulted.

- **Be flexible with scheduling of sessions** to suit both individual and collective preferences. For example, where possible, avoid planning sessions for students at the same time as a class/activity that they particularly enjoy.

- **Plan the structure of the sessions in collaboration with students**. Include activities and games that students find engaging.

- **Track student progress visibly** to build and maintain their intrinsic motivation. Provide students with opportunities for regular feedback to help inform adjustments to the sessions, in line with student input.

What does evidence-based practice look like in schools?

A systematic review of academic interventions intended to improve learning outcomes for disadvantaged students found that of the 14 interventions examined, tutoring was found to be the most effective.[10] The tutoring programs included in the research were often highly structured programs implemented over a limited time period, typically 12 to 20 weeks, and were conducted in small groups of five students or fewer. While the research to date has primarily looked at tutoring delivered on-site, many of the lessons learned can be applied to a remote and flexible learning environment.
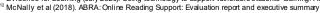
It is important to consider which specific approach will best support your students' learning needs and school context. For example, one-to-one tuition is reported to be more effective for students with special needs such as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and students with disabilities.[11] Other vulnerable students who feel pressure in group settings may also benefit from individual tutoring while they build confidence.

The evidence-based principles below can be used to inform your school's approach:

1. *Online tutoring can be effective*
   - Online tutoring can be used to maximise student learning during periods of remote learning.
   - Online tutoring can be particularly beneficial for schools that have difficulty finding suitable tutors to support on-site delivery.
   - An online tutoring initiative using a web-based program facilitated by teaching assistants in the UK produced a learning gain of five months over a 20-week period. The program consisted of four 15-minute sessions per week, with Year 1 students of similar ability, in groups of three to five.[12]

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[10] Dietrichson et al (2017). Academic interventions for elementary and middle school students with low socioeconomic status, p. 243-282.
[11] Evidence for Learning (July 2020). Using technology to support vulnerable students' learning: An evidence review of system-school interventions for remote learning, p.42
[12] McNally et al (2018). ABRA: Online Reading Support: Evaluation report and executive summary

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2. *Groups of two to five students are recommended*
   - Tuition in groups of two to five is highly effective, and there is evidence that it can deliver similar benefits as one-on-one tuition at lower cost. [13]
   - The appropriate number of students per group in your context will vary according to student needs. Grouping students of similar learning needs appears to be most effective.

3. *Effective tutoring is targeted and designed to complement classroom work*
   - Tutoring needs to be targeted at the specific needs of students to be effective, [14] based on their learning plans.
   - Effective tutoring is also connected to the learning provided by classroom teachers in students' regularly scheduled classes.

4. *Frequent and focused sessions are most effective*
   - Effective tutoring programs have been found to deliver five months' impact on average. These programs are typically delivered in short, focused intervention sessions of about 30 minutes, three to five times a week, over six to 12 weeks. [15]
   - Session length will differ for students based on age and individual learning needs, but flexible to adjustments as informed by students' progress over time. Upper primary and secondary students may find it more engaging to have small group learning combined with independent practice to break up 30 to 60-minute tutoring sessions. [16] Younger primary students are likely to benefit from shorter sessions (15 to 30 minutes), with opportunities for guided practice with tutors.

5. *Studies show that support outside of timetabled class hours is particularly effective*
   - One-to-one or programs, conducted as Tier 2 support after school, have been shown to deliver up to five months' additional learning and short, regular sessions of about 30 minutes, three to five times a week over six to 12 weeks, appear to result in optimum impact. [17]
   - While evidence suggests that tutoring has been effective after school hours, you may also consider other parts of the day outside of timetabled class hours, such as before school, or during free periods for secondary school students.

6. *Low-attaining students are likely to see greater improvements from tutoring interventions*
   - Evidence suggests that grouping students by achievement or ability levels to allow greater matching and tailoring of tasks is an effective intervention. [18]
   - Some studies show tuition can be especially effective for primary students who are behind their peers, and for subjects such as reading and mathematics. [19]

7. *Pre-service teachers and recent graduates can provide effective tutoring support*
   - Pre-service teachers and recent graduates provide effective tutoring support to students when it is delivered as a supplement to classroom co-teaching, alongside more experienced teachers. [20]
   - Recent reviews show tutoring by university graduates and teaching assistants can be as effective as tutoring by teachers in some contexts. [21,22,23]

[13] Evidence for Learning (2020). One to one tuition. Retrieved from https://www.evidenceforlearning.org.au/the-toolkits/the-teaching-and-learning-toolkit/all-approaches/one-to-one-tuition/
[14] Education Endowment Foundation (2020). Small group tuition. Retrieved from https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evidence-summaries/teaching-learning-toolkit/small-group-tuition/
[15] Evidence for Learning (July 2020). Using technology to support vulnerable students' learning: An evidence review of system-school interventions for remote learning, p.3
[16] Nickow et al. (2020). The Impressive Effects of Tutoring on PreK-12 Learning: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of the Experimental Evidence. (EdWorkingPaper: 20-267), p. 17
[17] Evidence for Learning (July 2020). Using technology to support vulnerable students' learning: An evidence review of system-school interventions for remote learning, p.3
[18] Education Endowment Foundation (2020). Within-class achievement grouping. Retrieved from https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evidence-summaries/teaching-learning-toolkit/within-class-attainment-grouping/
[19] Grattan Institute (June 2020). COVID catch-up: Helping disadvantaged students close the equity gap, p.24
[20] Buckingham et al (2012), A randomised control trial of a Tier-2 small-group intervention ('MiniLit') for young struggling readers
[21] Grattan Institute (June 2020). COVID catch-up: Helping disadvantaged students close the equity gap, p.24
[22] Nickow et al. (2020). The Impressive Effects of Tutoring on PreK-12 Learning: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of the Experimental Evidence. (EdWorkingPaper: 20-267), p. 54
[23] Lord, P. et al (2015). Perry Beeches Coaching Programme: Evaluation Report and Executive Summary. Education Endowment Foundation.

Implementation of FISO at the whole school level, including through small group learning, is guided by the Strategic Planning Online Tool (SPOT). In addition to integrating all school improvement planning documentation online, SPOT helps schools to regularly monitor the progress of the improvement journey. Small group learning can be represented within the Annual Implementation Plan of the school as an Action to support implementation of Key Improvement Strategies.

Who can lead small group learning in your school?

Tutor	Considerations
Pre-Service Teachers (PSTs)	In response to the shift to remote and flexible learning, small group learning can contribute towards PSTs required placement days. They still require supervision by a registered teacher, so consider how your classroom teachers can combine supervision with their other work.
Casual Relief Teachers (CRTs)	If CRTs are engaged to deliver small group learning with a group of students, the same CRT should be responsible for that group of students throughout the learning cycle. This supports the building of relationships between the tutor, student, and parents and carers. It also helps ensure consistency, which can lead to improved learning outcomes.
Classroom Teachers	Teachers who have time release in order to deliver small group learning. The time built in for classroom teachers should support the entirety of the cycle for any group of students.
Education Support Staff	Education support staff can support registered teachers in delivery of small group learning. In addition to providing supervision, registered teachers will need to monitor student progress and provide regular input on adjustments that will best support student needs and lead to improved learning outcomes.

PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE FOR SMALL GROUP TUTORS AND TEACHERS

The advice below is not intended as a comprehensive list of actions, but to provide a starting point for implementing small group learning in schools. It draws on the Framework for Improving Student Outcomes (FISO) Improvement Cycle (Figure 1), and on local and international evidence. Schools can determine the approach they think will be most effective and feasible for their school's context and students' needs.

Figure 1: FISO Improvement Cycle

Key Considerations for Tutors and Teachers at each stage of Small Group Learning

Evaluate and Diagnose		
Key Questions	**Guiding Principles**	**Suggested Strategies**

1. What do we know about each student's engagement, wellbeing, and preferred ways of working?
 	
 2. What is each student's current stage of knowledge, skill and understanding against different Victorian Curriculum learning areas?
 	
 3. To what extent do tutors have the knowledge and skills required to address each student's learning needs?
	• Small group learning is most likely to be effective with two to five students of similar ability.
	
	 • Lower attaining students have been shown to receive the greatest benefits.
	
	 • Student voice is vital.
	
	 • Consider cybersafety processes and document sharing software during remote and flexible learning.
	
	 • Schools can offer sessions that focus on a range of subjects in addition to English and Mathematics, where the tutor has relevant expertise.
		• Review student data and consider which students could benefit most, in consultation with other relevant school staff. The following data sources can be used to identify students' current point of need:
		    • student work samples that show progress
		    • Individual Education Plan (IEP) goals
		    • historical NAPLAN data
		    • EAL Continuum data
		    • student attitudinal data
		    • input from parents/carers
		    • documentation on student behaviour and wellbeing.
		
		 • Tutor and classroom teacher/s discuss learning interventions and teaching strategies that have worked or not worked so well before.
		
		 • Create a safe environment when interacting with students and parents or carers online.
		
		 • The tutor is encouraged to meet with each student before the first session to start building relationships[24].
		
		 • While discussing small group learning with students, ask them about what works for them. For example: preferred group size, during or outside of timetabled classes, length and frequency of sessions.

Prioritise and Set Goals		
Key Questions	**Guiding Principles**	**Suggested Strategies**
	• Teachers and tutors should work in partnership to develop individual	• Consult with parents/carers to ensure they are supportive of their child's involvement.

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[24] Nickow et al. (2020). The Impressive Effects of Tutoring on PreK-12 Learning: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of the Experimental Evidence. (EdWorking Paper: 20-267), p. 7

1. What are our students' learning goals and priorities? 2. How can we build on existing programs and support? 3. Have the students themselves, parents/carers, classroom teachers, and other relevant staff been consulted as we set goals?	goals based on the age and learning needs of the student. ● Small group learning should be designed to support and complement a student's regular schoolwork. ● Expectations, priorities, and goals should be clearly outlined and mutually agreed on by all involved (students, parents and carers, tutor, and teacher/s). ● Students are likely to find it motivating to see their progress, so consider how tutors can track student progress while maintaining a low-stakes, comfortable environment.	● Following the review of each student's learning priorities, the tutor and classroom teacher meet with each student to set goals . ● Encourage student voice throughout this stage to allow the student to fully engage in their own learning. ● Set achievable goals for students that are linked to the Victorian Curriculum and differentiated for their current level. ● Ensure clear links to classroom learning through regular catch-ups between the tutor and classroom teacher. Things to discuss can include in-class work that students have been undertaking; potential wellbeing needs; and success indicators.

Develop and Plan

Key Questions	Guiding Principles	Suggested Strategies

1. How will we know that students are learning?
2. What will implementation look like?
3. How will professional learning support our priorities and goals?
4. Who else should we speak to help inform and strengthen this work?
	Session Structure: Length, frequency, and duration
	● 20-60 minute sessions, two to four times a week, lasting anywhere from 6-20 weeks is recommended. This will differ based on the local context and include student preference, age, learning needs and staffing arrangements.
	
	Student Wellbeing
	● Increasing student voice can motivate students who may feel uncomfortable or disengage if they realise they are being provided with different work, or have fallen behind.
	● It's important to reassure students of their learning potential, and that they will not be negatively impacted by their participation.
		● Tutor to develop lesson plans and establish success criteria for sessions in close collaboration with classroom teacher/s and other relevant staff, tailored to the needs of the small group and each individual.
		● Refer to High Impact Teaching Strategies (HITS) as well as the Literacy Teaching Toolkit and Maths Teaching Toolkit when planning the lessons.
		● Research [25] suggests that student achievement is maximised when lessons are structured so they:
		   ○ begin with overviews/ review objectives;
		   ○ outline the content to be covered and signal transitions between lesson parts;
		   ○ call attention to main ideas and provide a clear recap at the end.
		● Small group learning involving explicit instruction (e.g. in phonics) can be particularly effective in early primary years [26].
		● Opportunities for students to interact and solve problems together help them learn from one another.
		● While evidence indicates that small group learning has been effective after school hours, you may plan sessions for other parts of the day outside of timetabled class hours, such as before school, or during free periods for secondary school students.
		● Identify sources of student data that will support monitoring of student learning growth against the curriculum, such as formative assessment rubrics and strategies.
		● The classroom teacher and tutor can refer to advice from the Centre for Multicultural Youth which outlines strategies for supporting EAL families.

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[25] Kyriakides et al. (2013). What matters for student learning outcomes: A meta-analysis of studies exploring factors of effective teaching. Teaching and Teacher Education (36), p.143–152
[26] Nickow et al. (2020). The Impressive Effects of Tutoring on PreK-12 Learning: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of the Experimental Evidence. (EdWorkingPaper: 20-267), p. 33

Implement and Monitor

Key Questions	Guiding Principles	Suggested Strategies
1. To what extent are we using differentiated strategies in our tutoring work? 2. How are we monitoring our implementation? 3. Who is there to support us to ensure effective implementation?	• Monitor with regular assessments to measure student outcomes and growth. • Tutor to maintain regular lines of communication with classroom teacher, school leadership, parents/carers to ensure adequate implementation support. **Online sessions** • Students have varying access to technology and comfort levels in using it. • Some students may need parent or carer support to access support online. • Hard copy learning packs may be of benefit to some students participating remotely. • Vulnerable students might benefit more from 1:1 support if they are learning from home, or can work at school by exception. **Face-to-face sessions** • Bus times or pick up and drop off arrangements need to be negotiated with parents or carers if sessions take place before or after school. • The preferred time for sessions should be mutually agreed upon by students, parents and carers, and the tutor.	• Scaffold learning and support students to break down learning tasks. • Monitor student learning regularly and frequently check for student understanding. • Provide students with frequent task-based feedback. • Introduce students to key vocabulary and skills for upcoming small group lessons. • Tutors can start or finish some sessions with a fun activity. • Refer to the HITS for more advice about collaborative learning strategies. • Develop the student's confidence to assist their capacity to learn. The Centre for Multicultural Youth has developed some useful advice. • Make student progress visible to enhance motivation, either in small group settings, individually or with parents and carers. • Maintain regular communication with parents/carers of participating students • Tutor and classroom teacher/s can schedule regular times during the week to discuss student progress and plan the focus of future sessions. • Consider using a range of assessments, including formative assessments.

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CHECKLIST FOR TUTORS: SMALL GROUP LEARNING DURING REMOTE AND FLEXIBLE LEARNING

Complete	Item
☐	Ensure you have a Working With Children Check
☐	Set up an initial meeting and induction between key school contact/program lead and tutor to agree on expectations
☐	Ensure compliance with Child Safety Standards (supported by the online safety kit for parents and carers provided by the eSafety Commissioner's Office)
☐	For online delivery, consider a blend of synchronous (in real time) and asynchronous (not in real time) online learning activities, including activities that help you get to know your students, such as this list of fun activities and games suitable for online delivery developed by the Centre for Multicultural Youth as part of the Learning Beyond the Bell program.
☐	Develop a schedule or calendar that clearly communicates timelines and expectations for students in line with school communication plan
☐	Identify opportunities to keep regular track of progress – both student and teacher-led
☐	Keep a log/record of tutoring conducted
☐	Maintain regular communication with parents/carers of participating students
☐	Provide simplified instructions for relevant online collaboration and learning delivery platforms (e.g. Webex video conferencing, Microsoft O365, Google Suite)
☐	Work with the school community to understand the achievement, engagement and wellbeing needs of students identified for small group learning, and offer targeted learning support at their point of need
☐	Participate in relevant professional learning to support online delivery. Free online modules are available on Arc and the Continuity of Learning Hub to support the transition to remote learning. The following courses may offer a good starting point: 1. Online Safety - Risk and Protective Factors 2. High Impact Teaching Strategies (HITS) in Remote and Flexible Learning 3. Behaviour Expectations for Remote Learning

CASE STUDIES: SMALL GROUP LEARNING IN PRACTICE

Balwyn North Primary School

Balwyn North Primary School has successfully adapted its small group learning program to an online setting with the shift to remote and flexible learning. It has done this by scheduling regular times with students, implementing online cyber safety protocols and using an online platform that students are already familiar with (MS Teams).

At the start of the year, the school identified a need to provide targeted literacy support to students in grades 4-6 that were falling behind. Lisa Cuthbert-Novak, a Leading Teacher at the school, worked closely with classroom teachers to use existing student data to identify individual students who could benefit from additional support. Student identification was based on multiple sources of data such as Fountas and Pinnell, PAT Reading assessment and teacher observations.

Based on the student data, the school decided to introduce the QuickSmart Literacy Program to help students in grades 4-6 that would benefit from additional support. The QuickSmart Literacy Program is an educational intervention designed to support literacy skills development. Lisa spoke with the parents of all students who had been identified, to ensure parents approved of their child participating in the program.

Eliza-Jane Whitelock is one of six Education Support (ES) staff at Balwyn North that deliver the QuickSmart Literacy Program lessons to students each week. Prior to starting the program, the ES team was provided with the necessary training to support their delivery of these small group sessions. The ES team stays in regular contact with Lisa, the Leading Teacher who supervises the program, as well as the classroom teachers, to allow opportunities for them to provide ongoing input and to help with any adjustments required to the program.

Eliza and the team provide structured support to students in groups of two, which takes place over three 30-minute online sessions a week. The lessons involve the use of focus words, flash cards, word studies, modelled reading and comprehension strategies to improve word recognition skills, word meaning, reading fluency and text comprehension.

Balwyn North Primary School has introduced a buddy system for the Education Support team, so that while one instructor is supporting a group of two students during a session, a second instructor is observing the online session. This is for both cyber safety and professional development purposes.

Students at the school have embraced participating in the online sessions, which are scheduled to take place while classmates are working independently. This means that students don't miss out on any whole-class sessions with their classroom teacher.

The learning cycle for each student is planned for 30 weeks, although this can be decreased or increased depending on each student's point of need and their individual progress. Balwyn North Primary School uses regular testing to track and monitor the progress of each student. Staff at the school are looking forward to seeing the ongoing improvement of the students involved in small group learning.

Footscray High School

Footscray High School has used small group learning as a key teaching strategy in 2020 to support the literacy needs of a select group of Year 10 students, as part of the Middle Years Literacy and Numeracy Support (MYLNS) initiative.

Lara Stockdale, Amy Murphy, and Kim Paatsch are three English teachers who form the MYLNS Improvement team at Footscray High School. At the start of the year, Amy, Lara and Kim agreed on a structure for small group learning with their school leaders. To avoid withdrawing students from their regular classes, small group learning was offered to prioritised students as an elective, built into the timetable.

The team started by reviewing 2019 NAPLAN data to identify 30 students in need of additional literacy support. Lara, Amy and Kim also analysed On-Demand and PAT data, interviewed students' English teachers, and conducted further individual testing to determine the literacy levels of each student. Based on the data and evidence, the team identified that out of the 30 students, there were 15 students who could particularly benefit.

The team met with the identified students and their families to explain the program, outline its benefits, respond to questions and find out which students would like to be involved. While students were encouraged to join, they were given a strong voice to choose if they wanted to be involved or not. This, in turn, enabled them to build agency and ownership into their learning. The community and collegial elements of the small group setting, as well as pre-existing peer relationships, were promoted as a strategy to encourage participation. As a result, 10 students elected to participate in the elective. For the five students identified who would not be participating, relevant data was shared with their main English teachers, to help them further differentiate along each students' point of need. The MYLNS team also offered suggestions to regular classroom teachers on potential literacy strategies they could use to further assist these five students.

The 10 students participating in the elective were split into two groups based on ability. Kim and Amy alternate to support one group of three students with a more foundational literacy focus, and Lara provides support to the other group of seven students, with an emphasis on more advanced academic skills.

The sessions are offered three times a week, comprising five 50-minute periods. Two of the sessions are double periods, and one is a single. While the double periods are quite long, the MYLNS Teachers have found that the Year 10 students are comfortable with both 50 and 100-minute sessions.

Sessions often start with a focus on oral language, through group discussions about current events, games, or simply a reflection on their weekend. Providing the opportunity for all students to speak in an informal, small group setting helps to increase confidence, strengthen relationships, and build a sense of community to support their learning throughout the remainder of the session. Speaking is then followed by short, interactive activities, ranging from 5-10 minutes each, focusing on reading, writing, vocabulary, spelling, and basic phonics, depending on the needs of the group. For example, Amy has a 'word of the week' activity, where students discuss its meaning and are encouraged to use the word in a sentence throughout the week.

The team regularly collaborates with the students' regular classroom teachers. This includes having regular conversations with teachers to discuss each student's learning needs. Members of the team have either invited classroom teachers into their own Google Classroom, or joined each student's Google Classroom to keep track of the lessons being delivered in their regular classes. This helps to make connections between the curriculum and small group sessions where possible.

At the start of the year, while on-site, students were given a 'class tracker' to record their reflections, skills covered, and progress to date at the end of each session. This has now been adapted for remote and flexible learning. Students have an online spreadsheet they sign in to at the start of each session and fill in after each activity to capture their progress. Parents and carers can also access their child's Google Classroom and are notified of any upcoming or outstanding tasks. Wellbeing, motivation, engagement, and attendance issues are prioritised and followed up by a phone call home, which ensures regular communication and provides each student and family with ongoing support.

One specific strategy that has further enabled the success of small group learning during remote and flexible learning is the use of the chat function in Google Meet. This has supported the students who were initially hesitant to speak via the audio and video function. Another productive approach has been the opportunity for students to work together on shared documents through Google Docs, where students can see contributions made by their peers in real-time.

The team found that some students have made rapid progress, and no longer need the same level of targeted support that they did at the start of the year. In addition, other students who were initially resistant to joining are now much more receptive to additional support. Expanding the program next year is seen as an exciting opportunity for students at Footscray High School moving forward.