



# Online Learning Policy

## St. Joseph's Primary School, Galbally

### RATIONALE:

Maintaining high levels of wellbeing and high-quality learning provides additional complexities when students and teachers are working in online environments, particularly at a distance. Teaching and learning which operates in isolation using innovative technologies comes with inherent difficulties in managing student behaviour and meeting learning and engagement goals.

### PURPOSE:

1. To uphold student wellbeing and provide learning which aligns with the learning aspirations of St. Joseph's Primary School when teaching and learning online.
2. Learning online may be necessitated by events which make physical school attendance impossible. This includes events such as the COVID-19 global pandemic and the associated New Zealand lockdown. In events where teachers and students engage in teaching and learning from home in isolated environments, guidelines are in place to ensure the safety and wellbeing of students and uphold the values of St. Joseph's Primary School.
3. In an online learning environment, the rules of engagement can be unclear, and students and teachers can have difficulty engaging meaningfully and respectfully. This policy outlines guidelines which support teachers to uphold the behavioural expectations of St. Joseph's Primary School, and is aligned with our behaviour management policy.
4. Direct comparison is made with the student behaviour management and e-Learning policies to apply these to an isolated online learning environment.

### GUIDELINES:

1. ***Students will be supported pastorally while online learning*** because online learning poses significant risks to social connectivity and enjoyment. Teachers (or other school representatives) should gather information on issues their students are facing and help delineate a plan to provide support. Teachers will need to gather intelligence on the type(s) of issues being faced, the type of support needed, the learning context of the student, and their accessibility to learning. Teachers may need to mobilise support from colleagues or leaders to help provide support. In some scenarios, family may need to be contacted to determine how best support can be provided.

Some scenarios may be difficult to support, particularly in situations where students may be isolated (such as during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown). In these situations, it may be impossible for a student without a computer to receive one and engage meaningfully in class. Support needs to take into account the unique situations in which students find themselves and ensure that it is tailored to their contexts. For example, some students may need to receive work via physical mail so that they may work from home without a device or internet access.

Students facing wellbeing issues, such as those living in homes where there is significant disruption or animosity, may need support through other staff or external agencies to ensure that they are emotionally supported while they learn from home.

2. **Teachers have control over the online learning environment.** This includes control over who is present, who is able to speak, what is being shown etc. Teachers must, therefore, have the knowledge to be able to:

- Add students to a call;
- Remove students from a call;
- Mute students in a call;
- Control what is shared from the teachers' screen; and
- Limit students' privileges in a call, such as sharing their screens.

Where any pieces of knowledge are missing or there are gaps in practice, then this must be addressed promptly through teacher training.

This knowledge allows for problem behaviours to be managed in online learning environments and allows for emergencies to be quickly averted where they arise.

3. **Teachers will have the knowledge to engage in online teaching and learning practices.** Where there are gaps in knowledge or practice, these are quickly addressed through individualised support and staff-wide professional learning. As with the e-Learning policy, teachers should be familiar with technologies which facilitate learning.

Teacher stress may be minimised by providing ample technical support provision and digital literacy facilitation. Teachers should feel like their ability to teach online is supported and should have some say in how this best occurs. The rationale needs to be made very clear to teachers so that they feel some control over online learning, even when other aspects of life feel out of control, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic.

4. **All students are to have the behavioural expectations of online learning made clear to them.** This means that students know how to behave in ways that uphold the values of St. Joseph's Primary School, summarised in our school motto, 'Learning, Friendship, Respect.' Students should know about what they need to do online to follow the behaviour code, understanding the differences in behaviour online and behaviour in classroom settings.

The following shows how the St. Joseph's Primary School's Positive Behaviour Policy is translated into online learning specific environments such as that experienced during COVID-19.

At St. Joseph's School we all do our best to:

Physical setting	Online setting
Respect each other's right to learn;	Respect each other's right to learn in online settings by taking turns and listening to others;
Speak positively and politely to one another;	Speaking positively and politely to one another over the Internet through the chat function or verbally;
Play and work co-operatively and peacefully;	Work-cooperatively and peacefully in online settings;
Follow the directions of those whose job it is to help us;	Following directions of those whose job it is to help us while we learn online;
Look after school equipment, personal belongings and those of others;	
Help each other follow this code.	

	Respect online work of my own and that of others; Help each other follow this code.
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5. **Online rules** may be made to help teachers and students navigate behaviours and determine what is appropriate and what is inappropriate for a successful online learning environment. Teachers should co-construct with their students a list of rules or guidelines to follow the behaviour code.

The online rules should reflect the class rules in a physical setting. Small adjustments will need to be made. For example, if there is a rule that students must not interrupt others and raise their hand if they want to speak, then in an online learning environment, the rule would be that students are expected to raise their hand on camera or raise a hand icon if one is available on the platform, and that students are expected to mute their microphones when not answering a question or participating in the discussion.

Teachers and students should collaborate in going through their class rules and specifying how rules can be applied to online settings. Like their physical class counterparts, these online rules should describe the desirable behaviour (e.g. follow the teacher's instructions online).

6. **All students are to have an opportunity to participate.** This means that classroom online rules should delineate who may speak and when, and how students are given a chance to contribute in an online setting where social cues may be absent or more difficult to interpret. Where a class activity involves a discussion, rules should be in place to ensure everyone has a chance to participate, such as taking turns.

In a video call setting, this may be achieved through physically raising a hand to the screen. If video is not used (or not available on a laptop without a webcam) then a certain word or a hand icon may be used to signal that a student would like to speak. This is to maintain the rules of engagement and ensure that teachers have control over who is speaking and when under different learning activities.

Students learning from home may face frequent disruptions such as a baby crying or a sibling entering the room. These are events which may largely be out of the control of the students. Because of this, it is recommended that teachers enforce a 'muted unless speaking policy' to avoid the potential for constant disruptions.

7. **Positive behaviour is to be emphasised and reinforced.** As occurs in physical classroom settings, teachers should use a range of strategies appropriate to various ages of students to acknowledge and reinforce appropriate behaviour, but in the context of an online learning environment. This needs to ensure that whole class rewards or privileges are available for all students who meet behavioural expectations under the class online rules.

Positive reinforcement may be delivered through fun activities for the class, publicly recognising a student's efforts (e.g. "It's great to see you focusing on your work Sean", "Thanks for raising your hand Molly, what would you like to say?"), or providing forms of certificates via e-mail.

These reinforcing actions maintain and strengthen positive learning behaviours and motivate students to act as online citizens.

8. **Consequences:** Where behavioural expectations are not met or the behavioural code is broken, consequences need to be made clear to students. Consequences should be agreed upon by the class and formed into progressive **steps** as non-compliance continues. These consequential steps should follow the same progression as those in physical settings and consequences should be matched to the severity of the ongoing problem behaviours.

Students need to be made aware of consequences before they happen and make efforts to decelerate any situations where problem behaviour arises before consequences are introduced.

Effort needs to be directed at ensuring that consequences are fair based on the behaviour. There needs to be an awareness that some consequences can be embarrassing or overly exclusive, which may lead to worse learning outcomes, disengagement, and further problem behaviour.

Consequences need to be tailored to the online learning environment. They may follow this progression:

- The students' microphone being centrally muted;
- The students' video being centrally switched off;
- The student being blocked from posting material in the online space;
- The student being removed from the video call;
- The student being removed from the platform.

In each of these scenarios, parents may be contacted by phone and informed of incident(s). Removing a student from a platform is similar to the physical school consequence of **suspension**. In physical settings, this requires students to work under the supervision of a teacher aide or other staff members. In an online setting, this is difficult as students can't be physically in the presence of a teacher aide, and particularly severe situations may have students remove themselves from communications (not answering calls, not replying to e-mails, not engaging with the school in any way). It is possible for students to be connected to a teacher aide or other staff member to help them keep learning and deal with their behavioural issues, however, it is important to note that removing students from platforms should be a last resort to minimise this possibility.

9. The **Positive Behaviour Policy** will be adapted for online learning environments. As above, this means tailoring disciplinary actions for online learning.
10. **Withdrawing students:** Removing students from video calls should only be used as a last resort and only temporarily. Muting a student for ongoing misbehaviour may be an option before they need to be removed from the call. Removing students from an online call runs the risk of them disengaging and not coming back as they are not physically present. Blocking them from a service means they will not have access to the same learning as their peers.

In the event of an emergency, such as a student showing inappropriate material or posing a security risk, they should be removed immediately and disciplinary action should be swift to ensure the safety of the class. Parents will be contacted to inform them of the misconduct and actions being taken by the school.

11. A **behaviour notebook/contract** should be encouraged to be used when learning online. This will help students with SEBD manage their own behaviour online and promote positive behaviour.
12. **Role of the Principal or Vice-Principal:** The Principal or Vice Principal should assist in the behavioural issues where regular online disciplinary approaches are not working. They should be made aware of parent and guardian contacts and referrals to external agencies will occur via the Principal or Vice Principal.
13. Digital etiquette is to be maintained through teachers' proactive curation of the online learning environment. This means that teachers use virus protection software, do not share usernames or passwords, and carefully monitor the exchange of documents and viewing/editing privileges.

### **CONCLUSION:**

Online learning may be necessitated by unforeseen issues, such as the global situation of COVID-19, or may become an ongoing part of teaching and learning at St. Joseph's School. When learning occurs exclusively online without physical proximity to a teacher, there are potential psychological and behavioural issues. This is due to students needing to work in an environment that is different than usual.

This policy outlines ways in which online learning can be facilitated and positive behaviour can be maintained. This means that a positive environment for learning, self-discipline and responsibility is upheld much like it would in a physical classroom.

This policy recognises that problematic behaviour can be dealt with in ways similar to a physical learning space, and thus requires forward-thinking and planning in terms of creating expectations of behaviour, setting boundaries, outlining disciplinary actions, and carefully managing online learning environments to be as safe as possible.

## Parental Guidelines

Online learning poses significant challenges for students. Research has shown that when school/learning environments are mixed with personal/home environments, learning and behaviour are harder to control. Research also suggests that learning through online calls is more mentally exhausting, and this means that students may be more likely to get distracted, disengage, or start to behave in ways that they would not normally do in a classroom.

When students are engaging with online learning, they are not physically present with their teacher, but are still connected to them via video calls and the expectation of their behaviour is the same as that of the physical classroom. Students abide by a behaviour code which they co-design with their teacher, and rule breaking will result in warnings and consequences. Where online behaviour is believed to put students at risk, students will be immediately removed from a call and disciplinary action may be taken.

Students are also likely under higher levels of stress. While being at home often seems and feels like a holiday or break, the stress associated with working in unfamiliar conditions, engaging with teachers in new contexts, and balancing their school and home life can put students under stress and result in increased emotional outbursts.

In order to help students integrate into this new style of learning, we ask that parents and caregivers offer some support to help make learning online a little easier for them.

### 1. Set up the learning environment

Help students adjust to the online classroom by having them seated, connected, and ready to go 5-10 minutes early. This means that when the call happens, students are seated and attentive, and don't need to leave their workstation.

In order to help with attention and motivation, it is recommended that students have a workstation. This means a table or desk from which they can sit and concentrate and have their resources nearby or within reaching distance. This is not always possible, and in those cases, it is recommended that students have an area where they consistently do their work.

This is because, for the duration of online learning, they have an area they can mentally associate with work. It is recommended that this is not the same place that they sleep, so students should not work from bed as this can lead to issues "switching off" at bed time.

The space should ideally be quiet although we understand that during extraordinary circumstances such as COVID-19, it is difficult to control the environment within the bubble. Where possible, students should be able to work without noise or significant distraction.

### 2. Help students get connected

Online learning will require that students are able to use their microphone (computers will have this built in, however many will choose to use wireless headphones etc.), web camera (if their computer has one), e-mail, and the Internet as basics.

Make sure your child knows how to answer a call, how to mute their microphone, how to turn off their video, and how to leave a call. If possible, be nearby in case a technical issue is faced and you need to intervene and help. However, once connected, provide some distances so that your child may work in peace as they would in a physical environment.

3. Be prepared for things not going to plan

Please don't interrupt a call or ask questions unrelated to the learning in the call. If there is something doesn't make sense, it is fine to ask. However, if the question pertains to something that can be sorted via e-mail or a private phone call while the class is not occurring, it is best to leave this until later. Teachers will be navigating a difficult space during online learning and it is inevitable that there will be false starts and things not going to plan as we all get up to speed.

**ASSOCIATED POLICIES:**

**This policy operates alongside all of the school's relevant safeguarding and behaviour policies.**

DRAFT

<b>Date Ratified by Board of Governors:</b>	
<b>Principal's Signature:</b>	
<b>Chairperson's Signature:</b>	