

## Lockdown Case Study:

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### Online Learning and Library Provision

Prior to the national lockdown in March 2020, ISL had worked very hard on preparing for a potential online learning situation. This involved Microsoft Teams training for all staff, setting up Teams class groups for students, ensuring all students had suitable devices to use and taking advice from schools in other parts of the world that had already been working remotely. The team of Library staff at ISL spent a significant amount of time planning for working remotely and designing an outline of what online library provision would look like. This outline was designed to be receptive to a rapidly changing situation.

Under normal circumstances, our Primary provision involves a weekly library lesson with book exchange, story time and other activities. We decided to put the weekly lessons on hold in order to limit the amount of screen time the students would have. We also agreed with primary teachers that we would regularly review this decision with them, and would be available to take part in or run lessons as required in terms of story time and research. We still offered new educational content and material on a weekly basis with pre-recorded videos exploring different elements of digital research alongside a list of library-related resources and weblinks, that teachers could utilise in any way that worked for their class, to incorporate library lesson material into their weekly schedule.

Our Grade 5 (Year 6) students work towards the PYP Exhibition which involves general research skills training through library lessons (which were already underway) and personal research followed by a presentation later in the school year. It was decided that there would be a weekly 1-hour long library lesson which was run as a discussion forum to enable students to run ideas by library staff and to get advice on sources of information for specific topics. These were attended by both Grade 5 classes and some teaching staff. It became clear that the Exhibition was also going to run differently and so the library team were able to work with the students (in collaboration with other staff) to prepare them for online presentations, attend their rehearsal sessions and also attend the full day Exhibition event, which was a huge success.

After the first few weeks of online learning, it was decided that primary students would have Wednesdays as a catch-up day with no set work or lessons. Some students would use the time to catch up on unfinished work, some would spend the time off-screen with their families, and some would take part in optional Electives that were set up by various staff. The purpose of this arrangement was to provide families with more flexibility to accommodate a wide range of varying circumstances. These sessions involved a short video to be uploaded in advance to introduce the days challenge or activity, and for the member of staff to monitor the Teams channel at pre-arranged times throughout the day to answer questions and feed back to students. There was a wide range of electives being run – from cooking and art through to building and coding, and the students really enjoyed these activities. One of the library assistants offered a coding elective, which built on a series of library lessons held before the first lockdown but opened participation to all PYP students of varying abilities and ages. Previously the coding classes were limited to Grade 4 (Year 5), but the Elective saw participation from extremely young Grade 1 (Year 2) students up to Grade 5 (Year 6).

We had been looking at the possibility of introducing an e-book library before lockdown with the intention of spending some time trialling different options before launching it to students in September 2020. We made a decision to bring this project forward so ePlatform was launched to students in late March, and we purchased the primary and secondary packages of e-books and audio books so that the whole school was catered for. This has been successful, and while an e-book and audiobook library cannot totally replace physical library stock, it has quickly become an integral part of the primary and secondary library offering to the whole school.

Behind the scenes, the library staff quickly transitioned to working in an online capacity. We were all based at home for the full duration of lockdown and school closures, and found many innovative ways to promote our work, support our staff and students, and to creatively redesign our roles. Our part-time library assistant spent her time developing outlines of user guides for some of our online resources alongside lists of book

awards and guides for academic honesty, etc. Our full-time library assistant was very busy planning and developing the coding elective alongside looking at many topical resource packs, including Black Lives Matter, and working on diversifying our collection (work that we had started prior to lockdown). This became a recurring theme throughout our initial learning period. So many of our pre-lockdown initiatives were already geared towards identifying gaps in and building on our digital resource bank, resources which became vitally important overnight and, as such, allowed us to continue our work near seamlessly into lockdown.

As Head of Department, I felt a great deal of responsibility to our staff and students in terms of ensuring that they felt supported, had access to as wide a range of resources as possible and that they knew who to contact for any help, advice or training. I spent a lot of time exploring potential digital resources, trying to marry up the needs of staff and students with the criteria of the IB curriculum, working out what would be worth investing in and setting up trials. It was a balance between inundating students and staff with a wealth of resources that they wouldn't have time to use or learn how to navigate and not providing what was needed! I felt very strongly that this was an excellent time to look at professional development for my team and so I shared any training opportunities and webinars, and between us we were able to avail ourselves of a wide range of CPD. I was also mindful about the wellbeing of my team and made a commitment to have regular check-ins (at least once every week) with them to make sure they were well and coping with this massive change in our working lives.

Alongside keeping the department running, I started planning for a variety of options in terms of reopening the libraries again once our school buildings reopened. I was involved in a number of useful online discussions within SLN (School Librarians Network) and international school library forums. I looked carefully at all the guidance being generated within the UK and overseas by the likes of CILIP, SLN, IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations) and ALA (American Library Association). I attended a few webinars looking at the practicalities of reopening library provision within the health and safety framework of a pandemic. I made sure that I was in regular contact with my SLT, who were very supportive of the work my department had been doing, kept them in the loop of advice provided by unions and the specialist library advice I was receiving, and we had a good plan in place for a range of possibilities in terms of reopening.

The leadership of the school made the decision not to reopen before the end of the summer term. We had run a very successful online learning programme for the whole school and our school year was due to end earlier than many schools in the UK. We were then able to concentrate on finishing off the school year as well as we could whilst starting to think about the practicalities of reopening after the summer holiday.

One of the key methods of communication between the school and families is the weekly bulletin. The library has always had a presence in the bulletin with an entry most weeks. I ensured that this continued throughout the whole lockdown. Whether it was a reminder about using ePlatform, information about an online book festival (e.g. Hay Festival), highlighting what students were learning in their research skills lessons that week, or communicating a new service or resource to parents and students, there was regular input from library staff. We view our involvement in this as vital in terms of maintaining our visibility across the school and with our families.

While there were many personal and professional challenges along the way, we felt as a department that we had offered a good level of library provision for the duration of the lockdown and that it had been a huge learning experience for the team that we had mostly enjoyed. One of the key outcomes for us was the level of creativity that we had used in terms of communicating with the whole school community, and how we had developed our roles in ways that would be of benefit to the school in the longer term. Interestingly, many of the developments we adopted were things that had been discussed earlier in the school year, but were part of a much longer-term plan and it was a great opportunity to be able to bring these initiatives forward or introduce them in a different way to how we would have expected.

Our departmental aim was to be prepared for a move to online learning and to ensure that we had all resources and devices that we might need along with a plan for development. We were very successful in terms of our planning and preparation, and were able to showcase our skills and expertise in adapting to this new way of working and learning. The main impact has been to further integrate our skills, services and expertise into the school community much more effectively.

In terms of the impact on teaching and learning, we've seen measurable change in that area. Research skills lessons are now an integral part of PYP students' both in-person and virtual timetable,

expanding from Grade 5 to Grade 3-5. MYP staff members have approached the library team for workshopping lessons to help students with references, citations and digital resources, and students are more confident in reaching out for academic support with instant access messaging via TEAMS. Our DP students have always been encouraged to seek out additional support as needed in terms of working on their Extended Essays, TOK Essays, revision skills and organisational skills - we have seen an increase in these individual requests from students which we can be fairly confident is as a result of an improvement in our lines of communication across the school.

The initial decisions, and the regular reviews and changes made, were as a result of conversations both within the department and with colleagues across the school. We regularly took on board information from other sources (both formal and informal) in terms of informing our practice, but, in reality, our aim was to provide the best support and resources for the whole school community based on staff and student needs using a range of tools, discussions and expertise.

It is difficult to obtain measurable evidence. We have loan data from ePlatform but there is nothing to compare it to as service was launched during lockdown. It is not comparable with physical loan data from the previous year as weekly library lessons with book exchange built in would have created much higher levels of borrowing. With regards to the Coding elective – students worked towards certificates (Hour of Code) throughout the programme. We played a part in the PYP Exhibition – both in the process and the production of the final presentation for the students; the whole project was developed as an online option for the first time in 2020.

Throughout the lockdown, we discussed the good practice that we were developing and how to continue this when back in the school buildings. It has become clear that much of the good work we did would translate back into the classroom and library.

We continued with many similar ways of working as we moved back into face-to-face learning within zones and bubbles, and there was a need to maintain much of the online presence.

For anyone tackling a similar project:

1. Planning and contingency planning (scenario A, B, C) with the team so that everyone involved feels comfortable with the plan. This also shows SLT and others that there are a range of workable options based on decisions outside of our control
2. Good communication with the rest of the school community (finding out how people respond best and using these channels).
3. Clear expectations communicated to the library team, other staff and students in terms of what we expect to offer and how we can support and help. Allow scope to evolve in ways that are not expected or obvious. Remain open to suggestions from others.

One observation that I have made throughout this experience is the differing ways that schools have responded to the transition to online teaching. Obviously, some schools and their students have more barriers to online learning than others and every school has a unique range of issues, problems and solutions at this unprecedented time. ISL was very proactive in planning and there has been an expectation for all staff to implement the school planning as is relevant and appropriate to their role and position. Alongside this, staff have both the expertise and the confidence to be creative and to figure out what works for them and their students. It is also important to note that we have been very fortunate in terms of the technology and devices available to us as a school. We have a great IT department who were very active in getting us ready for online learning and ironing out many early issues, a good distribution of devices across the school (for staff and students) and a great support network around us within the school staff that made the whole process much easier than it could have otherwise been.