

keeping learning going...

how can we create a great remote staff culture?



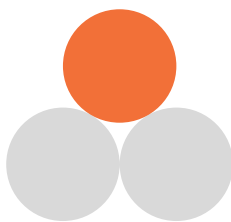
why is this important?

As teachers, we've all been into schools where we can just 'feel' a great staff culture. It's where staff feel happy about being at work, where they have an enthusiasm for teaching, and where they care deeply about their students and their colleagues.

Schools are stressful places - teachers are dealing with the emotional management of hundreds of students; we're designing learning that has to be engaging and linked to assessment objectives; we're dealing with students who have suffered trauma; and we're often managing our own families! The workload is heavy and intense. Yet despite all of these obstacles, we find happy teachers. We're often happy because we care about the progress and learning of our students, and we love seeing success and achievement written on their faces. We are happy because we work in a close-knit team who share successes and failures - we feel cared for and we care. Teaching is also an amazingly creative job, and there is a great sense of joy in creating learning materials and seeing them work. We are happy also because we have a sense of purpose - over our career our actions will make a difference to the lives of thousands of young people.

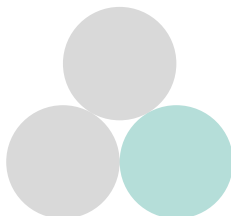
This toolkit will give practical tips about how to nurture a great staff culture remotely, where your staff feel happy and purposeful.

key ideas in this kit



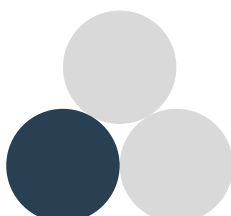
moving great things about your culture online

Ensuring the hard work you've done to build staff morale and connectedness translates to remote environments.



facing up to today's challenge

Creating caring and supportive team cultures given the craziness going on in the world at the moment.



the opportunities

Making the most of the opportunities remote work provides and boosting staff culture with some new protocols.

moving great things about your culture online

reflection

There are probably awesome things about your staff culture. In fact, you might already miss being around your colleagues and sharing stories of your family antics over the break, or the latest viral Tik Tok. Now is the time to think really purposefully about your school culture. What actions make it real? What regular activities give you that sense of support you need as a teacher?

Take a moment to jot down the important staff 'cultural' events that occur on a regular basis. It might be daily morning tea in the staffroom, or open teaching and learning meetings that are a safe space to share successes and failures. Which of these might transfer online now during a time of remote learning?

tools

So what practical actions can we take to ensure our great staff culture moves online?

- **Events:** This might be a good time to do an audit of events! Which of them should be dropped from the calendar? Which new events should be introduced to foster culture and connection? Move those important staff cultural events onto a platform so that people can be involved from their living room. There are loads of online platforms like Zoom, Google Hangouts, and TEAMS. You could even use Facetime! Teachers also love routine - we're used to our day being highly structured. If we used to have morning tea with the whole staff at 10:30am, then schedule a whole staff Zoom meeting everyday at 10:30am where people can socialise and chat. You might want to structure these with daily check-in questions or by sharing a theme that people come prepared to talk about (like the first overseas holiday they'll take when all of this is over!) and share those important un-emailable announcements at these scheduled times, too.

moving great things about your culture online

- **Meetings:** A key aspect of staff culture has always been meetings. In fact, you're probably having more staff meetings now that we've moved online! You should use meetings to encourage each other to try new things. During meetings, do you have a culture that encourages creativity and sees failure as an opportunity for improvement? Everyone is creating so much content at the moment - some teachers will love this and feel inspired, whilst others may feel overwhelmed. Use meetings to support teachers who are finding it tough and to celebrate the successes of those who are feeling inspired.
- **Accountability:** Part of being caring and creating a supportive staff culture is also ensuring people understand what they are accountable for, and who they're accountable to. This is a good time to remind people of their clear roles, and who they are reporting to. There are plenty of online tools available which can help with accountability when working remotely. We use Slack and share with our team daily targets. You can also use WhatsApp or TEAMS in the same way. Whilst ensuring accountability is important, if you're a manager it's better to 'default to trust'. Teachers are all doing their best at the moment and it's a stressful and anxious time. Setting inflexible targets could end up causing more harm than good.

action

Talk with your team - even if you're not the leader - about the benefits of collaboration and how we all have to ensure ongoing collaboration during this time of isolation.

Investigate online platforms that make collaboration easier and trial the use of these with a small team before you suggest everyone jumps on board. That way, you can iron out the bumps!

facing up to today's challenge

reflection

Ensuring everyone in a school feels nurtured and happy is hard enough under normal circumstances, let alone the current situation. Acknowledging the challenges our colleagues are faced with outside of work, actions must be taken to balance the sense of achievement that comes with working hard with the danger of burn-out, and to foster staff relationships so that they are caring and supportive. Effective time management strategies need to provide teachers with the space to be creative, and celebrating the successes of our students as a result of all our hard work has never been more important.

Keeping in mind the challenges our colleagues are currently faced with both at work and in their homes, how can we ensure a creative, purposeful, supportive and caring remote staff culture?

tools

What can we do to ensure a positive remote staff culture?

- **Creative and purposeful:** For a happy staff culture, educators need to feel as though they can do their job well and that they can collaborate effectively. To monitor and encourage collaborative work, provide staff with tools that make collaboration easy and practical. Online tools like Google Docs and Google Hangouts, Slack and WhatsApp can all be used to make collaboration easier. Once you've shared them with staff and people have had a crack at using them, run a survey to see how well they are being received. Provide professional learning to staff to support them to develop expertise in these new ways of working, and resource team members who are great at using the new platforms and designing remote learning sequences with time to support their colleagues. It's important that if staff are struggling they know how to get help. Student engagement might also be difficult in this period. It's soul-destroying to spend time and creative energy on lots of fantastic online content and then have no-one turn up to the online lesson! Make sure your staff know how to get support if they feel students aren't engaging in their online lessons.

facing up to today's challenge

- **Supportive and caring:** This time of such extreme change and restriction will be difficult for everyone. All of the community needs to feel like we are all in this together, supporting each other socially, emotionally and professionally. School managers should make sure there are structures in place for caring for the mental health of staff that can be effectively used and implemented online. State education departments have counselling services free to access for teachers (and some states even offer the service to teachers' families). We love the work of Beyond Blue who provide great resources to support the mental health of teachers. Make sure all of your staff know where they can get support. You might like to trial a "buddy-up" system where trusted colleagues can monitor the mental well-being of each other. Try starting meetings with positive primers, sharing an optimistic outlook, identifying the opportunities for education amidst the chaos of current events. Help staff to see that because of this turn of events, they are creating solutions now that they would never have had the time or impetus to create in the past. It's good to also explicitly acknowledge the challenges of working from home. Many teachers have children of their own and it's important to show empathy for the challenges of balancing work and parenthood if their three energetic kids are stuck inside all day.

action

Consider creative ways you can make it clear to your colleagues, regardless of whether you have management responsibilities or not, that you care about them and that you want to work together at this difficult time.

the opportunities

reflection

As the old saying goes, when life gives you lemons, make lemonade! Whilst there is no doubt that this is a challenging time for school cultures, we can look on the bright side and try to make the most of the reality we have in front of us.

Take a moment to think about what you have been doing to foster the good times with your friends and family, and which of these might be appropriate or work well for your staff culture.

tools

What are some cool ways of staying social and engaged as a staff?

- **Share the love:** In a busy school you can sometimes go days or even weeks without seeing some members of staff. If you use instant messaging platforms well (such as Slack or Microsoft Teams), set up channels like 'sendsomelove' or 'goodvibes' where you encourage people to shine a light on someone who has done something great in the school.
- **Walking meetings:** The insides of our homes can start to get a little monotonous when we are working from home, so why not set up some small teams of five or so people for 'Wednesday Walkers' groups who can pound the pavement at 4:00 for thirty minutes, plug the headphones in, and catch up and check in on each other.
- **Is everyone OK?:** We saw a powerful activity done in a school once where a small card was written up for every child and stuck onto the wall of the basketball court. Staff had to go around and put a check mark next to the students they had a positive and close relationship with. After fifteen minutes it was pretty clear which kids didn't have a supportive teacher getting around them. Could school leaders do this with their staff? Perhaps try the website Trello and create a card for each staff member and then have leaders put their initials next to staff that they are actively supporting through this challenging time.

the opportunities

- **Positive Peers:** Could this be a time where staff set some fitness goals together, and your PE teacher is running bootcamp classes by video, or creating meditation recordings for people? Have some fun with this, and have people set their goals publicly and then share their updates for some peer support!
- **Social Apps:** There are some great apps out there that help people link up and socialise. Netflix Party allows people to watch Netflix movies together and chat to each other simultaneously. You can share a TikTok dance with your colleagues, or join together using the HouseParty app. It's not for everyone, but human interaction is so important in keeping up our morale and facing this challenge positively, so investigate the options and get socialising!



action

What is one positive culture builder that you can bring into your online support with staff in the next week?

thank you for all you do to educate our children

the EC crew



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**professional learning +
support that changes schools**

Education Changemakers is an organisation founded by teachers, for teachers. We have a range of resources you can draw on from podcasts to videos, and books to workshops. If you would like to read more about how we may be able to partner with your school, head on over to educationchangemakers.com.