



International School of London

THE TRANSITION AND TRIUMPH OF VIRTUAL SCHOOL, AND BEYOND

BY RICHARD DUDLEY, HEAD OF MARKETING

VIRTUAL LEARNING AT ISL

Back in March 2020, the face of education changed dramatically with the closure of school sites around the world to safeguard students, teachers and their families from the impact of a global pandemic. For us at the International School of London (ISL), we faced a speedy transition, unprecedented change, but more than anything a new (virtual) world of opportunity we wouldn't even have thought possible, enabling the delivery of the highest-quality virtual learning at home.

From the beginning, ISL responded fast by moving our entire International Baccalaureate programme to virtual, with all teachers and support staff given comprehensive training on the new virtual classroom environment, crafted and created in Microsoft Teams. Teachers adapted to the new learning platforms with great efficacy and enthusiasm, and as such were fully prepared for the first day of virtual school, in late March. With our teachers eager to login and begin, and students equipped and excited to connect virtually with ISL, we were ready to make good on our commitment to deliver world-class education to the homes of our students and community.

Joris Deckers, ISL Group Head of IT, with the support of Microsoft, spearheaded the development of our Microsoft Teams platform to create a space for every member of the ISL community. Face-to-face lesson delivery was live from day one, shortly followed by tutor groups, social time, elective activity, extra-curricular clubs and facilitated PTA meetings. Towards the end of the Summer term, three virtual graduations were also hosted (Primary, Middle Years and Diploma) with a mix of live streaming and pre-recorded video seamlessly combined to create a celebration of learning which is the crescendo of the year.



Grade 12 Virtual Graduation Ceremony

TECHNOLOGY

"Technology is only but a tool, best when it brings and keeps people together. Thanks to the ISL mission, vision and core values, this is precisely what we have achieved. However, during such pandemic, engaging our students, driving collaboration and motivating them, it is our teachers and parents who are the heroes without a cape. It is paramount we recognise that such a holistic shift in the use of technology can only ever be achieved by a common goal embraced by whole community, not just a single individual. Microsoft and Teams formed to be the inclusive vehicle that has helped us to quickly transpose our world-class education into an entire online environment."

Joris Deckers.



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Another key takeaway from the thorough preparation for virtual learning, was the heading-off-at-the-pass of a potential barrage of safeguarding and child protection concerns as a result of all school work being linked to and conducted from children's homes. Our expert pastoral and safeguarding leads researched and sort guidance from the wider international school network to better understand concerns they'd faced and addressed already, including schools in Hong Kong and Malaysia. ISL staff, parents and students were briefed on new protocols and practices to keep our community safe, which is always our highest priority, in physical or virtual school..



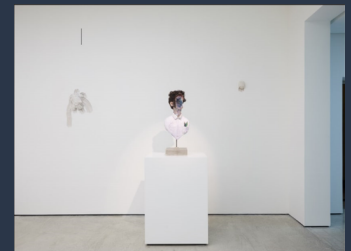
E-Safety Workshop, hosted on Microsoft Teams and shared on Youtube

Moving from being stood up in a classroom of students to delivering learning to a camera and organising a group of students accessing school from computers at home, is, to put it mildly, a big transition. The adaptability of our teachers and support staff was key, as they altered curriculums, overcame hurdles, switched-up lesson plans and learnt new digital skills within a matter of days. We focused all our efforts on teacher training; producing specialised tutorials for every question which might arise during virtual school.

Teachers have preferred ways of working, and because every subject is different, we provided the resources every teacher requires to deliver lessons in the best way possible, from assigned equipment they could take home, to the latest Tech plugins and resources for teachers, including: Microsoft Teams, Bug Club, Smartboards, Sketch Up Pro and the Adobe Creative Cloud package.

ART & DESIGN

The Middle Year's Program Art & Design Showcase was hosted in a virtual exhibition gallery. Users can navigate around as if they were walking around a museum. It was modelled on the White Cube Gallery, Hong Kong.





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In our Primary school, our teachers set up 1:1 video conference calls not only with students, but with families daily to check in and see how people in each household were coping. From this feedback, learning was then personalised to suit the needs of each family. As well-being was of extreme importance, after a few weeks of online learning, the Primary staff reflected on what was working well and looked at areas which could be improved. Primary initiated an 'Electives Day', where students had the option of catching up on past work or joining in engaging and fun activities to compliment the curriculum already in place for the year. Many students joined in as staff ran activities like; coding, exploring different apps, cooking, art classes, photography classes, brilliant science experiments and many more. Electives became a huge success and student agency shone through when some of our students began to run the Electives activities themselves.



Primary Year's students create insects with materials from the garden and around the house.

Our parent community were also incredibly supportive and encouraging, and were perhaps for the first time seeing first-hand, in their own homes, the amazing teaching that is part of the everyday at ISL. The PTA, parent tutor-group and mother-tongue language reps, all had virtual areas to meet and facilitate those key relationships with existing parents, as well as welcoming new families into ISL who joined us during #ISLVirtualSchool.



ISL Parent English Lessons were held virtually every week.

WELLBEING

Besides the academic, there are a number of other areas which a community require to live well, these include a focus on exercise, maintaining balance, good physical and mental health, mindfulness and being able to relax whilst living during an uncertain time. ISL introduced a number of initiatives and support systems to ensure our community had access to the resources and advice they needed, when they needed it. A new virtual learning area on the school website, a direct line for students, dedicated tech support available 7 days a week via phone and email, parents and teachers into the school counselling and transitions team, access to expert practitioners in relaxation therapy, yoga, and fitness to name a few.





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Events, celebrations of learning and exhibitions are culminations of a year's (or more) hard work for students. With the move to virtual school and safety measures on social distancing, all of the ISL Summer Term events were moved online. From art & design exhibits, concerts and music recitals, project presentations and even graduation, ISL provided online platforms for showcasing the exceptional talent, skill, endeavour and accomplishment of our students. Our students have inspired us all to persevere through the storm of #Lockdown, and learn to dance in the rain.



Students gave us all so many reasons to smile and celebrate during virtual school.



Editor Notes:

About ISL

The International School of London (ISL) is an International Baccalaureate (IB) school for ages 3-18, providing an intercultural community which fosters a passion and enthusiasm for learning through outstanding educational practices, recognised by OFSTED, the IB and CIS.

At ISL, everything we design activates students, teachers and parents to use the diverse cultures, languages and viewpoints around them to change the world for the better. Students' cultural and linguistic identities are valued and nurtured through our international curriculum and Mother Tongue programme, offering over 30 languages.

Since 1972, we've established a community where students, parents and staff are happy and engaged in school life and feel they belong. That starts with our award winning transitions programme giving our new starters the warmest welcome, and nurturing them as they grow. That's why our people are curious, able to explore deeper and broader, and build a unique understanding of the world around them.

LEADERSHIP

Leadership play a hugely important and influential role in any successful, thriving school. Perhaps even more so in times of great change. ISL Head of School, Mr. Richard Parker, along with Primary Principal, Ms. Kathryn Firebrace and Secondary Principal, Mr. Paul Rose, opened new two-way communication channels with the whole school community to ensure every voice was heard, no query too small. On top of extensive planning and organisation behind the scenes, ISL Principals craft regular video messages addressing our community, which are sent out to guide and reassure our families and staff, during what is an unsettling time for many.

