Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia

Survey results: How are schools conducting parent teacher interviews remotely?

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Members of AHISA's Depnet service were recently asked to share their experiences of conducting parent teacher interviews remotely.

A total of 18 deputies responded, and their answers are shared below.

Thank you to Kerri Batch, College Head of Learning and Acting Head of Faculty - Humanities (Years 7-9) at Aitken College in Victoria, for asking this timely question and for collating the results.

Arrangements for parent teacher interviews
We did all of our PT interviews R – 12 by telephone and it worked well. We used our usual booking system and said we'd ring once and if no answer, again in 3 minutes, and then assume they were unavailable. Some teachers asked if they could do them from home, which was allowed.
We went over 4 batches, 2 afternoons each and had phone/conference/group calls. Monday and Tuesday we had Years 9-10 with each call to be a maximum of 7 minutes. Teacher called the parent. The student was also on the call.
We set up Zoom meetings for each staff member with waiting rooms turned on and the 'bell' to signal someone had arrived in the waiting room turned on. Access links to the Zoom rooms were published in a 'Virtual Hall' in the LMS so only authorised community members could see them. Teachers admitted parents from the waiting room at their scheduled appointment time and stuck strictly to the 5 minute interview time. Parents were requested to have a recognisable name on their device so teachers knew who to admit. Parents who were late could only use remaining time or were not admitted. Teachers conducted the interviews from home, in two 2pm to 5pm sessions. Parents were overwhelmingly very happy that they could avoid travel time to school and could attend interviews from wherever they were.
We use Teams. Teachers call the student on Teams. The parent is present. It worked well last term.
We are looking to phone home. We don't want parents or others recording Zoom sessions.

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We ran 2:00-6:00pm on two days and cancelled the last class (they were remote/at home anyway). 10min slots were allocated for MS and SS, but parents were advised they were only 5 minute interviews (as we would do normally). On average they went 6 or 7 mins, but they were ready on time for the next one. 10 min slots were also allocated for JS. Interviews ran via the students' Teams video call – so the teacher rang at the allocated time. Whilst we haven't done a survey, anecdotally, parents enjoyed it – not waiting in corridors or halls. Teachers were on time and could do their own things in between. We normally do a 4:00-8:00pm and 4:00-6:00pm each round of interviews so the expectation for an extra two hours was an initial concern but this was overcome once the event occurred. There were one or two concerns about the lack of face-to-face in person interviews, but we are thinking about how we could improve this with the start of year information nights etc. We couldn't do it for our JS student-led conferences, but there are strong feelings about continuing into 2021. We will do it again this way in Term 3 for MS and SS. Note: we would normally do our first round late Term 1 early Term 2 but obviously these got pushed out this year. Of course, staff enjoyed doing interviews from home too! And we didn't need to provide meals/refreshments etc. It's maybe one of the unexpected things to come out of the past few months that we may well continue, possibly for the second ones in the year, having met face-to-face in the first ones.

We have conducted one session of interviews by phone and, by and large, it was seen as a success with many suggesting we make it part of our ongoing (post-COVID) planning. It was particularly appreciated by Boarding families. We used online booking for interview times. Previously we have had 5 minutes per interview. This time we made slots begin every 10 minutes to allow time between phone calls so there isn't always an engaged signal on the other end due to the other interview just finishing up. Teachers made calls from school phones or personal mobiles or home phones. If a personal phone was used they were advised to set it to no caller ID. When bookings were closed (about midday. Interviews started at 3:30), the Director of Studies generated a Spreadsheet of teacher, parent, student, contact phone numbers, etc. (which could be filtered by teacher) and circulated this so teachers had the phone numbers at hand. This system meant fewer interview slots were available, so parents could email a request to someone they had missed out on speaking to – there were not many I think. Our only real issue was that we have a limit of approx. 24 calls going out from school at any one time, so some teachers sometimes experienced not being

able to get a line out. We have searched further for school mobiles and encouraged teachers to use their own phones if possible for the next round.
We too are going to do our parent teacher interviews online this time. We use Microsoft teams here. We haven't set it up yet (we only spoke about planning for it yesterday). We have a large boarding community as well as day students so we are hoping this works. We think the major thing we need to plan for is the setup of all the interviews with the teachers (we will allocate support staff resources to this). We have done a number of enrolment interviews via Microsoft teams with boarding families in rural and remote communities as well as in Brisbane and it all worked well.
We held phone interviews of 10 minutes duration and they went very well. It kept the teacher and parent on time and ensured the feedback and conversation was very specific. An addition we would add to our process for next time would be for the parent to nominate the best contact number to ensure the interview commenced on time.
I used Zoom for just a few parent teacher interviews last term with great success. I was even able to screen share to discuss assessment pieces :-) Particularly excellent for split parents, and gave the convenience of taking up less time. Since the start of term we have been using Zoom for Year 7 2021 enrolment interviews. We started with families who already have a child here as we knew they could manage Zoom with assistance from their older child. It has been wonderful!! The children appear more comfortable as they are in their own home, and I've loved seeing the expressions on parents' faces as they await their child's sometimes hilarious response to a question. We use a Google doc to record interview responses, and have 2 staff involved - one to do all the talking and one to take notes, which can be seen live by the talker.
We have run with Zoom meetings and they have been an overwhelming success. I doubt we will return to face-to-face in the years to come, following parents and staff surveys.
We have ours in 2 weeks using zoom. Appointments are set at 7 minutes although interviews are only 5 minutes to try and reduce crossover. Parents logging in will be directed to the waiting room until the teacher is ready to admit them. Staff are able to Zoom from school or home. The only issue we are having is around

custodial parents and restrictions about separated families. Apart from that I think it's all good.
We are currently using a phone call system for our Term 2 PT interviews. Staff are conducting these over the next 3 weeks, to spread them out. Staff enter their availability on a spreadsheet, which is then shared with the parents who then book an allocated timeslot. We are booking calls of 5 minutes duration, with 5 minutes after blocked out, just in case the calls go over time. It is going well so far. We decided not to use Zoom or Teams due to the fact that staff would have to email out to every parent the invitation.
We used Microsoft teams and it worked beautifully. 10 min appointments with a 5 minute gap. We will very likely continue to do student led conferences (year 7 – 12) this way in the future.
We've now done remote PTIs for 4 year groups. Overwhelmingly positive response from parents, who love that they can be preparing dinner/on the way home in the car/in their PJs on the sofa and watching Masterchef/having a glass of wine (I kid you not – all these were mentioned more than once!) between or as they take the call. We've made our staff stay at school to make the calls for some consistency, ability for me to monitor etc. I've missed the incidental contact I'd have with a whole year group's parents as I'd usually wander around, but that's really been the only negative. We considered Zoom, but given the comments above about multitasking parents I think they liked the lack of vision!
We used Microsoft Teams a few weeks ago. Video chat to the student's computer that the parent used. Highly successful and awesome feedback. We will probably adopt this method fully moving forward.
We are using PTO, an online booking system and a unique Zoom link for each teacher that is in the system when parents book. We have allowed three weeks for teachers to conduct interviews of 5-7 minutes duration. For our upcoming 8-10 Parent Teacher interviews, teachers with more 5 or more 8-10 classes are being given time in lieu. Half a day for 5 classes and one day for 6 or more. This will involve a cost of approximately 17 casual replacement days. We have always run student led conferences for all of our interviews but we only did this for year 11 and will not do it for years 8-10 so that teachers can use periods when they are not teaching to zoom with parents. I provided this advice to our teachers: Go into PTO when it is open and unblock the times for interviews; Thursday afternoon and

evening has always been gazetted for the interviews. Please unblock from at least 4pm on and leave time for dinner and a break. This will be an ideal time to try to get through as many of the interviews as possible; Don't use up all of the periods that you are not teaching as you will be exhausted; Please allocate two afternoon/early evenings during week 7 and 8 or one early evening week 7, 8 and 9 as most of our parents work during the day; Taking into consideration these unusual circumstances, please do not worry about student led conferences particularly during the day as we do not want boys out of class. The parents and boys can work through the student led questions and protocol questions prior to the interview to ensure that the parents are well informed; Please ensure that the interviews do no go over 10 minutes. They are normally 7 minutes in length when they are face-to-face; If you teach five classes of 8, 9 and/or 10 students you will be given half a day to support you to complete the interviews. Your allocated time will be emailed to you. You will be covered by a casual; If you teach six or more classes of 8, 9 and/or 10 students you will be given a full day to support you to complete the interviews. Your allocated day will be emailed to you. You will be covered by a casual.
We are also exploring the best model to continue with Parent Teacher meetings next term and have decided to keep them remote. Parents will schedule an appointment and will engage in a Zoom call with teachers (7 mins – appointments every 10 mins). We will run this on the first day back of Term 3 with teachers having the option of working on campus or from home. Teachers will be provided with a script for opening/closing the conversation and will have a log to as a record of completed conversations.