

NEW ZEALAND

# Lockdown learning: 'I'm not going through that again!'

22 Aug, 2020 5:00am  
13 minutes to read



Auckland mum Holly Brooker (left) is home-schooling daughter Billie, 5, and son Hudson, 8, while working from home herself again now that Auckland schools are back in lockdown.

Photo / Supplied



By: [Simon Collins](#)

Education reporter, NZ Herald

[simon.collins@nzherald.co.nz](mailto:simon.collins@nzherald.co.nz)

Holly Brooker felt she had only just recovered from the last lockdown when she heard at 9.30 on the Tuesday night before last that Auckland schools were closing again.

Brooker has three jobs and two children, aged 8 and 5. Her husband works 12-hour days as a construction manager.

In the last lockdown she tried to help the children do their schoolwork while still doing her three jobs at home - as a part-time communications worker for Parenting Place, part-time freelance writer and running her own consultancy, The Media Project.

"The kids loved being at home. They would have preferred to carry on doing it, but they were happy as well to go back to school," she says.

"For me, I enjoyed it - but I was exhausted by the end of it. I was sitting next to them at the table when they were working, and trying to do my work. I had to take phone calls often. It was a challenge."

As the Covid-19 pandemic intensified around the world, and especially after Victoria, Australia's apparent success in containing the virus dissolved into a new disaster, Brooker began to expect a new lockdown here "at some time".

"But when it came suddenly, obviously we were not mentally prepared for it, and I was nervous about going through all that again because I felt like I had only just recovered from the intensity of the last one," she says.

"So my initial comment to my husband was: 'I'm not doing it the same way we did it last time. We have to do it differently.'"

ADVERTISEMENT

[Advertise with NZME.](#)



It's hard work for mum Holly Brooker supervising 5-year-old Billie's colouring in while trying to work from home. Photo / Supplied

The couple agreed to share the home-schooling.

"We went through my husband's timetable and blocked out a few hours a day when he was on duty [with the children] and I would be able to go into the office alone," Brooker says.

## Related articles:

NEW ZEALAND

**School students to get 8100 more free computers**

18 Aug, 2020 12:10pm

7 minutes to read

NEW ZEALAND

**Kiwi kids turn off reading - what can we do?**

17 Aug, 2020 5:00am

5 minutes to read

NEW ZEALAND

**TV but no online learning for 70,000 students**

17 Aug, 2020 12:28pm

6 minutes to read

NEW ZEALAND

**Parents on online school: 'It's not worth the stress'**

17 Aug, 2020 5:00am  
3 minutes to read

"He had to block out slots in his day when he can't be in conference calls, and he goes on working late at night to make up for it.

"We felt like the kids needed to be prioritised because my daughter had been quite anxious since the last lockdown and quite clingy to me and worried about getting germs, and we really felt that she needed more of our attention. And I reduced some of my workload with a client."



Dr Nina Hood believes we can learn from the lockdown not just about handling

disruptions but about improving normal schooling. Photo / Supplied

Dr Nina Hood, an Auckland University educationalist who has just published a report on [Learning from Lockdown](#) on her Education Hub website, believes we can all learn lessons from the pandemic experience - about how to get through future disruptions and about how schooling itself could be more engaging.

"The lockdown as a whole, plus the experiences of teachers, students and parents, present an opportunity," she writes.

"However, it is easy to fall back into business as usual and not to follow up on the questions the experience raised, the opportunities it presented, or the challenges it uncovered or exacerbated."

## What worked best

At its best, lockdown learning was better for some children than going to school. Hood found that "a substantial minority" of the students she surveyed said they would prefer to continue learning at home.

One parent told her: "My daughter loved it so much we are considering Te Kura [Correspondence School] depending on how school handles the return to school. Her results were excellent, her anxiety very low and she enjoyed school more than she has for years."

Another lockdown report from the [Greater Christchurch Schools Network Trust](#) has found that 42 per cent of students felt their learning actually progressed more at home than at school; 35 per cent said they progressed about the same in either place, and only 22 per cent said they progressed more at school.

Asked what went well in the lockdown, they were most likely to talk about being in control of their own learning.

"I like setting my own time frame and doing all my work at my own pace," one said.





Dr Gabrielle Wall believes we can empower students to pursue their own learning.

Photo / Supplied

The trust's general manager, Dr Gabrielle Wall, says that doesn't mean we don't need teachers, but it does mean we can empower students to pursue their own learning.

"For me, the take-away would be the importance of both/and," she says.

"The teacher is important in setting the task and ensuring the completion of the task and scaffolding it [helping students], but the students are able to use their own agency in how they approach the task or in how they engage in the topic area.

"In a face-to-face environment you have more flexibility to have a both/and model."

## 'I did my own thing'

In the first lockdown, Ponsonby School gave 8-year-old Hudson Brooker lots of work to do on Google Classroom.

"It was kind of optional, you could choose what you wanted to do. It worked well for him," Holly Brooker says.



Ponsonby School gave Hudson Brooker (left) and his sister Billie (right) lots of work to do on Google Classroom this week. Photo / Supplied



"But I found Google Classroom a minefield to find my way through and to figure out. I found it stressful to have the headspace to understand the Google Classroom and understand what he needed to do.

"So within a week or two I gave up on it and did my own thing. I have a teaching background so I felt comfortable with that. I wrote a timetable up each night for the next morning. The kids liked to see that, they really liked the structure, and it helped me."

She included reading, writing and maths for Hudson and his sister Billie, who turned 5 during the lockdown. They did online Mathletics, and Hudson did a version of StepsWeb for dyslexia, which the school had signed him up to.

But there was also "a lot of Lego, playing outside, going out for walks and bike rides, cooking, baking - just being involved in normal life".

"I wanted it to be a good nurturing experience," Brooker says. "I didn't put a lot of pressure on them with schoolwork, and the school was really supportive."



Holly Brooker wanted it to be "a good nurturing experience" when she had children Billie, 5, and Hudson, 8, home again this week while she worked. Photo / Supplied

When Auckland went back into lockdown again 10 days ago, Brooker asked the school for a printed version of its online learning programme for Hudson's class. The school principal, who lives nearby, delivered it to their home on the first Friday.

"They have their whole week's work printed out in a booklet. It's much better," Brooker says.

"It's student-led learning. They know what to do. My daughter can choose maths, reading, writing, colouring in."

## The digital divide

When the lockdown started, the Ministry of Education said 82,000 households with [145,000 school-aged children](#) - about one-sixth of the country's 816,600 schoolchildren - didn't have broadband at home, and were presumed not to have suitable computers either.

The Government rushed out [an \\$87.7 million package](#), delivering six-month free internet deals and an initial 17,000 computers to students' homes.

By July 31 it had funded an astonishing [37,500 free internet connections](#), booked a further 15,500, and delivered 25,000 computers. But that still left 70,000 students without computers.

This week the Cabinet approved a further \$5.5m to fund [a further 8100 computers](#), mainly to Auckland students.

### Read More

- [Covid 19 coronavirus: Auckland secondary schools cautious as 10 apply to run Year 12-13 classes...](#)
- [Covid 19 coronavirus: More than 99% of Auckland school students are staying at home - NZ Herald](#)
- [Covid 19 coronavirus: Auckland schools advised to close immediately - NZ Herald](#)

## Seven weeks behind

Arona Taurima, a Year 12 boarder at Sacred Heart College in Glendowie, missed four internal assessments and ended up seven weeks behind the rest of his class because he didn't have broadband during the first lockdown at his parents' place at Ōmāpere on the Hokianga Harbour.

"I had four internals - Physical Education, Māori, Religious Studies and English - all at the same time. I couldn't get access to any of them so I had to just leave it until I got

back to school, which was very stressful because I knew I was seven weeks behind," he says.



Arona Taurima has to hot-spot from his mobile phone to get internet access at his parents' place on the Hokianga Harbour. Photo / Supplied

His teachers gave him recordings of their online lessons when he got back to school, but it meant "quite a few late nights" to catch up.

"I was behind everyone else, they were on to the next internal. I was holding up the class," he says.

His mum Taryn Taurima says the family has been trying since the first lockdown to get their internet connection upgraded for Arona and his brother Manuka, a Year 9 boarder at Auckland Grammar. A technician finally turned up on Tuesday this week.

"They have replaced all of our equipment, which has improved it a little bit, but we still lose connection more often than not," she says.

"We've been trying to hot-spot off mobile phones or driving down the road. Arona was staying up because he could get the best connection between midnight and 4am."

## Deep learning or 'busywork'?

Hood found that, even if they had good internet, many families opted out of online learning "because it was becoming too stressful, required too much parental input, or it was considered to be low-level "busywork".

"Relying too heavily on the same tasks – common examples included worksheets in primary school or [Education Perfect](#) at secondary school – decreased student motivation and engagement," she found.

"We are not always seeing the types of deep learning that we need."

Of course it's much easier to engage students in deep learning face-to-face than it is on a video call or email. But Hood says "it's about how you frame it".

"We saw some primary school teachers creating rich, real-world learning experiences, setting their students up with tasks that were going beyond a worksheet and promoting new ideas and new thinking."

## 'I don't know what to look for'



Noah Lee, 9 (left), pictured with sister Jade, 7 (right), has to write a three-minute speech about wisdom. Photo / Supplied

Noah Lee, aged 9, has been asked to write a three-minute speech during this two-week lockdown about "wisdom". His mum, Brittany Lee, feels it's too difficult.

"I've told him to Google it. I wouldn't be able to talk for three minutes about wisdom," she says. "He's asking for help because I don't know what else to look for."

Lee is trying to help Noah and his sister Jade, 7, while running a busy 10-person plumbing business from home. She found the first lockdown very frustrating because everything was online.



"I didn't understand Google Classroom. I had never worked in it and neither had my 9-year-old," she says.

"Nothing was printed. I did ask the first time around and the principal said, 'If you can't figure out online learning, don't do it.'"



Noah (left) and Jade Lee have to study on the kitchen table. Photo / Supplied

"We did it our own way. But then their reports came in saying that they did not participate in online learning, which made it look terrible."

So this time she is determined to make sure the children submit the required work.

"I log in and get them to write it out on paper, and then I spend three or four hours at night re-entering their work on to the computer, because most of it has to be scanned in. You find me a 7-year-old who knows how to operate a scanner!"

## 'I asked the wrong questions'

Cheyenne Beukman, a Year 11 student at Waiuku College who normally gets merit grades, failed a horticulture and science assessment in the first lockdown because she didn't understand it.



Cheyenne Beukman: "I asked the wrong questions to get the answer that I needed to get." Photo / Supplied

"We had been taught about it during lockdown, which was difficult because we had no explanation about it," she says.

"I did email the teacher. She was very helpful. I also asked some other students. But I asked the wrong questions to get the answer that I needed. I couldn't find the right answer."

This time, her teachers haven't provided any live online lessons. One has provided a recorded lesson and the others have sent emails.

"It's still pretty hard because you have to try and understand what they are trying to say when you have no idea what they are supposed to be talking about," she says.





Kiowa Beukman finds it hard to concentrate sitting at the dining table. Photo / Supplied

Her younger brother Kiowa, a Year 9 student at Dilworth School, says it's hard to concentrate sitting at the dining table with Cheyenne and their dad Jacques Beukman, who is working from home.

"You get distracted by things and go off task easily," he says.

## High expectations

Hood found that another big turn-off for students was teachers who didn't set high expectations, didn't check that work was being done, and didn't provide feedback.

"Maintaining high expectations and holding students accountable for meeting these expectations was critical for maintaining students' motivation and engagement and facilitating learning," she found.

"Providing regular formative assessment and feedback that was connected to the expectations set by the teacher was crucial for motivation and engagement as well as for ongoing learning."

# 'I have been more clear'

Benjamin Houghton, 11, is doing much better in the second lockdown than he did in the first because now he knows what's expected of him.

"In the first lockdown I feel it was harder to learn. We had never done it before," he says.

"Then in the second lockdown I felt, because we know what to do, most of us had an easier schedule."



Benjamin Houghton, 11, at home with his dad James and his mum Charlotte. Photo / Supplied

His mum Charlotte Houghton says her eldest son Finn, 13, "did an awful lot of work" and did okay the first time, but Benjamin and his younger brother Anders, 8, quickly lost interest.

"By about Day 4 they were totally disengaged and I couldn't get them to do anything," she says.

"I managed to make them do one or two tasks, but they did it without much joy and I had to squeeze it out of them."

This time she has taken a different tack.

"They have been reasonably good about engaging with their work this time. I have been more clear about what I expect them to do in a day," she says.

"I mainly require them to do their maths and maybe their writing and reading."

## Can we do better?

Some lessons are obvious. Clearly the Government is still only part-way to ensuring that every student has a computer and internet access.

The Greater Christchurch Schools Network, a charitable trust trying to "bridge the digital divide" in Christchurch, says schools should "engage more with charities, funding bodies and the government agencies" to get computers and internet for their families.

Beyond that, Hood sees lessons from the lockdown for the way we do schooling in normal times, including getting the right balance between "explicit instruction" and letting students drive their own learning.

"Sometimes explicit instruction is seen as the teacher at the front delivering information. That's not what it's about," she says.

"It can be an incredibly interactive and collaborative process - teachers constantly checking on their students' understanding, making sure that the students are questioning what they are learning, so creating that questioning and dialogue."

Her report also suggests we need to balance the drive for each school to develop its own "local curriculum" against the need for a more consistent national curriculum backed up by good learning resources.

"Because we don't have a lot of consistency in how the curriculum is applied in different school settings, it's incredibly hard to share resources across schools," she says.

"While I think some degree of local curriculum is important, and being able to match the curriculum to the students in your school is important, it raises some quite big questions that become a question of equity, because students in different schools are getting access to very different knowledge and very different learning experiences."