



## National overview of practice in remote learning

Support for the health and wellbeing of learners and their families, staff and the school community



## 1. Introduction

HM Inspectors of Education (HMIE) have been engaging with local authorities, schools, parents, carers and learners since January 2021 to provide a national overview of how remote learning is being delivered in schools across Scotland. The purpose of the national overview is to outline what is working well, identify the challenges and what further support is needed to continue to improve the delivery of remote learning. In the initial phases of the national overview, six [reports](#) were published. These focused on planning, guidance and delivery of remote learning and how schools and local authorities are taking forward the expectations and entitlements outlined in the [remote learning guidance](#) published on 8 January 2021. The final report of this phase summarised what we have learned so far about what is working well in remote learning across Scotland and where there remains scope for reflection and improvement.

Phase three of the national overview focuses on taking a closer look at particular themes emerging from evidence published in previous reports. This report focuses on how schools are supporting the health and wellbeing of children and young people, their families, staff and the school community. It highlights examples of practice which illustrate what is working well in schools within six local authorities. The report includes comments made by school leaders and educators during professional dialogue with HMIE and detailed case studies to help illustrate examples of strong practice.

## 2. Approach to engagement with local authorities

HMIE engaged in professional dialogue with 26 schools across six local authorities to share how schools are supporting the health and wellbeing of children, young people, families, staff and the school community. The schools were nominated by their local authorities to exemplify strong practice in this aspect of their work.

Professional dialogue with key school staff, focused on their approaches to supporting the health and wellbeing of children and young people, their families, staff and the school community. In particular, these conversations aimed to identify and explore:

- what has improved or changed in supporting health and wellbeing;
- how approaches support the health and wellbeing of children, young people, their families, staff and the wider community;
- the main challenges and how these are being overcome; and
- supporting children and young people returning to school.

This report contains case studies from some of the schools and local authorities involved. A selection of supporting documentation shared by local authorities and schools will be published on the [‘Sharing what’s working well’](#) section of the national overviews website.

### 3. Findings

#### Supporting the health and wellbeing of children and young people

“Health and wellbeing was always central to what we do but it is especially so now.”

All local authorities highlight how they are prioritising support for health and wellbeing. They have strengthened their focus on supporting the emotional, social and physical needs of children, young people and their families. Headteachers describe how staff know children well, and provide a wide range of support to help meet their individual wellbeing needs and circumstances. Through regular check-ins with children and young people, staff now have an increased focus on discussing emotional and mental wellbeing. Schools also report that children are confident in using direct messaging tools and emailing to share any worries or anxieties quickly and easily with staff.

In some schools, children and young people who require targeted health and wellbeing support receive additional wellbeing check-in sessions. This varies depending on the needs of children and young people and their families with times and method of contact agreed in advance with parents. Through more regular contact with children and young people, staff can respond quickly to wellbeing concerns and support learners and families overcome any worries or challenges. Staff offer children and young people helpful advice on keeping healthy, including the importance of regular exercise and spending time away from a screen. As a result of these approaches, staff report that children and young people are becoming more confident in recognising when to seek help and how to access it.

Most schools have reviewed the support staff provide in relation to health and wellbeing in light of feedback from children and young people. As a result, school staff have reflected on and improved the range of interventions and activities they use to support wellbeing. This includes support for those experiencing increasing anxiety, feelings of isolation, disconnectedness and worries about family and friends. For example, schools have an increased focus on internet safety, cyberbullying, relaxation strategies, resilience and the importance of sleep. Many teachers report that they are devoting time each day to support children and young people to build resilience and understand their own feelings. They report that children and young people indicate that accessing this support is helping them to overcome challenges related to their health and wellbeing.

“All of our children have access to their own device for remote learning. This is a prime example of government policy being delivered at the chalk face and has helped take some of the stress on families away.”

All schools recognise the importance of social interaction in supporting children's and young people's wellbeing and mental health. They have taken steps to provide increased opportunities for children and young people to come together compared to the previous period of school closures. For example, primary schools have developed helpful virtual playtimes to support friendships and social connection amongst children. Across sectors, school staff offer virtual assemblies, which provide children and young

people with opportunities to connect with each other, share news, and promote achievements and successes.

In most secondary schools, staff have increased their focus on supporting young people's mental wellbeing. They are developing ways to promote positive attitudes amongst young people during lockdown and help reduce and address their concerns. For example, staff offer virtual 'drop-in' sessions where young people can share and discuss any worries, including uncertainty and anxiety over final assessments, or transitions to future career pathways. Staff report that these activities are having a positive impact on learners' health and wellbeing and feelings of self-worth. In one school, the educational psychological service is offering virtual sessions for young people who are involved in remote learning whilst at home who need support in relation to their mental wellbeing. Staff report that this is having a positive impact for individuals and helping to address young people's feelings of loneliness and worries about their futures. Other children, who would normally receive specialist input in school, such as from the play therapist, have continued to access this support online.

In most schools, staff support children's and young people's wellbeing through encouraging learning outdoors. Staff recognise the benefits of this for children and young people, and now plan daily activities which support learners' mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing such as garden visits, virtual sports days or daily wellbeing walks. Staff report an increasing number of children and young people who are developing improved self-awareness and skills in managing their behaviours and interactions when learning outdoors, particularly around social distancing.

Most schools promote physical education and personal and social education as an integral part of the remote learning offer. Staff plan a range of physical challenges and activities for children and young people and families to participate in together. These include how to use outdoor spaces effectively, or motivational videos from sports personalities. Staff also offer live physical education lessons which are well attended by children and young people.

“Outdoor learning has had a positive impact on the children and has become a pivotal part in the success of each school day.”

#### Case Study – Shortlees Primary School, East Ayrshire Council

##### Learning outdoors

School staff work closely with the local authority's outdoor learning provider to design engaging and motivating learning programmes for children and their families. This work is linked to the school's health and wellbeing framework with a specific focus on emotional wellbeing. Staff are enhancing children's skills and confidence through various coaching sessions which take place outdoors. These are delivered in both live sessions but also as part of remote learning which takes place outdoors. Staff share their own fitness and mental health support strategies with parents to help promote the developing ethos and culture of the school.

### Case Study – Shortlees Primary School, East Ayrshire Council - continued

As a result of participation in the programme, families report benefits to their mental health and wellbeing. Staff also observed that increased numbers of children were managing their own emotions and behaviours and overcoming feelings of distress and anxiety more easily when learning outdoors. Seventeen families participated in the John Muir Learning Award by following a programme provided by the school and modelled by teachers. The culture surrounding the importance of outdoor learning within the establishment has provided a platform for the school to plan future changes and inform their improvement journey.

### Case Study – Lossiemouth High School, Moray Council

#### Using data to respond to needs

Senior leaders are proactive in gathering information relating to young people's wellbeing and support needs. They use this information to support improvements in addressing a range of health and wellbeing needs. For example, young people highlighted that they did not have sufficient opportunity to engage with each other. To address this, staff have implemented 'peer chat sessions' for young people to allow to socialise and interact with others. This approach is helping young people to overcome feelings of loneliness, boredom and frustration they are experiencing as a result of lockdown.

Staff recognise the importance of early identification of support needs so that help can be put in place quickly for young people who need it. A daily wellbeing check-in allows staff to identify who is coping well and those who are not. Guidance staff and middle leaders also monitor engagement to help identify young people who may need extra support. Staff are better able to make others aware of young people's wellbeing concerns and help to alleviate these where they can.

## Case Study – Wallace High School, Stirling Council

### Guidance and practices to support the health and wellbeing of young people, families and staff

The senior leadership team have led the development of guidance and practices to support the health and wellbeing of young people, families and staff that take account of local and national guidance. Careful consideration has been given to the physical safety of all and risk assessments are personalised for identified young people and some members of staff to take account of their individual needs. The school app has been used well to communicate with parents and the wider school community on health and safety procedures and protocols. This includes appropriate links and signposting to relevant documents.

Staff reviewed the core health and wellbeing curriculum to take account of the challenges arising as a result of remote learning. Physical education and personal and social education are promoted and delivered through a range of fun challenges and activities, including motivational videos.

The senior leadership team maintain a good knowledge of their community and young people's needs by meeting regularly with key staff to monitor wellbeing. As a result, bespoke support is offered timeously to those who need it. For example, the pastoral team, community link workers and the mental health counsellor provide personalised support for identified young people through phone calls, garden gate visits and community wellbeing walks. Young people, who need to, access the established mental wellbeing hub zone in the school library.

## Supporting the wellbeing of families and the wider community

“In school relationships have been strengthened over the two lockdowns, both within and beyond the school, this has resulted in a very ‘joined-up’ approach to support families at the moment.”

In all schools, staff recognise the impact that remote learning can have on parents, carers and family life. Connectedness has been a main focus and there are examples of staff making weekly phone calls to all families to maintain relationships. Most senior leaders make themselves available to listen to the concerns of parents and others in the school community. Schools are being proactive and responsive in addressing wellbeing concerns for families. A few schools have appointed a staff member to target and support effectively those families who may experience a broad range of situations

which impact negatively on their wellbeing. These include, supporting parents who are self-isolating, offering wellbeing physically distanced walks, advice, and digital learning support.

In one primary school, the English as an additional language teacher makes regular calls to parents to support children and help provide translation where necessary. This helps to ensure these families are not isolated because of language barriers. The home link teacher engages well with identified families and maintains regular contact to ensure health and wellbeing needs are met. In another school, the headteacher has created 'cup of tea and a catch up' sessions in the evening and invited parents and members of the local community to it. This reinforces the support of the community and allows staff to gather information about concerns or issues.

Most schools are working with partner organisations, including community groups, social work and allied health professionals to provide bespoke support to families and their children. The range of support includes engaging with counselling services, educational psychologists, social and family support workers and a number of charities. In one school, staff are working with education psychologists on a range of activities teaching children about 'change'. They offer a resilience-based approach to develop children's understanding and awareness of the current pandemic situation and its effects on their community. Another school has worked with the local library to create learning experiences for Children's Mental Health Week. Library staff identified suitable texts around the theme of dreams and goals and teachers used texts to create learning activities to help promote positive health and wellbeing. This approach has been very positive and had high levels of engagement from children.

Staff report that reduced informal contact with children and young people can make sustaining a sense of community, and positive relationships more challenging, regular contact is helping to address this. A few schools have introduced wellbeing groups for parents which help provide strategies and interventions for them to use at home. Staff report that this approach has been well-received by parents in helping them with their children at home. Relationships between schools and families have been strengthened through more regular communication. For example, in one school, a member of the leadership team has the role of 'duty manager' each day. This information is shared with parents. Those parents who have a concern are encouraged to contact the 'duty manager' for support and advice. This approach has helped ensure parents and families receive prompt support. Some schools report that parents and families would welcome further information and feedback on the support that schools are putting in place for their children's and young people's health and wellbeing during the period of remote learning. One school reports that despite the tragic circumstances of the pandemic, relationships with parents and carers have improved in many ways as a result of support available to help families and the wider community engage in their children's learning both online and at school.

*"It is really important that we don't allow Covid-19 to be divisive. Everybody feels part of the school community. I think communicating and knowing you are not alone is so important at this time."*



## Case Study - The Highland Council

### Caithness Cares

The Caithness community is working well together to improve support for children and young people and address issues such as increased suicide rates, depression, self-harm and the use of drugs and alcohol. This Scottish Government funded 'pathfinder' project is supporting the mental health and wellbeing of young people aged 5 to 26. Community groups have collaborated and developed a structure which will enable immediate short-term crisis support for children and young people, and a longer term whole system review and change. The overall aim is to deliver tangible, direct support for young people in Caithness, as a matter of urgency.

'Caithness Cares' now has 60 people on the project board in five key workstreams: education, youth activities, safe spaces, family support and crisis and recovery.

The views of young people, particularly those with lived experience of these issues, are used to ensure that each person receives the right support at the right time. This also enables early identification of where whole system change is needed. An important aspect of this project is to listen to young people and identify what is not working, or not yet available to, children and young people. Local schools are key in this work.

The project is at an early stage although initial successes include:

- Wick and Thurso High schools taking part in an Icelandic Model Pilot - a national pilot involving elements of the Planet Youth model aiming to prevent substance use among young people. The national pilot is being facilitated by Winning Foundation Scotland and supported in Highland by Highland Alcohol and Drugs Partnership.
- Teenage Brain training organised for all staff at Dounreay. This training helps staff understand the way teenage minds work when under stress.
- Courses are being developed in Mental Health Awareness, Suicide Awareness and Trauma-Informed training for community businesses and parents.



## Case Study - Newmill Primary School, Moray Council

### Supporting wellbeing across the school community

Reducing stress and anxiety across the whole school community is a key focus for all involved in developing the remote learning offer for children. Regular communication between school and home has been crucial in reflecting on and evaluating the impact that remote learning is having on families.

Staff maintain a strong focus on 'learning to learn' with almost all children and their families completing weekly reflection sheets and returning them to the school. This provides staff with relevant information in relation to children's wellbeing linked to their engagement with learning. This is helping teachers to identify concerns and areas to follow up. It also helps identify what families enjoy and would like more of. Staff work well with a range of partners to support the wellbeing of children and their families. For example, staff share and promote the challenges and opportunities provided by active schools coordinators as part of children's learning experiences to help stay active and healthy. They also liaise with educational psychologists to provide resources and materials to help families who face challenges with various health issues, including those which relate to mental wellbeing.

### Supporting the wellbeing of staff

"We have been massively supported by the local authority and this has been pivotal to the success of all this."

All local authorities recognise the importance of supporting staff wellbeing. Senior leaders in school describe how they maintain positive and regular communication with staff and provide ongoing pastoral support and provide the opportunity for staff to raise issues and share concerns. Staff provide peer support for one another through virtual staffrooms, catch-ups, sharing of resources and signposting to useful advice to help maintain their health and wellbeing. Schools report that this support is having a positive impact for staff during the pandemic, and that staff feel supported and less isolated.

Local authorities have developed and delivered professional learning to support the health and wellbeing of staff. Examples include certificated modules in anti-bullying, courses to support children suffering from bereavement and loss and mental health. Officers report that these courses support staff to be more confident when speaking

to children and young people about sensitive issues. Local authorities are also providing information to staff on other useful professional learning, including those available from outside agencies, for useful professional learning to help support children's and young people's health and wellbeing. Senior school leaders report that staff feel increasingly confident as a result of this support and this is leading to a reduction in staff anxiety about remote learning. One local authority has developed a suite of materials to help ensure staff can access readily available, professional learning on 'resilience and bouncing back'. As a result, headteachers describe how their staff have a better understanding of remote learning and increased awareness of the impact which the pandemic may have on and young people's mental and emotional wellbeing. Staff describe how their own wellbeing has improved as a result of their engagement in helpful professional learning opportunities.

[“I have learned that you can't do this on your own. You need your team around you.”](#)

A number of schools have taken steps to support staff's wellbeing, for example, through introducing flexible working arrangements for those who are shielding, have caring responsibilities, or are supporting their own children to learn at home. A few schools have introduced 'mental health champions' who provide staff with helpful materials and sign-post to partner agencies who can offer bespoke support. In the majority of schools, staff can access specialist help from counselling services to support their own health and wellbeing. Staff describe how the introduction of lateral flow testing for staff has resulted in increased confidence in the majority of schools where children and young people are attending during the pandemic. However, senior leaders believe the demands on teaching staff during the pandemic are having an adverse impact on their own and staff's overall health and wellbeing.

Guidance teachers in secondary schools raised concerns about not having opportunities to brief each other about young people's health and wellbeing, which they would have in school. Dealing with difficult issues in isolation is, at times, having an impact on their own wellbeing. To help address this in one local authority, a peer support network was developed and introduced for guidance staff, educational psychologists, school nurses, counsellors and education support workers. Feedback from the initial session on what has been useful and what further support would be valuable is being used to help the network evolve. Strong support from colleagues in one cluster is helping staff to deal with concerns in relation to wellbeing through sharing different ways of managing anxieties and worries as a result of the pandemic and social isolation. Light hearted activities such as quiz nights and sing-along events help staff to socialise with each other and discuss their experiences in an informal way.

## Case Study – South Lanarkshire Council

### Headteacher support pods

Headteachers were invited to join a ‘Learning Community Headteacher Support Pod’, facilitated by a quality link officer and assisted by a designated educational psychologist.

These solution-focused ‘pods’ are designed to:

- assist reflective practice, provide support and challenge amongst peer groups of headteachers;
- provide a confidential and reflective space for headteachers to consider and reflect on their work;
- ring-fence a safe and confidential space for headteachers to discuss work including feelings, difficulties with relationships and resolving conflicts; and
- provide a vehicle to support connectivity between schools and the centre to help inform organisational thinking.

Almost all headteachers found sessions to be useful in supporting them to connect with others, provide space to talk and share emotional load, and help to put things in perspective in a safe and supportive environment. Almost all headteachers want the ‘pods’ to continue.

Headteachers describe how the approach is helping them gain a deeper understanding of their needs and supporting their wellbeing at this challenging time.

## Case Study – Aberdeen City Council

### Empowering staff to support children and young people

The Aberdeen City Council Building Capacity Team has played a central role in supporting staff and school communities during the pandemic. Members of this team have been working with both internal and external partners to help support staff, including probationers during remote learning. Support for health and wellbeing and professional learning has been a core part of this work.

## Case Study – Aberdeen City Council - continued

Practitioners have the opportunity to engage in professional learning. Self-directed opportunities are shared through the Informed, Skilled, Enhanced or Expert (ISEE) Framework, allowing practitioners to select professional learning relevant to their needs. Staff appreciate the ready access to this professional learning. This model has helped to build capacity, professional agency and offers progression pathways for all. Staff report that they are engaging well in professional learning around remote learning at their own pace and level and in collaboration with various agencies. The local authority is now confident that staff have a shared understanding of wellbeing and how to support better children, young people and families.

The local authority has targeted support materials and engagement events around staff's wellbeing, and the impact of the pandemic on learner and family wellbeing. A guide for staff, 'what to look out for in your pupils', includes helpful advice on key things to consider around young people's wellbeing now and when they return to school. Practical solutions, professional support and the opportunity to develop beneficial partnership with others have been offered. These include one-to-one coaching with educational psychologists, podcasts focusing on the wellbeing of staff and wellbeing sessions from the Scottish Association for Mental Health. Staff found these professional learning sessions reassuring and report that these have reduced the isolation felt by individual members of staff.

## Supporting transitions with a focus on health and wellbeing

School are putting in place arrangements to support children and young people to manage changes at key points of transition. Most senior leaders and staff have used their experience of the previous lockdown to plan appropriate support for children and young people as they return to in-school learning. School staff continue to adapt the learning environment to maintain the safety of children, young people, staff and the wider community. Creative ideas such as virtual tours of school buildings, adapted school handbooks and visual timetables are supporting children and young people to visualise changes made to school environments in response to the pandemic. Most schools have introduced staggered arrangements for drop off and pick up times across the day to support physical distancing amongst parents.

Senior leaders report that they are now intensifying their focus on supporting children and young people to make key transitions to P1, S1 and post-school destinations. Examples of how this is being done include through virtual tours of new settings and establishments to help inform children and young people of any changes to routines. In a few schools, staff have made helpful video clips to help children and young people recognise and visualise changes to the school environment, either when they return to school or when moving to other settings. Some schools have created child-friendly



playground signage, or met individually with children and young people to discuss the impact of changes, such as staff wearing face masks. Others provide children and young people with opportunities to have virtual meetings with new staff whom they will meet on returning to school.

Most secondary schools work with Skills Development Scotland, local colleges and employers to support young people and their parents, arrange next steps and provide pathways into positive post-school destinations. For example, schools are providing reassurance to young people and parents around assessment requirements, and post school transitions to address help anxieties, particular in relation to learners in the senior phase. The majority of secondary schools have found ways of helping young people to make subject choices as they progress from the broad general education to senior phase. These include well-attended virtual information evenings and opportunities to meet with former pupils.

“While we are responding to the current need, we are also planning for what’s coming next.”

Senior leaders are working with families and partner agencies to ensure the return to school is positive and effective for all children and young people. Schools are considering how to support children and young people. They recognise that extra support may be required for those children and young people who have not been engaging well in the remote learning; have not been in school for a considerable period of time due to health reasons; or have enjoyed learning at home and may be reluctant to return to a school building. Senior leaders report that they have undertaken risk assessments in collaboration with staff, and where appropriate with children and young people, which take account of local and national advice. Senior leaders feel that these risk assessments should help support health and wellbeing both in terms of remote learning but also in preparation for a return to learning in school.

#### Case Study – Stonelaw High School, South Lanarkshire Council

##### Supporting transitions for P7 to S1

The school has a well-established system for tracking the health and wellbeing of young people. The system was developed following the first period of remote learning and is used by all teachers across the school. All young people worked with their pastoral teacher to agree the support they would require while learning remotely. This included setting timescales for pastoral catch-ups. Pupil support staff also facilitate a live drop-in session every lunchtime, which is open for all young people and provides informal support to those who access the sessions. As a result, a significant number of young people have daily or weekly check-ins with pastoral staff. This contact includes telephone calls, emails and socially distanced walks.

## Case Study – Stonelaw High School, South Lanarkshire Council - continued

Led by both teachers and young people, the ‘One Stonelaw’ approach to health and wellbeing encompasses three groups:

- The ‘Be Strong’ group is developing mental and emotional wellbeing.
- The ‘Choose Kind’ is building positive relationships.
- ‘Be U’ focuses on promoting and celebrating inclusion, equality and diversity.

Each group has created an online space, using Google classroom, which provides the whole school with access to resources, web links and activities to support key aspects of health and wellbeing. These classrooms are continuously developed to provide ongoing support to young people returning to school buildings.

Staff have developed sketchnotes for parents to help them support young people with their health and wellbeing, and make effective of social media to celebrate ‘Wellbeing Wednesday’ and ‘Feel Good Friday’. Staff and young people share hints and tips to support mental and emotional wellbeing. This approach has become increasingly popular during lockdown and engagement has increased.

The ‘One Stonelaw’ approach, reinforced by the Parent Council, also supports both universal and targeted transitions for children in P7. A programme of virtual lessons has been developed and delivered by the depute headteacher, pupil support staff and newly qualified teachers. The leadership team has engaged in a series of virtual meetings with all children in P7 and their parents to build confidence and support children to become more familiar with their new learning environment.

## **Emerging strengths in approaches to supporting the health and wellbeing of children and families, staff and the school community.**

- Schools know their children and families well and have continued to increase communication with families during lockdown. They use a range of approaches to monitor children's and young people's wellbeing and respond promptly using a range of supports to address wellbeing concerns.
- Staff recognise the impact of remote learning on family life and provide parents with strategies and interventions for them to use at home with their children to help support wellbeing.
- Strengthening collaborative working amongst staff and with senior leaders is supporting staff wellbeing. Staff provide peer support for one another through catch-ups, sharing of resources and offering helpful advice when needed.

## **Areas for continuing improvement in approaches to supporting the health and wellbeing of children and families, staff and the school community.**

- Continue to have a strong focus on supporting the health and wellbeing needs of children, young people and staff in order to help address any impacts for them in the long term.
- Through well-established communication and support channels, schools should continue to work with learners, parents and the school community to help maintain positive approaches to health and wellbeing, including learning outdoors.
- Build on supportive arrangements being put in place for learners at key points of transition. Staff should continue to offer support to all children and young people, with a particular and immediate focus on those moving into P1, S1 and post-secondary stages.
- As more children and young people physically return to school, staff should continue to support the health and wellbeing of children and young people and recognise that transition back to school will be challenging for some.

The following standard Education Scotland terms of quantity are used in this report:

Almost all	91%-99%
Most	75%-90%
Majority	50%-74%
Minority/less than half	15%-49%
A few	less than 15%

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