



## National overview of practice in remote learning

Schools

## 1. Introduction

In December 2020, the First Minister announced that most children and young people in Scotland would learn remotely, rather than in school buildings, until Monday 18 January 2021. On 4 January 2021, the First Minister confirmed that school buildings would close to the majority of children and young people. A further announcement by the First Minister on 19 January 2021 confirmed that the period of remote learning would be extended until at least 15 February 2021. These arrangements remain under regular review.

In January 2021, the Deputy First Minister requested that HM Inspectors of Education (HMIE) develop a national overview of practice in the delivery of remote learning through engagement with local authorities, schools, parents, children and young people. These reviews will continue throughout the period of remote learning.

The purpose of the national overview is to:

- Learn what is working well and share this widely to celebrate success and support consistency in the quality and effectiveness of delivery of remote learning.
- Surface the challenges and/or issues so that these can be addressed, either locally or nationally, as appropriate.
- Identify what further assistance is required to continue to improve the delivery of remote learning so that relevant support can be provided at local and/or national level.

The national overview also provides an opportunity to learn from evidence about the delivery of high quality remote learning in the current context, to help shape how we deliver remote learning experiences beyond Covid-19.

This report is the second in a series of weekly overview of national practice focusing on the delivery of remote learning. It contains comments made by headteachers and school staff during discussions with HM Inspectors to help illustrate some of the work taking place.

## 2. Approach to engagement with schools

During the week beginning 18 January 2021, HMIE engaged in professional dialogue with 5% of schools across all local authorities. These discussions took place across 128 schools including 74 primary, 36 secondary and 18 special schools. In the current context, HMIE did not observe learning episodes. The selection of schools was agreed in advance with local authorities. The discussions focused on the following three aspects:

- talking about what is working in their own context;
- listening to concerns and any challenges; and,
- learning what further support is needed.

## 3. Findings

### Readiness for remote learning

“I am impressed and proud of the way staff have risen to the challenge. Their confidence in the use of digital technology to make learning clear and accessible has really grown.”

In preparation for remote learning in January 2021, all local authorities developed and shared guidance with schools outlining their expectations for remote learning. Headteachers appreciate the support provided to them by local authorities, often citing regular headteacher meetings as useful platforms to share practice. Schools are acting promptly to implement local and national guidance to design and deliver remote learning to reflect their own context and the needs of learners. At the time of engagement, almost all schools were aware of the recently published Education Scotland Remote Learning Guidance (8 January 2021) but most had not yet used it to evaluate and review their practice. However, it is clear that approaches schools have developed already reflect many of the entitlements and expectations outlined in the guidance.

“The support from the council of our digital platforms, provided to parents and staff is second to none and enables all of this to happen seamlessly.”

“The commitment and resilience of staff has been exceptional.”

Senior leaders note that staff in schools are committed to doing things differently and are positive about the strong teamwork which is developing as a result of working remotely. There are examples of staff accessing and participating in a wide range of professional learning opportunities. Staff report that across schools and associated school groups, teachers are supportive of one another and share good practice and resources.

### Curriculum and learning

Almost all primary schools prioritise time for learning in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. Most primary schools also provide learning tasks within other curricular areas, often through cross-curricular topics. A few schools provide whole-school learning contexts or open ended tasks which support families with children at more than one stage to learn together. In addition, a few schools are using their local context and locality to increase outdoor learning experiences and provide learning in other curriculum areas.

Teachers use the local context, particularly the location of the school within Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park, to frame learning and teaching in a meaningful way. This is resulting in extensive outdoor learning, for example watching and identifying native birds. Parents are keen for this type of learning alongside the structured online learning sessions and readily support children to access the outdoors. This approach also links with the school values. Plans are in place for future involvement of partners to support this rich learning.

Luss Primary School, Argyll and Bute Council

Overall, there is more work to be done at the primary stages to ensure children are learning across the breadth of the curriculum. Whilst it is recognised that remote learning will not replace face-to-face in school teaching, there is an expectation that children and young people will receive learning opportunities which reflect the principles of Curriculum for Excellence, allowing learners to develop their knowledge, skills and attributes across the curriculum.

A weekly learning grid is in place for all learners, which sets out learning intentions and success criteria for numeracy, literacy, health and wellbeing and interdisciplinary learning. Teaching staff balance the content well between screen time and non-screen time, live and pre-recorded learning activities, including activities outdoors. This is working particularly well for families with more than one child.

Priorsford Primary School, Scottish Borders Council

Each teacher has responsibility for planning grouped curricular areas. For example, one teacher may plan all languages and mathematics activities with another teacher planning sciences and technologies. This has ensured a broad curriculum offering using remote learning.

Langlands School, Dumfries and Galloway Council

In almost all secondary schools, the full timetable is delivered with some changes to the style of delivery in practical classes. Teachers of practical subjects are using some creative approaches to delivering learning. These include teachers who use digital tools to demonstrate practical activities such as science experiments, posting practical activities online, and delivering packs such as sewing and cooking packs to support remote learning.

In order to support family learning throughout this latest lockdown, the home economics department have contacted all S1 families to gauge interest in a cooking at home project. Just under 100 families have responded that they would like to take part. Cooking at home packs have been made up, which contain a recipe booklet, along with ingredients for a meal for four that the pupil and parent can cook together. The packs are being collected from the school, or being delivered by staff. This initiative promotes family learning, strengthens our relationships with pupils and parents, and is a discreet way of providing nutritious food to families across our community.

Johnstone High School, Renfrewshire Council

Overall, schools are providing a range of remote learning and teaching activities so that learners are not engaging in online learning for the entirety of the day. There is recognition across almost all schools, that a balance between online, digital learning and non-digital activities is important. Examples include interactive digital resources, presentations, pre-recorded lessons, activities away from digital screens, and encouraging learning to take place outdoors. The majority of schools provide an overview of learning for parents, which often includes links to useful websites. A few schools have developed 'how to' videos to show parents and carers how to support children in aspects of their learning.

Whilst children and young people are provided with a range of remote learning activities, the balance of live learning, independent activity and pre-recorded lessons varies greatly from school to school. Some schools are delivering live learning daily in more than one curricular area, but others are not yet delivering any live learning. In the majority of schools, learners receive some live learning each week. In schools where live learning is working well, teachers are able to teach new learning, check understanding and provide feedback. In schools where live learning is provided, these are sometimes recorded and available for children and young people to access at another time. This approach, alongside pre-recorded lessons, supports learners to revisit key teaching, practise skills and consolidate learning. It also supports parents and carers to balance working commitments as it allows learning to take place at a time that best suits the needs of individuals and their families. Overall, it is important that schools develop the right balance of live learning and independent learning that meets the needs of learners in their school. This needs to be communicated with parents to ensure a shared understanding of expectations.



The leadership team and staff produce learning grids for all children on a Friday afternoon. These grids outline the timetable for live learning and additional tasks which have to be completed at home. Recorded lessons or ‘signposts’ to support material found on, for example, BBC Bitesize and video links as references are also found on the grid. Extension work for children is also placed on the grid to support parents who may wish to pursue a topic further at any particular time.

Carnegie Primary School, Fife Council

Principal Teachers liaise with departmental colleagues and make a weekly return to senior leaders based on what each subject will be offering. This includes an analysis on breakdown of ‘live interactions’, type of activity/learning and the expected time it would take pupils to complete task. This allows the senior leadership team to analyse the remote learning being offered.

Grangemouth High School, Falkirk Council

In emerging good practice, practitioners and partners collaborate to provide children and young people in Gaelic Medium Education with live and recorded learning, and resources designed for independent learning. This is not yet consistently available to all. Providing learning in immersion has been more challenging when children and young people do not benefit from opportunities to converse and learn through Gaelic at home. Whilst acknowledging positive approaches, there should be a continued focus on ensuring that children and young people experience regular live and recorded learning to support their fluency in Gaelic.

## **Access to resources for remote learning**

“In terms of moving forward I’d like to see greater equity of digital access. For example, for children to have a pack, not only with a laptop or tablet, but with headphones, a microphone and internet access via dongle. We now need to embrace what digital technology has to offer and embed it when we return to some sort of normal.”

Schools have taken active steps to improve children’s and young people’s access to the physical resources they need to allow them to participate fully in remote learning. Digital devices such as tablets, phones and laptops are being used by learners to access online learning materials and view live or recorded lessons. A few schools have sought to provide technical support for parents in an interactive way. Examples include the creative deployment of technicians who act as a point of contact for families who require support or groups of learners, ‘digital champions’ who provide online support.

Access to online learning remains a concern for schools where young people who do not have access to suitable digital devices, or need to share devices with others in the home. Schools are working hard to reduce barriers to remote learning by optimising the distribution of digital devices to those learners who need them most. Some schools have used funding schemes, such as Pupil Equity Funding or digital inclusion funding, to purchase tablets to support families who face socio-economic challenges. Other examples include distributing vouchers from a telecommunications company offering free data for mobile users and working in partnership with local businesses to distribute refurbished laptops to young people. Despite these pro-active approaches, schools are still aware that some children and young people do not have access to digital devices or connectivity. Schools continue to seek ways to acquire these for their learners, with a few citing funding, bureaucracy relating to procurement and purchasing, along with supply issues, as challenges.

Where access to devices or internet connection is challenging, schools ensure learners are provided with hard copies of learning materials and resources. Approaches include delivering learning packs to children's and young people's homes, or providing a safe collection point in school or community buildings for collection. In addition, consumables such as jotters, pens and pencils are distributed routinely or left in a community location for families to access.

The school provides paper packs of all materials, as well as writing materials such as jotters and pencils for all children as a matter of equity. The headteacher used the Glasgow Accessibility Audit to identify and contact parents who do not have access to broadband and/or a digital device. The school is trying to supply as many digital devices as possible to all families.

St Ninian's Primary School, Glasgow City Council

In most special schools we engaged with, learners are receiving a blend of remote and in-school learning for all or a part of their day depending on their needs. These schools are providing bespoke packages of support for individual learners tailored to their needs. For example, some schools provide home packs to aid learning through sensory experiences and expressive arts. Within some special schools there are significant challenges in supporting children and young people accessing remote learning. For most learners with severe and complex needs, they often require specialised approaches and some need specialised equipment that may not be easy to take home or use there. In order to meet the needs of their learners, many schools have adapted their curriculum to focus on the development and application of life skills, for example, digital literacy, communication and health and wellbeing. Schools recognise the need to widen their curricular offer and continue to develop approaches to supporting individuals and families.

## Engagement and participation

“The high levels of engagement from children has been motivating for the teachers.”

The increased use of digital technologies has led to changes in the way teachers engage with learners and parents. Almost all schools report improved engagement levels of children and young people in remote learning compared to the previous lockdown. Most schools have developed approaches to monitor levels of engagement and use this information to identify learners not engaging.

“Showing families how to make use of the resources has been a big part of the job. Building relationships with parents is the key to success here. Treating families with dignity and respect; trusting them; this works wonders for pupil engagement.”

In most schools headteachers report that pro-active measures are being taken to contact families to identify barriers to participation and engagement, discuss progress, assess wellbeing and offer support. In some examples, teachers make physically distanced doorstep visits to offer support to vulnerable families. In other instances, staff contact young people who have not registered or engaged with the school by a specific time each day. Staff who have a supporting role maintain regular contact with identified groups of learners.

Senior leaders have designed a school social networking page to provide parents with ‘How to...’ guides. This includes information on accessing and using GLOW, Education Scotland website, Teams software etc. They have also directed parents to the Parentzone page on Education Scotland’s website. The feedback on the both initiatives is very positive and appreciative.

Baltasound Junior High School, Shetland Islands Council

Participation in individual learning activities is monitored by schools. Most schools now provide regular check-ins with learners, although these are not always live. In schools where this is working well, daily check-ins provide opportunities for children and young people to engage directly with their teacher and their peers, talk about their learning and celebrate successes. These daily check-ins also offer opportunities to provide support with learning and check on children’s and young people’s wellbeing. Some schools make arrangements for regular check-in times with identified individuals and groups of children and young people. For example, one school appointed an ‘Action for Children’ worker using Pupil Equity Funding to ensure more targeted support directly to children and families. Schools report that learners who are offered the daily check-in approach tell staff that they value this contact with their teachers and find it reassuring. At the time of engaging with schools for this report, in a minority of schools, children do not yet have their entitlement to a daily check-in with staff.



“There are systems in place which allow us to monitor the quality of interactions, engagement, and attendance of all pupils to be able to act on any concerns timeous.”

## Assessing and monitoring progress in learning

Effective learning, teaching and assessment remain central to ensuring children and young people progress in their learning. Headteachers report that most of their teachers are using a range of approaches to provide regular feedback to learners on the individual learning tasks they are completing. Approaches include written feedback, voice recorded feedback and feedback during discussion sessions as part of live learning. Headteachers report that appropriate, meaningful and timely feedback to children and young people is challenging in the remote environment. While schools continue to develop creative approaches, they remain concerned about how well learners are coping with the levels of tasks. Schools report that it is often difficult to judge how much support learners receive at home and therefore, how much they are able to do independently. Schools are aware that more effective approaches need to be developed to review progress and ensure learning remains progressive for all learners. Schools commented that they would welcome further professional learning and guidance on effective approaches to assess children’s and young people’s progress during remote learning.

Staff are using a range of approaches to assess young people’s learning. These include graphics tablet to show workings; self-paced learning platforms; posing a question at the end of the lesson to gauge engagement and feedback; use of the hands-up function to gauge opinion or feedback; self-assessment activities; and use of collaboration software slides to complete questions. Young people can also give feedback on other pupils’ work using marking scheme uploaded by teachers. A number of other applications are also used to increase engagement through fun, interactive tasks which are self-marking but allow staff to look at work for feedback.

Barrhead High School, East Renfrewshire Council

Vital teacher feedback is given through social networks and virtual classrooms. Through this, children and young people see that their work is valued and maintain a link to their teacher and PSA. Written feedback is provided to families; video messages are also sent in order that children see a face and hear a voice.

St Duthus School, The Highland Council

In most secondary schools, annual reports, learning conversations to discuss learning targets, and online parental meetings keep parents informed of their child’s progress

and next steps. A few headteachers have noted the move to an online parents' evening as being an aspect of practice working well for parents.

There are continuing pressures in secondary schools relating to the submission of assessment evidence for National Qualifications. Almost all secondary schools report that teachers, young people and parents are anxious about the cancellation of national examinations. Schools have expressed concerns about gathering senior phase assessment evidence to inform further learning and teaching throughout the remote learning period.

Teachers maintain a useful overview of children's and young people's progress through parents sharing evidence of learning in photos and stories in an online platform.

Westfield School, Aberdeenshire Council

## Partnership working

It is clear that there remains a focus and commitment from schools to continue to work with partners to improve support for learners and their families. Examples include: community link workers providing support to families for whom English is an additional language; collaboration with allied health staff to support therapy to improve posture and comforts for young people with the most complex needs; and, accessing support for individuals from Educational Psychology and Speech and Language Services. In some cases, schools highlight video conferencing as helpful for 'team around the child' meetings as this enables a range of professionals to meet in the same virtual space.

Schools continue to develop approaches to support children and families who require additional support with their learning. For example, one-to-one sessions and small group breakout discussions during live teaching. In some instances, support for learning teachers are deployed to provide specific support for targeted groups of learners and activities on health and wellbeing issues.

Support for learning staff have been delivering one-to-one sessions to support those young people facing challenges during their learning. Additional (Covid-19) funding has provided extra teachers to target particular children with complex needs. Parents and staff have greatly appreciated this extra support and feel that this should continue when schools return to on-site learning.

Stromness Academy, Orkney Islands Council

Young people identified as vulnerable, including learners who require additional support in their learning, are being supported through a nurture hub, and online activities. Young people with autism are receiving one-to-one contact and support. Regular check-ins are in place for vulnerable groups with calls home and if necessary socially distanced 'wellbeing walks in the community'. Tailored packages have been devised and the provision is being reviewed weekly.

Milne's High School, Moray Council

Where partnerships are strong, these are contributing to meeting the needs of learners but this is not a consistent picture across the country. Overall, significant challenges remain in meeting the needs of some groups of children and learners.

Partnership working is a positive feature of the school. Notably, the school works very closely with the Community Link Worker who is providing very effective key support to many Polish families, or those for whom English is an additional language.

Our Lady's RC Primary School, Perth and Kinross Council

## Supporting wellbeing

"We are all learning as we go, adapting as things evolve. I say to staff, let's work smarter not harder or longer, for the sake of everyone's wellbeing."

All schools are aware of, and sensitive to, the complex circumstances for many learners and their families as a result of Covid-19 and the national lockdown. Schools have a strong focus on pastoral support and describe a wide range of approaches to support children's and young people's wellbeing. They have made good use of partnerships such as local community groups and school-based counselling services who provide emotional support to families.

Staff are committed to maintaining a strong sense of community for schools during the period of remote learning. This is considered to be important in developing children's and young people's confidence and sense of belonging. For example, live morning assemblies provide opportunities for children to interact with the wider school community and celebrate their achievements. Other opportunities for engagement with peers include small-group work in breakout rooms within digital platforms for groups of children to share their learning and experiences with each other; online chat spaces to socialise with their friends within a secure platform; and virtual playtimes. Some schools have adapted whole-school events to make them accessible online while others have created whole school activities. While schools are taking active steps to provide appropriate support, some report the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people as a key concern.

One school operates a class representative system. Each class have their own representatives and they meet with the other class representatives at fortnightly pupil council Zoom meetings to discuss any issues with remote learning.

Troon Primary School, South Ayrshire Council

Schools have responded quickly to the national lockdown to ensure provision for remote learning is in place for their learners. Almost all schools are aware of the national e-learning offer and remote learning resources and welcome these supports. Although the present situation continues to present challenges to the system, staff have strengthened their approaches to collaboration. However, in almost every school, the workload pressures and wellbeing of staff is identified as a concern. They report workload challenges of working remotely, uploading digital content and delivering live/recorded learning. Schools highlight that this is particularly challenging for staff who have caring responsibilities or young children of their own to support with home learning. In addition, most headteachers report that staff are overwhelmed by the volume of information available and find it challenging to review the amount of online content available. Staff would welcome further streamlining and signposting of national resources.

Headteachers cite the challenges of balancing strategic leadership and continuous improvement with the high volume of operational tasks associated with the current Covid-19 pandemic restrictions. Senior leaders would welcome high quality, targeted and specific online professional learning on leading and managing change. Headteachers report challenges in managing the time teachers have available to plan, organise and deliver remote learning whilst also delivering in-school learning for increased numbers of vulnerable and key worker children.

In one school, video calls are being made to families that have children and young people who are shielding. This allows them to participate in circle time and story time with their peers. Similarly, the leader of the 'signing choir' skypes with different classes so that everyone can participate and the music teacher records a regular 'music with movement' video that can be joined in at home.

Southcraig Campus, South Ayrshire Council

## Continuous improvement of remote learning

"We can't (and we shouldn't) go back to 'normal' school. Working digitally, with the resources to support this, has to be built into the way we teach and the way children learn for the future."

Since the initial Covid-19 lockdown in March 2020, schools have continued to develop and improve approaches to delivering remote learning. This has enabled schools to provide remote learning for those individuals or groups of learners having to self-isolate during the return to school in August 2020. A majority of schools report using feedback and learning from the first lockdown to influence the current learning offer. As a result, staff have used the experience to identify professional learning needs, improve skills in digital technologies, and consider new ways of working. Some schools have trained all staff, including support staff, in the use of digital technologies. This has led to staff in almost all schools being more confident and skillful in using an increasing range of digital tools to deliver more effective remote learning.

Senior leaders gathered data well on young people's learning experiences during the previous lockdown. The feedback from young people stated they wanted regular contact with staff and peers, a structured approach to learning, and expectations and deadlines for completing work to be clear. Senior leaders developed and consulted on a school protocol for remote learning which has been regularly updated to reflect national guidance.

St. John's RC High School, Dundee City Council

Since returning to remote learning provision in January 2021, a majority of schools have already engaged with parents to gather initial feedback on the approaches to home learning, either directly with individual parents or through surveys and virtual Parent Council meetings. Schools are beginning to use feedback from these engagements to inform further developments and improvements to the delivery of remote learning.

Schools have a responsibility to ensure that all learners experience high quality remote learning. In a few schools, senior leaders have begun to attend some remote learning sessions in order to identify areas of good practice to share more widely across the school. One staff team has worked collaboratively to begin to develop a quality assurance approach for remote learning in order to improve consistency of planning and delivery of remote learning. In some schools, staff meet together as a team to discuss how well learner's needs are being met. Senior leaders acknowledge the importance of reviewing and evaluating the quality of remote learning and recognise that further work is needed in this area to ensure all learners receive consistently high quality learning and teaching.

The school digital leader pupil voice group meet weekly with senior leaders to provide feedback on learning activities and make suggestions about improving their learning.

Glenboig Primary School, North Lanarkshire Council



Depute headteachers meet with young people from each year group each week. These interactions provide young people with the opportunity to give feedback on what is working well or not in their learning. Young people can use a Google Form to do this, or can discuss this as part of a whole class conversation. This helps young people to feel that they are still part of their class, and allows senior leaders to check in with young people.

Stonelaw High School, South Lanarkshire Council

Staff consulted with parents/carers and developed a remote learning policy during the first lock down. They later evaluated and amended the policy to reflect blended learning and updated approaches to remote learning. This evidences the staff's use of self-evaluation for self-improvement.

Turiff Primary School, Aberdeenshire Council

“Despite the challenges, I really feel that we have a tremendous opportunity and that this period will redefine education.”

Overall, there is clear evidence that schools have learned from the previous lockdown and are continuing to improve their remote learning offer. Even at this early stage, there are examples of schools gathering the views of learners and parents to evaluate the impact of remote learning. It is important that all schools place even greater emphasis on continually reviewing the impact of remote learning to ensure all learners receive consistently high quality learning.

## 4. Recommendations

- **Ensure school planning and guidance for the delivery of remote learning is updated to reflect the entitlements and expectations published on 8 January 2021.**
- **Ensure children and young people experience high quality remote learning across the breadth of the curriculum.**
- **Continue to review approaches to learning and teaching to ensure learners receive an appropriate balance of live, recorded and independent learning.**
- **Ensure learners are aware of the progress they are making in their learning and what they need to do to improve.**
- **Build on existing good practice to continue to support the health and wellbeing of learners and their families, staff and the school community.**
- **Develop and implement approaches to continually review the quality and impact of remote learning to ensure all learners receive consistently high quality experiences.**

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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