National overview
of practice in remote learning

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Using feedback from learners and parents to adapt and make improvements to the delivery and quality of remote learning

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 and local authorities are using feedback from learners and parents[1] to adapt and make improvements to the delivery and quality of remote learning. It highlights examples of practice which illustrate what is working well in schools within five 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 24 schools across five local authorities to learn how schools and local authorities are using feedback from learners and parents to adapt and make improvements to the delivery and quality of remote learning. 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 using feedback from learners and parents to adapt and make improvements to the delivery and quality of remote learning. In particular, these conversations aimed to identify and explore:

- approaches that schools are using to gather feedback from learners and parents; and
- how schools are using feedback from learners and parents to adapt and make improvements to the quality of remote learning.

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[1] Throughout this report, the term 'parents' should be taken to include foster carers, residential care staff and carers who are relatives or friends.

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 national overview 'Sharing what's working well' section of the Education Scotland website.

3. Findings

Gathering the views of children and young people

"Our motto is 'we shall serve', that is why feedback is very important to us as a school."

Senior leaders are recognising the benefits of engaging more regularly with children and young people to hear their views. Almost all schools are now using a wider range of methods to gather feedback from children and young people about their experiences of remote learning. Schools are continuing to use common approaches, such as discussions with teachers, pupil surveys and pupil council forums, enhanced by digital technology, to gather views. Senior leaders are using a mixture of different digital collaboration tools to enable all children to participate and share their views. In one example, online platforms are being used to gather the views of children through a weekly evaluation form. Children have the option to write responses, or use an online digital voice recorder to provide their views, making it accessible for everyone.

Pupil leadership groups continue to be a key forum for children and young people to share their views. In one school, the pupil council and prefect leadership team now meet online every week with senior leaders. These groups provide helpful feedback about how young people are feeling, concerns about their wellbeing and their views about approaches to remote learning and teaching. The prefect leadership team also gathers and shares feedback through their role as S1 buddies. Key themes, identified through learner feedback, include togetherness and managing workload. These themes are used by the prefect leadership team to support the delivery of weekly assemblies.

Case Study – St Benedict's High School, Renfrewshire Council

Using data to inform improvement

St Benedict's High School is making use of feedback to improve the quality and range of the remote learning provision. Through questionnaires and discussion, young people in S1 and S2 reported that at times, they felt overwhelmed. Some were finding demands of learning on their own challenging. In particular, they felt that the number of subjects as well as the varying expectations of staff in each area was difficult.

Case Study – St Benedict's High School, Renfrewshire Council – continued

In a parental survey, half of respondents felt the volume of work for learners was too high. As a result, across the school and in departments, staff worked together to simplify their remote learning offer. They planned short learning episodes with clear outcomes and longer themed learning, for example, a focus on learning in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). The school reports that this has been a valuable exercise and is working well for young people.

Young people shared that they were not entirely comfortable being in lessons 'on camera' all of the time. Many found the forum too public to share any difficulties or concerns they were having. Staff undertook professional learning and now make more use of the facility in Microsoft Teams to have small, breakout sessions on a regular basis. Staff feel this has enabled them to tailor support better. They report that this has had a positive impact on young people's engagement; and the quality of work submitted by learners. Young people say they now feel more comfortable talking to staff.

Gathering views of parents and carers

"The way we are now communicating with parents is so much better, because it had to be."

Schools have increased the range and frequency of approaches to gather the views of parents and carers about remote learning. Common approaches include: surveys; focus groups; emails; newsletters; and social media. A few schools now provide weekly opportunities for parents to meet online with the headteacher or other members of the senior leadership team. Other schools have introduced informal virtual 'tea and chat' sessions and 'friends of the school' meetings. The informal nature of these helps to increase the number of parents who attend and increase their confidence to raise issues.

Schools are making telephone calls to reach a wider group of families and seek a broader range of views. In one example, following an engagement survey of families, senior leaders selected 10% of the school roll and made phone calls to speak to both the parent and child. The calls, which focused on wellbeing, support and information gathering, were very well received by families. The senior team was then able to collate the information to identify strong trends in the feedback, and use this to make improvements. In another school, senior leaders have made individual telephone calls to families. Schools report that parents appreciated being contacted individually. A number of calls have led to referrals to other agencies to seek support for families, such as financial aid, support services and young carers support.

Greater use is being made of technology, such as Google and Microsoft forms to seek parental views. As a result, schools are reporting that parents often respond better and more regularly than previous requests for feedback.

"It`s really important to know your parent body well so you can fully meet their needs. We listen carefully to their feedback and act upon it."

Schools continue to hold Parent Council meetings and are making good use of their Parent Councils to gather useful feedback. Headteachers report increased attendance since the introduction of virtual meetings and there are examples of schools increasing the frequency of these meetings to maintain engagement and interest. Schools frequently use a 'you said, we did' approach to show parents how their feedback is being used to shape improvements.

A few schools have adapted their approaches to parents' evenings to increase engagement and the opportunities for parents to share their views. Parent interviews are being carried out virtually this term and this has been welcomed by parents. In one school, parents suggested devising a prompt sheet to focus their questions and feedback about their child's experience of remote learning. Staff share prompts before the appointments take place so that parents have the opportunity to prepare for the discussion.

Local authorities are also supporting schools in a range of ways, including by conducting authority-wide parental surveys or engaging with parents. In one local authority, a parental engagement officer meets regularly with members of a regional parents' forum. Parents are able to share their views at these meetings and officers report conversations are "fruitful and productive". These meetings have enabled local authority officers to understand and measure if they are providing the right amount and level of information to parents. Officers report that feedback from parents through meetings, social media and surveys has been very positive and has enabled the local authority to respond quickly.

Case Study – West Lothian Council

Stakeholder Engagement Overview

West Lothian Council recently adopted a strategic approach to seeking feedback on remote learning which they report was successful. Local authority officers sought feedback from learners, parents and carers across all sectors. This informed a local authority Stakeholder Engagement Overview, published in February 2021. Local authority officers report that most of the feedback was extremely positive on the approach the local authority had taken to delivering remote learning.

Case Study – West Lothian Council – continued

Each individual school and centre received feedback on their establishment's strengths and potential areas for improvement. Headteachers also sought feedback from individual learners and parents through focus group discussions, dialogue with members of Parent Councils and social media posts. Local authority officers reported that parents appreciated being contacted individually by phone, strengthening further the relationship between themselves, teachers and practitioners.

Local authority officers supported schools and centres to analyse all feedback by issuing guidance documents, including challenge questions, and engaging in meetings with teachers and practitioners. This helped staff in schools and centres to act on the feedback in a consistent manner and tailor future actions to individual needs. The local authority feedback helped provide a context for staff in schools and centres to consider their own parent and learner feedback.

Local authority officers have worked with headteachers to explore more deeply the practice in schools and centres. As a result, the central pedagogy team are now being used in new ways to provide support for staff in early learning centres, nurseries and schools, in areas such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics, 1+2 languages, and health and wellbeing. Teachers have made changes to the quality of children's learning experiences and activities, including using more extended tasks with longer completion dates.

Case Study – North West Community Campus (2-18), Dumfries and Galloway Council

Parent Blethers

A key improvement priority for the school is to increase levels of parental engagement. Staff are keen to build relationships and support open communication with families.

Following discussions with parents, the leadership team established a system for parents and carers to meet with staff and each other to discuss their experiences of remote learning. These meetings are also intended to provide an opportunity to share ideas and suggestions around how remote learning could be improved.

Case Study – North West Community Campus (2-18), Dumfries and Galloway Council – continued

The virtual 'Parent Blether' sessions, led by a principal teacher from the secondary school, last for approximately thirty minutes. The school reports that the informal and brief format helps parents feel comfortable and encourages them to contribute their ideas, as well as sharing any concerns. Information gathered is then shared appropriately with the leadership team and other staff.

To date there have been four sessions, each attended by approximately 16 parents, representing all sectors. The school plans to extend this positive start to reach more parents, as more staff are invited to facilitate the discussions. Senior leaders anticipate that 'Parent Blethers' will become an integral part of school life and support their overall efforts to improve parental engagement.

Using feedback to improve curriculum, learning and teaching

"One of our biggest successes has been in adapting our delivery of remote learning as time has gone on, responding to feedback from children and parents."

Schools have used feedback from learners and parents to help shape the curriculum being offered through remote learning. Feedback from children, young people and parents indicates that they are concerned about the amount of screen time during remote learning and the impact this has on their health and wellbeing. Schools are addressing this through providing increased outdoor activities and independent learning tasks that promote physical activity. In one school, parental feedback indicated that they would prefer a greater range of learning activities across the curriculum beyond literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. To address this, staff introduced a weekly 'Rainbow Day' that focuses exclusively on expressive arts, science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and outdoor learning. The school reports that feedback from children and families suggests that this approach has been successful in engaging and motivating learners and improving the curriculum.

Staff report that feedback from learners and parents is helping to improve the quality of remote learning. Senior leaders used feedback from the first period of lockdown to gain a clearer understanding of what worked well and what needed to be improved. Evidence from most schools underlined how staff used feedback to improve the consistency and quality of remote learning and teaching. A few schools used the national expectations and entitlements as a framework for gathering views on the quality of children's and young people's experiences of remote learning. In one secondary school, learners raised issues around connectivity and accessing tablets. This feedback led to additional devices being provided which helped learners to engage better and improve the quality of their remote learning experiences. In another

example, feedback from parents and learners on the variability of siblings' experiences of remote learning, resulted in staff agreeing consistent approaches across the school to help improve how they delivered improved quality remote learning. These changes have resulted in parents and staff reporting improvements in children's progress and better engagement in remote learning.

Case Study – Sandhead and Drummore Primary Schools, Dumfries and Galloway Council

Virtual Nature Schools

Since the first lockdown, both primary schools have continued to review and adapt remote learning as a result of national and local guidance, and feedback from staff, parents and pupils. Staff introduced 'virtual nature schools' to increase children's time outdoors and help develop their skills in inquiry-based learning. The Parent Council and community groups provided funding so that every child has suitable outdoor clothing.

Senior leaders report that children are now engaged more often in quality and active outdoor learning experiences. Formal evaluation of the success of these improvements will be part of future school improvement planning, including through the school's standards and quality report. Staff are starting to collect a variety of helpful data to measure the impact of this initiative on children's learning with a view to embedding the approach within the curriculum.

Using feedback to increase engagement

"You need to be open minded as to how you gather data. I am looking for what the data tells us. Not what I want it to say."

In most schools, feedback is helping staff to improve the quality of children's and young people's engagement in learning. In a few schools, in response to parental feedback, 'pupil engagement teams' have been established. These teams work with learners and their families to help overcome any barriers to learning and teaching. There has been an improved percentage of young people engaging in their learning which staff report has increased considerably since the first lockdown. Feedback has also helped to improve further the quality of learning and teaching and to increase the engagement of some learners. For example, 'Fun Friday' activities were designed as a result of feedback from a pupil council to improve and enhance learners' remote learning experiences and to enable them to engage more with peers. The intended outcome of this has also resulted in children spending longer periods online engaging with activities and their learning. One school used existing links successfully with two local charities and a local business to support those learners who had disengaged from remote learning to re-focus. Identified families were provided with recipe kits and ingredients and given the opportunity to participate in live cookery lessons. The

feedback via comments on social media and individual messages from families was positive about their children re-engaging with remote learning and the quality of their learning.

"Together, we've identified skills we want to keep after all of this. We've used feedback to adapt our curriculum which is supporting skills for learning, life and work."

Case Study – Beath High School, Fife Council

Family wellbeing and learner engagement

The school's senior leadership team phoned a sample of parents to evaluate family wellbeing and learner engagement. In some cases, staff spoke with young people. The school reports that parents appreciated the opportunity to talk individually about their current experiences. Overall, parents felt the structure and timing of remote learning activities was working well in the senior phase. However, they had some concerns that young people at S1 and S2 were anxious about the quantity of work expected and the length of time it was taking them to complete it. When staff views were sought, they confirmed this and reported also that it was taking a lot of their time to prepare and mark the work.

Staff took account of the feedback and provided work based on curricular areas rather than subject areas, which resulted in around a 50% reduction in tasks allocated to young people at S1 and S2. Each subject now rotate the work issued for S1-2 within their curriculum area. This new approach was implemented quickly and all reported improvements in supporting young people manage workload. Staff report that young people are now completing more work, and at the same time have the better opportunities for wellbeing activities, such as daily physical exercise.

Case Study – Kilpatrick School, West Dunbartonshire Council

Using data to inform flexible approaches

The headteacher uses quantitative and qualitative data to help staff provide personalised learning for children and young people. The headteacher reports that clear, shared expectations have led successfully to staff using flexible approaches to meet individual children's needs.

Case Study – Kilpatrick School, West Dunbartonshire Council – continued

A recent survey of parents and learners identified clearly the need for children and young people to feel connected and see teachers and peers. This led to staff delivering more live and recorded lessons and encouraged creative approaches, for example using green screen technology, which the school reports is well received by parents. Additionally, staff are using interactive class apps and creative live sessions using jamboards, boardmaker symbols and face to face meetings with pupils enabled everyone's voice to be heard. Sharing ideas and solutions at professional learning twilights has supported staff to offer younger children opportunities to learn alongside their parents. Data also identified a range of practical issues, for example access to equipment and learning packs, that were resolved quickly.

The school has used data gathered from weekly engagement surveys to identify groups of children and young people who were not engaging with learning. As a result, they have put in place personalised arrangements which have increased children's and young people's engagement in learning and improved their wellbeing. The headteacher reports that almost all learners have now accessed class meetings, live lessons, and recorded lessons.

Staff report that the regular and focused gathering of data from parents and learners has improved home-school communication. The school plans to build on this and retain and develop approaches learned during remote learning.

Using feedback to address concerns around health and wellbeing

"The hardest thing about learning from home is 'missing friends'."

The health and wellbeing of children, young people, families and staff is an important focus and schools are using feedback to understand and address issues and concerns as these emerge.

In their feedback to schools, children, young people and their parents report that friendships are hard to sustain during lockdown and remote learning. Children and young people indicated that they missed interacting with their friends. As a result, the majority of schools have introduced opportunities to help address this. Examples include regular social virtual break times for children and young people to keep connected with one another, weekly virtual 'say hello' meetings and increased opportunities for children and young people to work collaboratively online. These provide children and young people with the opportunity to mix socially out with their

own class and to have a choice of which activities they participate in. All of these approaches are helping children and young people to feel less isolated.

Children and young people have also shared their feelings of heightened anxiety when they are on camera for a lot of the time. They report that they sometimes find it difficult to raise issues with teachers in a public setting. Schools have responded to this by creating more opportunities for smaller breakout groups during online learning. This is helping teachers to tailor support better and schools report that children and young people say they now feel more comfortable.

Feedback from parents highlighted that a few lacked confidence in their children`s safety online. Schools have worked with partners to address this, for example, by asking the community policeman to provide awareness raising sessions to parents on cyber safety. Schools report that this has improved parental confidence in using online materials and enhanced the school's safeguarding procedures.

Children, young people and parents have also provided feedback to schools about the impact of remote learning on their mental health. A few schools have established additional approaches to monitor this. For example, by undertaking weekly mental health check-ins for pupils. In one school, where parents were concerned about children's motivation, the pupil council introduced weekly competitions. In some secondary schools, senior leaders are helping to address young people's concerns around mental health by training senior pupils as 'mental health ambassadors' who support other young people to develop resilience, coping strategies and independent learning.

Emerging strengths:

- **The increasing range of approaches being used to gather the views of learners and parents about remote learning.**
- **Senior leaders recognising the benefits of engaging more regularly with children, young people and families to hear their views.**
- **Headteachers and staff using timely and regular self-evaluation, including seeking regular formal and informal feedback from the whole school community, to inform continuous, ongoing improvements.**
- **Schools' focus on particular themes emerging from feedback, such as prioritising health and wellbeing and learning experiences for children and young people.**

Areas for continuing improvement:

- **Continue to build on the range of approaches used during the period of remote learning to gather feedback from learners and parents when all children and young people return to in-school learning.**
- **Continue to use children's, young people's and parents' views in shaping how learning is delivered so that the needs and interests of individuals are being met.**

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%

Published March 2021