Education Scotland
Foghlam Alba

Remote learning:
a summary of key features

> "We can build on the message that remote learning is good, it's here to stay and we want to get better at it."
>
> **(Teacher)**

Introduction

This guide summarises evidence about remote learning, gathered and evaluated by HM Inspectors over 2020/2021. The guide focuses on key features of remote learning and evaluates what works well.

Remote learning is learning that is directed by practitioners and undertaken by children and young people who are not physically present with the practitioner while the learning is taking place. In the current context, digital and online approaches will be commonly used as part of the overall mix for remote learning.

Remote Learning - December 2021 (education.gov.scot)

More detailed information can be found in **HM Inspectors' National Overviews of Practice in Remote Learning:**

HM Inspectors' National Overviews of Practice in Remote Learning

Background

The evidence gathered by HM Inspectors highlighted the fundamental importance of prioritising children's and young people's safety, health and wellbeing above all else. Only then could staff realistically expect to motivate and engage children and young people, in learning approaches which would often differ significantly from their prior experience.

Following on, staff then found it vital to take steps specific to the needs of vulnerable groups and individuals, and those requiring additional support for learning. At every stage, staff parents and partners recognised the importance of ensuring that children and young people felt "connected" and valued. Effective learning activities succeeded in engaging learners, building their confidence and self-esteem in the new and unfamiliar learning environment. Flexible teaching strategies were of vital importance, as was ensuring appropriate levels of challenge. Skilful assessment and feedback helped strengthen learners' engagement. Staff reflected on the success of the learning, teaching and assessment strategies they had adopted, achieving important progress between the two main periods of lockdown.

The guide is organised using terms and expressions that feature strongly in the remote learning evidence gathered by HM Inspectors.

"I understand that we are in the middle of a pandemic and think absolutely the most important thing we can do is support health and wellbeing for all - whatever age, this must remain the key priority."

(Parent)
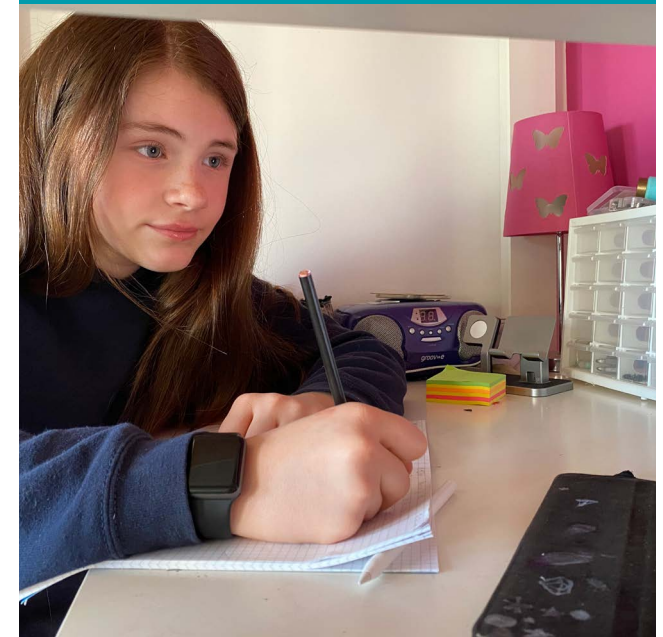
1. Maintaining connection and strengthening engagement

"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."

(Headteacher)

Partners collectively prioritised the health and wellbeing of learners, staff and families. Local authorities and schools communicated clearly with parents, carers and learners about remote learning arrangements. They provided helpful advice to parents and carers about how to support learning at home. Schools initiated regular daily contact with children and young people, for example through "check-ins" and "doorstep calls" to maximise engagement and monitor wellbeing. Staff monitored learner participation and followed up when children and young people were not engaging. Teachers provided opportunities for learners to engage with their peers, for example through the use of virtual break-out rooms during live lessons. Schools made use of whole-school or year group online events to increase motivation and engagement.

2. Support where it was needed

"As Digital Leaders, we use our learning to support others, this helps us develop a growth mindset. If we find solutions we put them on the whole school chat to help others."

(Learner)

Local authorities provided hubs for children and young people who were vulnerable and for whom school attendance was necessary. Local authorities and schools deployed staff to provide targeted support for those learners with the most complex needs. They took steps to ensure that families did not face difficulties with access to devices and connectivity, and provided advice to schools and families about online safety and protocols. Schools worked in partnership with key agencies such as social work and health services to provide targeted support for learners who were finding it difficult to engage with learning. Local authorities provided support and advice for schools and families about key transitions, including those at P7 to S1 and BGE to Senior Phase. Partners contributed to support for children who required additional help with their learning, at times with a focus on individual support plans with relevant targets. Pastoral and support staff engaged with partner organisations, including community groups, social work and allied health professionals, to provide bespoke support to families and their children.

3. Balancing the learning experience

"My mum worries about the impact on my health. It is too tempting to spend a bit longer on work, sitting on my bed on my laptop, and not take enough time to get out and about."

(Learner)

Local authorities and schools provided staff with professional learning in delivering remote learning. Schools recognised the importance of achieving a balance between live learning, recorded sessions and independent activity, including non-digital sessions. Evidence from both periods of lockdown underlined the importance of allowing learners flexibility in how and when they studied. Equally, staff found that children and young people appreciated an overall study framework or "timetable". This encouraged the learners to manage their time effectively, and helped them to revise and consolidate their learning.

4. Balancing the curriculum - core and breadth

"During the first lockdown, we were focused on engagement and literacy and numeracy mainly. This time round we are much better prepared to continue with our plans for learning in all curricular areas and ensuring children make progress."

(Teacher)

Schools generally prioritised numeracy, literacy and health and wellbeing. Staff increasingly used interdisciplinary learning and cross-curricular topics to deliver a wider curriculum. Children and young people had access to a broader curriculum through the national e-learning offer. Schools devised creative approaches to delivery of practical subjects such as physical education and music. Schools offering Gaelic Medium Education (GME) provided live and recorded learning in GME to ensure learners continued to have opportunities to converse in the language.

Many schools made effective use of outdoor learning experiences to enhance the curriculum for all young people, taking advantage of the reduced risk of viral transmission. These sessions were sometimes planned as interdisciplinary experiences, and were found to have particular value for children and young people with specific learning needs.

5. Assessment, moderation and feedback

"Pupil voice helped us understand the value of 'mark it live sessions' and so where possible, we embed live marking into our lessons. Young people told us that this deepens their understanding."

(Teacher)

Schools employed a variety of approaches to assess learning and to deliver feedback to children and young people about their progress and next steps. Most provided opportunities for learners to engage in self- and peer-assessment. Some schools organised online parental meetings to ensure families kept informed about learners' progress. Supported by local authorities, schools collaborated in moderation activities to build consistency in assessment standards.

6. Quality matters

"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 timeously."

(Headteacher)

Local authorities introduced authority-wide quality assurance approaches, based on key measurable outcomes. These helped to build consistency and strength of practice. Schools engaged in regular self-evaluation and quality assurance activities relating to remote learning. They explored provision, engaging with learners and their families through surveys and discussion sessions. They adapted practice in response to what was found to work well with remote learning. Schools improved the balance of learning activities to include live sessions. These were often backed up by recorded lessons and important periods of time off-screen. Headteachers joined virtual lessons to ensure their quality. Teachers devised more effective approaches to ensure children and young people engaged actively with lessons, rather than just listening in. Local authorities improved their systems for gathering data about how well children and young people were participating.

# 7. Partnerships, planning, collaboration and communication

"We like how the school has worked with our parents to let them know what remote learning means and what it should feel like. That has helped our parents understand the difficulties in remote learning, for us and for the school."

(Parent)

Local authorities collaborated closely with schools to plan the delivery of remote learning, and shared local plans with parents and carers. The authorities developed strategic, high-level plans and guidance for remote learning, with a clear expectation that schools would implement that guidance. Along with schools, the authorities took steps to ensure that local plans aligned with national guidance. Schools collaborated with others to share effective practice. Some engaged with their Parent Council forum for valuable discussions about remote learning provision.

"Let's not waste a crisis! There is a healthy appetite across our schools to see where remote learning can go next. I am so impressed by the creativity and innovation our staff are showing in their daily interactions with learners."

(Headteacher)
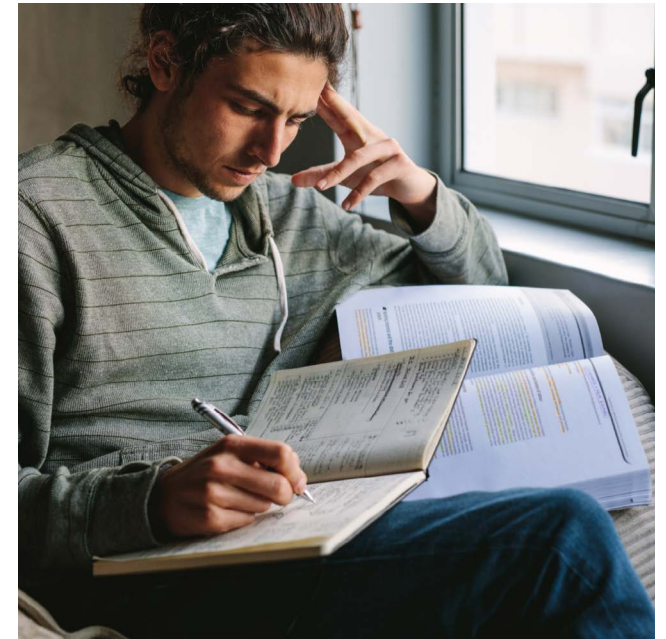
You can view examples which illustrate how different schools implemented remote learning:

Sharing what's working well | National overviews | Supporting remote learning | National Improvement Hub (education.gov.scot)