**National overview
of practice in remote learning**

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Schools: a focus on learning
entitlements for children and
young people

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. 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 fifth in a series of weekly overviews of practice in remote learning and focuses on how schools are delivering children's and young people's entitlements to remote learning as set out in the national guidance published on 8 January 2021. It contains comments from headteachers gathered through discussions with HM Inspectors.

2. Approach to engagement with schools

During the week beginning 1 February 2021, HMIE engaged in professional dialogue with 5% of schools across all local authorities. These discussions took place across 123 schools including 79 primary, 35 secondary and 9 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

Engaging with schools

"It's like chalk and cheese between the first lockdown and now. What we are providing for children this time is more meaningful and necessary. Staff are taking steps to ensure they 'see' children regularly."

Overall, schools report that senior leaders and staff understand the needs of children and young people and their families well, and prioritise their wellbeing. All schools describe having a strong focus on pastoral support to identify and meet children's and young people's needs and monitor their wellbeing. Schools report that they maintain regular contact with identified families to provide targeted support where this is required. Most schools describe how partnership working and communication with a range of support agencies has strengthened over recent months. Schools outline the referral mechanisms they have in place to ensure that learners and their families have access to help and resources for example, via community-based interventions or individualised support within learning hubs. The use of home-school workers, support staff, and work with partner agencies helps to meet the needs of children and young people.

All schools support vulnerable families, including many who have experienced bereavement, or are affected by isolation. Almost all schools highlight that some children and young people are neither engaging regularly in their own learning nor with staff. Schools describe how staff reach out to learners who are not attending planned lessons and activities, and encourage and support them to re-engage with their learning. However, schools would benefit from additional, targeted support and resources to help children and young people engage, and cope with the impact of Covid-19 on their wellbeing. Almost all schools are increasingly concerned about the wellbeing of staff. Many schools highlight that parents are becoming more fatigued as remote learning continues.

Increasingly, schools feel that continued engagement with children and families is supporting a shared understanding of the remote learning offer and how the needs of learners are being met. A majority of primary school headteachers identify parental engagement as a key factor in supporting the development of improved learning experiences for children during this period of remote learning. They describe how parents appreciate access to resources such as learning frameworks or grids to help support their child's learning. Schools comment that these resources help to clarify expectations and signpost parents to additional information.

Almost all schools provide daily check-ins for children and young people. Overall, schools report that the increased use of daily check-ins has improved the engagement of children and young people in their learning since the first lockdown. They describe how this is also supporting children and young people to talk about the learning planned for that day, and to see their friends. Increasingly, children and young people are using check-ins to raise concerns and clarify aspects of their learning. Daily engagements also support staff to identify any additional support children and young people may require, and to monitor their wellbeing. In some schools, where daily

check-ins are not in place, staff engage pupils during live lessons to confirm engagement. Where children and young people do not engage in check-ins or live lessons, most schools describe how staff follow up quickly to establish the reasons for their absence. Many schools would welcome further support on how they can improve young people's engagement in learning, in particular for learners in S1-S3.

The curriculum

"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."

Most schools describe the progress that they have made in relation to planning a more balanced curriculum since the first lockdown, including a greater focus on planning activities and tasks at different levels of difficulty and progression in children's and young people's learning. Schools highlight the range of remote learning opportunities they are providing that allow children and young people to develop knowledge, skills, and attributes through interesting and engaging learning activities. Where this is working well, planned learning across the curriculum is relevant, engaging and provides depth. However, overall, the breadth and depth of curriculum offered to children and young people by schools is variable, particularly in relation to the delivery of practical subjects, and for young people in S1-S3.

Almost all primary schools clearly prioritise numeracy, literacy, and health and wellbeing. Most schools use a range of approaches to support learning across other aspects of the curriculum, including inter-disciplinary learning (IDL) to support learning across expressive arts, social studies, science and physical education. A few schools describe how teachers are increasingly making explicit links to Curriculum for Excellence experiences and outcomes, and the four contexts of learning in the planning of remote learning. However, this is not yet consistent across all schools.

Almost all secondary schools describe how they aim to offer the full curriculum to their pupils. This includes providing the full timetabled curriculum to young people at S3-S6. Secondary schools highlight how timetabling adjustments support learners to engage in learning and make progress with their studies. However, many schools acknowledge that the curriculum offer has narrowed. Some learning opportunities have been paused during remote learning or become more difficult to deliver fully. These include: practical subjects, senior phase elective courses, IDL work, and school-college partnership provision. A few schools report that as priority is given to the senior phase, this is impacting on young people within the broad general education, particularly those making transitions, for example, young people in S3 making subject choices. Schools would welcome examples of good practice that exemplify innovative ways of engaging learners in all curriculum areas as part of remote learning.

A few schools express concern that young people who undertake vocational qualifications, for example foundation apprenticeships, are not engaging as well with online learning as their peers who undertake National Qualifications. This also applies to some courses where practical skills development is a key aspect of learning. Many

schools express concern about the implications for learner progression and pathways for these young people.

> Children and their families are offered a monthly curriculum overview, outlining the main theme for the month and suggested activities children can undertake independently and with their families. Each Wednesday, children can choose from a series of linked activities that offer opportunities for personal achievement, and that promote the ethos and life of the school as a community. The overview also highlights the focus for the four set days of learning across the curriculum on Google Classroom. The interdisciplinary learning theme for February has a strong focus on social studies, learning about the past in their local area. Children across the school are working together to create a virtual museum 'A Walk in the Past at Dyce'.
>
> Dyce Primary School, Aberdeen City Council

Learning, teaching and assessment

"Staff skills in IT have improved and this is having a positive impact on the online learning we are able to offer. None of this would be possible without the support of parents and carers."

Most schools describe how teachers are using digital platforms to support learning. They adopt a range of approaches to deliver learning and teaching, including, pre-recorded videos, daily differentiated tasks and family learning topics. Headteachers in the majority of schools report that staff are continuing to develop their skills in delivering remote learning. Most schools indicate that staff are providing a range of interactive activities each day and that many staff are now using digital tools that they have not used before. Schools highlight that teachers increasingly share resources and ideas with each other in and between schools.

> "Our regular live connections and pre-recorded lessons for our pupils are very popular with families. Not only do they give essential contact with our school community, they also provide invaluable opportunities for families learning together. Moving forward, we need to capture these opportunities to build on our school family learning offer. We are steadily building up a bank of high quality videos which are bespoke to our school community. They range from science experiments, cooking and art lessons to teaching phonics and reading bedtime stories."
>
> Viewlands Primary School, Perth and Kinross Council

Schools describe how their use of clear timetables and plans for learning activity is allowing for flexibility in how children and young people wish to learn.

Schools indicate that increasingly, teachers systematically plan learning which takes place 'away from screen'. This is helping to address concerns around the excessive use of screen time. A few schools would welcome support to help staff facilitate play-based pedagogy within the context of remote delivery.

"Since lockdown, our support for children is more tailored. Staff are constantly responding and adapting to suit the needs of children and families. It will change the way we work in the future."

Most schools describe how the balance of live and independent learning has improved over the course of the current term. They feel they provide an appropriately balanced remote learning offer for children and young people. In some schools, teachers are working collaboratively to deliver live learning, for example, where one member of staff will provide key input, with colleagues facilitating breakout rooms to support further discussion. Primary schools describe how the recording of learning activities has become an area of strength, and they are hopeful that live learning will also develop further. Where schools are recording lessons, they report that children and young people appreciate this and feel that it enables them to revisit their learning regularly and access it in ways appropriate for their context. Most schools report parents welcome the flexibility to re-visit learning activities with children, or access learning resources, when they have the time to support their children with their learning. However, some schools have voiced concerns about the time taken to structure live lessons, pre-record sessions, do voice recordings and plan lessons. This is particularly challenging for staff who are balancing their own caring responsibilities while working from home.

"The burden on staff in one-person departments should not be underestimated. That makes it so difficult to balance duties and maintain quality, for example between looking after a class in school and the needs of those working online at one and the same time."

Most schools identify a range of mechanisms and approaches for providing feedback to learners on their learning. In many cases, staff provide daily opportunities for pupils to discuss tasks and activities and share feedback to children and young people about their learning. Some teaching staff offer daily opportunities for young people to engage in catch-up sessions, reviews of previous learning, feedback, peer assessment, and group work for activities such as reading or numeracy. However, in a few schools, headteachers are concerned about assessing planned learning and monitoring children's and young people's progress across the curriculum. They describe how teachers are working hard to plan remote learning, but are not yet fully confident about whether this is progressing children's and young people's learning appropriately. A number of schools indicate that despite the efforts of staff to engage with children and young people, a few are not routinely submitting work to be reviewed. In some cases, staff are unable to establish how independently children and young people are learning without the support of parents and carers or other siblings to complete tasks. There is a need to develop further, approaches to providing feedback to children and young people about their learning, the progress they are making, and future next steps.

Almost all schools describe how they place importance on the need to facilitate engagement between learners to support learning and promote social interaction and emotional wellbeing. Most schools are providing regular opportunities for children and young people to work collaboratively. Across schools, staff are making use of the 'class notebook' function for collaborative learning spaces to allow young people to interact with their teacher. In some schools, opportunities are offered daily, but in most schools, they are available once or twice per week. Sessions include some reflection on learning but generally focus on encouraging engagement and participation through fun activities, for example celebrating birthdays, sharing about pets or favourite toys, or what children have enjoyed doing over the past week. However, some schools describe offering only limited opportunities for engagement with other pupils, and acknowledge that this is an aspect that needs further improvement.

Schools describe how they are using feedback from pupils and parents to refine approaches to supporting children to work independently and with others. For example, headteachers in secondary schools meet regularly with pupil councils to seek feedback and ideas from young people. Most schools acknowledge the need to continue to review and develop approaches to assuring the quality of remote learning to ensure greater consistency of the learner experience.

> The Parent Council has supported, provided and sustained a number of well-planned, innovative opportunities to support children and families' informal engagement. In January, they organised a remote celebration for Scots language with a variety of special features. They created a sway, which included a local piper who recorded music. The children were able to recite and share their reading of Burns poetry as part of a competition. Matthew Fitt, a Scottish author, took part in remote judging and provided resources to support learning more about Scots language.
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> Hill of Beath Primary School, Fife Council

Resources

Headteachers outline how they continue to work to identify appropriate resources to help meet the needs of all learners. Most schools report that almost all children and young people now have access to an appropriate digital device and to the internet. Schools are using their knowledge of family circumstances to distribute resources. Some schools are helping families to access remote learning by providing access to Wi-Fi and cellular data, or offering support to help families access, and make the most of, online learning resources. However, a few children and young people do not yet have access to a digital device, or require additional support in using technology. In some families, children and young people are sharing a device with other family members, or have poor connectivity. Schools are helping these children and young people to overcome barriers by providing the opportunity to access learning in school or distributing 'at home' learning packs.

Schools report that increasingly, teachers are making their learning resources available on digital platforms. This supports children and young people to access material online to support their learning at a time that is convenient to them. However, headteachers report that staff find it challenging to devote the time required to create and locate resources to meet children's and young people's learning needs. This can be a particular issue where relatively high numbers of young people are attending school hubs, as staff need to balance delivery of online learning while supporting face-to-face learning in the hub. A few schools report that a continued focus on assistive technology is needed, and headteachers would like additional guidance on providing targeted support for children with more complex needs who are learning remotely.

Schools highlight that the majority of children and young people are confident in using technology to support their learning. However, they recognise that some younger children are reliant on a parent to support them to access remote learning. In addition, some parents may not have the confidence or skills to help with online or digital access. Schools describe how teachers make every effort to provide technical support and assistance, but schools have identified that more support for parents is required.

4. Recommendations

- **Ensure the curriculum provides all children and young people with breadth and depth in their learning.**

- **Support all children and young people to receive their entitlements to, and engage in, remote learning.**

- **Provide all children and young people with opportunities to revisit learning when required.**

- **Ensure that all children and young people receive regular feedback on their learning and the progress they are making.**

- **Provide support for parents to help children and young people engage in remote learning.**

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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