



National overview of practice in remote learning

Schools: a focus on meeting learning needs, including those with additional support needs

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 fourth in a series of weekly overviews 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 25 January 2021, HM Inspectors engaged in professional dialogue with 5% of schools across all local authorities. These discussions took place across 127 schools including 80 primary, 36 secondary and 11 special schools. In the current context, HM Inspectors did not observe learning episodes. The selection of schools was agreed in advance with local authorities. The discussions focused on the following three aspects, with a focus on meeting learning needs, including those with additional support needs:

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

3. Findings

Curriculum and learning

“Learning is much more personalised during this lockdown.”

Almost all primary schools prioritise learning in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. In addition, some schools are making use of specialist teachers to deliver aspects of the curriculum such as physical education and music. In almost all secondary schools, young people receive their full curriculum offer. Headteachers in a few secondary schools have personalised the curriculum for individuals by allocating more time to health and wellbeing activities to support their needs. A number of schools highlight the challenge of delivering practical subjects remotely to all young people, particularly those with complex additional support needs.

Teachers developed their virtual classrooms using well known visual symbols to represent literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing, and sensory activities. This allows learners to have some choice over selecting and accessing learning activities online. Using Pupil Equity Funding, the school has been able to purchase recorded activities based on music, drama and dance which enhance the curriculum for their learners. The school has links with the local college’s horticulture department who deliver sessions for young people in the senior phase. Young people develop important skills for learning, life and work and land based skills through this input.

Redburn School, North Lanarkshire Council

Schools recognise the importance for children and young people, who require additional support in their learning, being able to achieve success in a range of ways. They provide opportunities for their learners to participate in fitness classes, sign language groups and charity work. Often, these include learning outdoors and promote learning away from the screen. Schools take time to celebrate children’s and young people’s successes through achievement of awards and certificates.

The school’s online Makaton choir has been very successful. It includes children who are still learning in school and those at home. It does not require ‘voice’ singing but builds on music lessons that were taking place before Covid-19. It is accessible to all and provides enjoyment, socialisation and learning experiences.

Drummond School, The Highland Council

Staff use knowledge of the school context well to plan relevant and engaging activities. For example, as the majority of students live in flats, teachers recommend outdoor and active experiences carefully and sensitively. The use of local green spaces and community facilities to expand outdoor learning experiences is a key area of focus for the school.

Dysart Primary School, Fife Council

Planning to meet the needs of individual learners

“There is not a one size fits all approach. Teachers are responsive to the needs of the children.”

“Teachers are going above and beyond to provide high quality, differentiated learning remotely to enhance children's experiences and sustain engagement.”

Most primary schools describe the arrangements they have in place to ensure that learning is at an appropriate level of difficulty for all children and young people in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. Across sectors, there are positive examples of teachers adapting learning in a variety of ways to meet the needs of learners. These include providing a choice of topics to reflect children’s and young people’s interests, and flexible timescales that allow learners to work at their own pace.

The majority of schools offer activities with varying levels of challenge for learners. Examples of what is working well include, ‘chilli challenges’ where teachers provide a menu of activities with each one graded by the level of difficulty. In other examples, teachers use open-ended activities designed to develop higher order thinking skills to encourage deeper learning, or require learners to use concepts that are more complex. However, this is not yet consistent across all schools or for all learners.

For many schools, the nature and type of children’s and young people’s additional support needs determines the balance of live learning and independent activity. Headteachers report that in planning learning, staff take into account that some children and young people may find it challenging to complete activities independently, and consequently, provide more live learning. For other children and young people experiencing challenges, most schools provide more structured and detailed daily plans rather than a weekly overview.

Most schools work in partnership with other agencies to support children and young people with additional needs. This includes educational psychologists, teachers specialising in autism, and speech and language therapists. Schools are deploying specialist and support staff in a range of ways to help meet children’s and young people’s needs. This includes supporting teachers to adapt learning and digital packages. In a few schools, specialist staff support teachers to plan and deliver learning to meet the needs of all children and young people. This includes specialist teachers for children and young people with English as an additional language (EAL),

or for learners with sensory impairment providing regular live learning for small groups of pupils. In other cases, specialist teachers record daily video lessons that children and young people can access at a time of their choosing.

Given that significant numbers of children do not have English as their first language; the school has continued to offer daily and weekly live lessons for a number small support groups for EAL. The headteacher reports that maintaining as much continuity in language acquisition for these pupils was a priority and that the approach is working very well. Interpreters in Urdu and in a number of Eastern European languages are available to support families who cannot speak English, in order to access remote learning and to support children.

Cuthbertson Primary School, Glasgow City Council

“Classroom assistants play a significant role supporting children in school and this has continued while children are at home”.

In the majority of schools, support staff benefit from tailored professional learning for remote delivery. They feel this is helping them to support learners with additional needs via remote delivery.

Pupil support assistants (PSAs) have been upskilled significantly during the period between the two lockdowns and this is leading to more targeted and bespoke support for pupils. PSAs are now joining live lessons and offering support to those pupils with additional support needs. The school reviews the deployment of this staff to reflect changing circumstances.

Fortrose Academy, The Highland Council

Use of digital technologies to support learning

Almost all headteachers describe an increase in the confidence of staff when using digital platforms and delivering remote learning for learners, including those with additional support needs. Most schools provide a range of guides, tips and direct support for learners with additional support needs in using digital platforms. Schools report that teachers are making more use of assistive technology to support children

and young people to access learning. They feel this is helping children and young people who require additional support engage with learning activities.

Staff identify and use various features of Microsoft Teams well to make learning materials more accessible for young people with additional support needs. For example, young people with dyslexia are encouraged to use the immersive reader feature. Other tools such as changing the page colour or grammar tools are also being used effectively to support young people. Staff have published a helpful guide for young people and parents with information on how to access and use these features.

Crieff High School, Perth and Kinross Council

A few schools reported that some learners who require additional support find it challenging to use digital devices. In these circumstances, schools are working to ensure families have access to hands on, practical resources that will allow children and young people to learn at home. Where appropriate, home learning packs are delivered to families or can be collected from school. These packs include differentiated resources tailored to individual needs to support remote learning. These resources include, for example, flashcards, reading books, magnetic boards and resources for practical activities. Staff have produced help guides and videos for parents on how to use these resources at home to support their child's learning.

The school provides learning packs to support young people undertaking National Qualifications. The packs include concrete materials relevant to specific targets outlined in individual support plans. For example, some young people working towards National 3 Art and Design receive palettes and art materials. Others working towards National 4 Home Economics are provided with food ingredients. The school also works in partnership with a local supermarket to provide young people with ingredients to prepare and cook a three-course meal. These are distributed to homes on a weekly basis.

Park School, East Ayrshire Council

A bespoke in-school offer is delivered by additional support needs staff and support for learning assistants (SLAs) for identified groups of young people. Differentiated materials are provided according to the individual learner's profile. Alternatives to Google classrooms, for example paper packs, are provided for learners who find it challenging to engage digitally. In addition, SLAs continue to support young people with additional support needs online. Young people can access supported study or individual Google meets.

Bannockburn High School, Stirling Council

Reviewing progress of learners, including those with support plans

“The team around the child meetings have been prioritised and maintained throughout lockdown.”

Schools use a range of approaches to provide feedback to learners about progress with learning. This includes written feedback, using digital voice-notes and face-to-face feedback. Headteachers report that teachers are finding it more challenging to provide effective feedback to children and young people with additional support needs. In school monitoring and tracking the progress for some learners with complex needs would usually be carried out through direct observation of learning. There are a few examples where parents capture and share tasks that their children are doing to allow teachers to review progress. Across all sectors, schools report that they would welcome further professional learning and guidance on how to assess progress of learners through remote delivery. They would also welcome further advice on how to gather assessment evidence for those young people undertaking National Qualifications in the senior phase.

In the best examples, approaches to remote learning for children and young people with additional support needs are based clearly on individual support plans that contain relevant targets. Schools continue to hold child-planning meetings remotely to ensure progress and learner needs are reviewed regularly. They take into account the views of learners and parents when reviewing progress and when planning next steps in learning. Targets are updated regularly to reflect changing circumstances. However, reviewing progress and planning next steps in learning for children and young people with additional support needs is not yet consistent across schools.

Next steps in learning are based on the established and regular monitoring, tracking and assessment system in the school. Targets are shared with parents weekly. They value receiving the targets as it helps them understand their child’s learning journey. Targets in individual education plans for those children with additional support needs continue to be assessed with parents and adjustments made which reflect learner’s achievements.

St Peter’s Primary School, Scottish Borders Council

All support plans are shared with parents digitally and strategies explained through, for example, using visual timetables. Social scripts to support children with communication difficulties are prepared and shared with families. This is successfully supporting children to engage at the right level for them. Most children with additional support needs also receive tailored periods of support physically in school. School self and parent evaluation shows this is an improved model in meeting children’s needs than previous offer.

Longhagh Primary School, Dundee City Council

Support for children and their families

“Check-ins with all families are a priority for the staff.”

“Health and wellbeing permeates through everything whether that be for children, staff or families.”

Most headteachers report improved levels of participation and engagement from learners since the first lockdown. In all schools, staff aim to ensure that they maintain regular contact with children and young people who require additional support with their learning. Many teachers and support staff make use of daily online check-ins to support children’s and young people’s emotional wellbeing, and measure their readiness to learn. Many schools make adaptations to meet the needs of children and young people who require additional support by, for example, offering smaller group ‘check-ins’ for those not confident in speaking out. In a few schools, these daily check-ins provide opportunities for children and young people to talk with and see their peers and familiar adults. Schools are using daily check-ins to monitor learner participation and follow up instances where staff raise concerns about non-engagement by individual children or young people. Where this is the case, staff are pro-active in supporting families to help children to re-engage in their learning.

Headteachers are confident that teaching and support staff are aware of family circumstances of children and young people. They are able to ascertain how children and young people are coping with remote learning and whether further support is required. Some teachers make physically distanced doorstep visits to offer support to families, or contact parents on a daily basis via email, face-to-face online messaging or phone calls. A few special schools expressed concern about parents who are balancing work demands and supporting their children’s learning, therapeutic, and personal care needs without the usual in-school support.

Some schools have provided access to places in hubs for those children and young people affected by bereavement or those who are emotionally vulnerable. In a few schools, learners with more complex additional support needs attend school full time. Schools review and update risk assessments as appropriate for those children and young people who are most at risk.

The school makes ‘check-in’ phone calls to support families’ welfare; this is enhanced by home visits for young people who are hard to reach or who are not visible on line. The school counsellor continues to work with those who require input. For some this is online and for other more vulnerable young people, this is face to face. The school partners work well with local community organisations such as Boghall Drop-in and Community Action Blackburn who provide direct support to families.

Burnhouse School, West Lothian Council

“We have all learned lots and still do each week. We ask ourselves what worked well for our learners. What was tricky? What changes can we make to be better next week?”

4. Recommendations

- **Provide tasks and activities that provide the right level of challenge for all learners, including those with additional support needs.**
- **Further develop approaches to monitoring and tracking children’s and young people’s progress so that teachers can build on what children and young people already know.**
- **Ensure support planning is reviewed regularly in partnership with learners and parents to help meet the needs of children and young people.**
- **Share approaches taken by schools to provide personalised support for those children and young people with complex additional support needs.**

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%

Education Scotland
Denholm House
Almondvale Business Park
Almondvale Way
Livingston EH54 6GA

T: +44 (0)131 244 4330

E: enquiries@educationscotland.gov.scot

www.education.gov.scot

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