**National overview
of practice in remote learning**

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Summary:
What we have learned so far

1. Introduction

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 educators across Scotland an opportunity to learn from evidence about the delivery of high quality remote learning in the current context, to help shape how remote learning is delivered beyond Covid-19.

Five National Overview reports have now been published. This sixth report provides a summary of findings to date. The report outlines what we have learned about what is working well in remote learning across Scotland and where there remains scope for reflection and improvement.

References to the views of parents and learners are based on responses to the national surveys ran by Education Scotland between 20 and 25 January 2021. Responses were received from 12,105 parents and carers and 2,667 learners.

2. Enabling remote learning

Local authorities and schools are better prepared and more equipped to deliver remote learning. They have learned from the experiences of the previous lockdown and have responded quickly to ensure learners can access remote learning. Local authorities and schools have taken active steps to improve children's and young people's access to resources by using additional funding, including Pupil Equity Funding to purchase digital resources and tools for learners.

There is also more use being made of assistive technology to support children and young people who require additional support with their learning. Most parents believe that they have appropriate resources and equipment, including technology, to enable their children to access remote learning. However, some children and young people do not yet have access to digital devices, do not have suitable connectivity, or share

devices with other family members. In addition, some learners who require additional support find it challenging to use digital devices. To help address these challenges there are many examples of local authorities and schools providing learning packs, guides for parents and other practical resources. Teachers and learners are using a range of platforms for online remote learning. These include Glow, locally developed virtual learning environments and virtual schools or academies. These platforms provide learners with the opportunity to access learning at times that best suit them and allow for reinforcement and extension of learning.

3. Engagement with parents

Local authorities and schools have built on the experience of previous periods of remote learning to strengthen their engagement with parents and carers. Parents acknowledge improvements in the quality of remote learning, and communication from their school and local authority on arrangements for remote learning. However, some parents would welcome more communication, particularly about their child's progress. Parents have welcomed advance notice of planned learning which allows learners to complete tasks at their own pace and at times which fit around family circumstances, including work and caring commitments. This is particularly helpful for families trying to balance remote learning with working from home. There are positive examples of schools engaging well with parents to gather feedback on approaches to remote learning and using this feedback to inform further developments and improvements to the delivery of remote learning.

4. Wellbeing

Overall, schools understand the needs of children and young people and their families and focus strongly on pastoral support and monitoring wellbeing. Regular check-ins provide children and young people with opportunities to engage directly with their teacher and peers. Most schools contact families to identify barriers to participation and engagement, discuss wellbeing, and offer support. However, daily contact with learners is not yet a consistent feature of practice across all schools. There are numerous examples of schools working with a range of partners to meet the needs of families, children and young people, including support for their wellbeing and for learners affected by bereavement or who are emotionally vulnerable. Parents and learners highlighted their concerns around health and wellbeing both during the period of remote learning and for the return to school. They are also anxious about National Qualifications. Parents are experiencing challenges in balancing their work and other commitments in addition to supporting their children's wellbeing and learning at home. Learners can sometimes experience excessive workload, long hours of screen time and a loss of confidence, all of which are having an impact on their wellbeing. There are also concerns about the demands and impact on staff wellbeing. Creating lessons for live learning, prerecording learning, and delivering learning remotely is challenging and demanding.

Local authorities and schools are taking positive steps to support the wellbeing of staff throughout this period. However, the impact of Covid-19 on the mental health and

wellbeing of children and young people is a significant concern. While providing support for health and wellbeing has been a strong feature, there will need to be a continued emphasis on support for learners, parents and practitioners.

5. Curriculum

There is a clear acknowledgment that remote learning is not a substitute for face-to-face learning within a school building. Positive work has been undertaken to adapt the curriculum and provide children and young people with a broad range of learning. That being said, the breadth and depth of the curriculum provided is variable. Primary schools have focused on learning in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing, cross-curricular topics, or whole-school learning contexts. Secondary schools describe aiming to provide the full timetabled curriculum for learners in the senior phase. 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. There are particular challenges in delivering practical subjects and providing learning appropriate for those children and young people with complex additional support needs. Overall, there is more work to be done to ensure children and young people at all stages are learning across the breadth of the curriculum, allowing them to receive learning opportunities which reflect the principles of Curriculum for Excellence.

6. Learning experiences

Learners believe that the organisation of remote learning and the variety of approaches being used by teachers has improved since the first lockdown. They feel that remote learning is encouraging them increasingly to be more independent in their learning. Over the course of the term, schools have developed approaches to the delivery of remote learning that increasingly take account of the remote learning entitlements and expectations which were published in January 2021. Particular challenges exist for learners with severe and complex needs to access learning. Overall, schools are improving the balance and range of activities, including live, independent and pre-recorded lessons. The balance of learning activities and opportunities for children and young people to collaborate with their peers varies from school to school and from local authority to local authority. For many schools the balance of learning is aimed at supporting the needs of children and young people. Increasingly schools provide materials digitally so that children and young people can access these at a time of their choosing to revisit key teaching, practice skills and consolidate learning. Of particular note are the positive views expressed by parents and learners about recorded lessons. Children and young people feel that it enables them to revisit their learning and parents feel it provides flexibility for them to support their child. There are times when schools find parental expectations regarding remote learning challenging. Although communication with parents has improved since the first lockdown period, engagement with parents will continue to be important to ensure a shared understanding of the learning being provided by schools.

7. Assessing children's and young people's learning and progress

Overall, most schools are using a range of approaches to provide feedback to children and young people about their learning and most learners highlighted that they receive feedback about their remote learning work. Feedback is welcomed by parents, who describe the positive effect this has on their child's motivation and engagement in learning. Schools describe the challenges of providing high quality feedback to children and young people on their learning and progress in a remote environment. These challenges include providing timely feedback; observing learning and intervening where appropriate; and using skilled questioning to support and extend learning. They recognise that the quality and quantity of feedback on children's and young people's work and progress remains variable within and across schools.

8. Professional learning

Local authorities continue to deliver a range of professional learning activities for teachers to enhance their skills and knowledge of remote learning approaches. Staff now have increased confidence in remote delivery and in the use of digital platforms. Staff have used their experiences to identify professional learning needs, improve skills in digital technologies and consider new ways of working. Some schools have trained all staff members, including support staff, in the use of digital technologies. The pace of change towards remote delivery has been, and continues to be, demanding and staff are continuing to develop their skills and confidence in delivering high quality learning remotely. Schools have acknowledged that staff would also benefit from further professional learning on approaches to pedagogy for remote learning; assessing the progress of learners; and supporting those children and young people with additional support needs.

9. Approaches to assuring the quality of remote learning

Local authorities and schools have described their approaches to continuously developing, reviewing and evolving delivery of remote learning. Many schools have taken positive steps to gather the views of parents and learners during the first lockdown, while others have sought feedback early into the delivery of remote learning in January. In the most effective examples schools have used feedback to adjust and refine their approaches and provide professional learning to address needs. In early January, while some local authorities had made changes to their approaches for quality assurance, most highlighted there was more work to do in adapting existing quality improvement arrangements. There is now a need to ensure that the delivery of remote learning is systematically reviewed by both schools and local authorities. This includes having an increased focus on learning, teaching and assessment.

10. Conclusion

Since January 2021, local authorities, schools and parents across Scotland have responded quickly to ensure children and young people continue learning during the period of lockdown. Local authorities, schools and parents are to be commended for the commitment and effort to deliver learning and teaching remotely in the most challenging of circumstances. It is clear that local authorities and schools have built on what they have learned from the first lockdown, and have used the experience to consider, develop and implement new ways of working. Local authorities and practitioners have learned much along the way, proactively finding solutions to ever-changing situations and challenges. Currently, the delivery of high quality remote learning across schools varies.

To date, five National Overviews of the delivery of remote learning have been published. Each report sets out recommendations. It is important to reflect on the recommendations set out in these reports in order to support continuous improvement of the delivery of 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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