**National overview
of practice in remote learning**

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Supporting pupil engagement,
participation and motivation

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 are supporting the engagement, participation and motivation of learners, and 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 schools

HMIE engaged in professional dialogue with 18 schools in five local authorities about their approaches to supporting children's and young people's engagement, participation and motivation. Local authorities identified schools which exemplify successful approaches to supporting the engagement, participation and motivation for their learners.

Professional dialogue with school leaders and educators focused on their approaches to supporting pupil engagement, participation and motivation. In particular, these conversations aimed to:

- explore how schools are monitoring the engagement, participation and motivation of children and young people during remote learning;
- exemplify how educators are ensuring that remote learning provision is engaging and motivating for individual learners, and the steps being taken to increase engagement and participation, where necessary, for individuals, groups and across school communities; and to
- identify the main challenges and how these are being overcome.

This report contains case studies from the local authorities involved. Supporting documentation will be published on national overview 'Sharing what's working well' section of the Education Scotland website.

3. Findings

Monitoring engagement and participation during remote learning

Schools report that the engagement of children and young people in remote learning has improved since the first period of school closures in March 2020. Almost all learners are now participating well. Schools use a variety of approaches to monitor children's and young people's engagement and participation in their learning. This includes a focus on how often they engage and the quality of the engagement. Approaches include individual teachers recording engagement and senior leaders tracking engagement across schools. Schools are making more use of the 'insight' facility within Microsoft Teams to connect with learners and gather useful information about levels of engagement to support their learning activities online. For example, in one school staff use the data gathered through the 'insight' facility, to monitor how many children are attending online sessions, how much time they allocate to each task and what types of work are being submitted for assessment. In another example, staff use daily check-ins as a means of recording participation in learning.

Schools describe how approaches to the monitoring and tracking of engagement have evolved to become more than just tracking online attendance. There is now a greater emphasis on monitoring the engagement of children and young people in remote learning. For example, teachers are making more targeted use of 'chat' functions within digital platforms to engage learners actively during lessons. They also ensure that learners use audio and video during live learning activities to contribute ideas, demonstrate understanding and participate in discussions. A few schools described using approaches to identify varying levels of engagement. This has supported staff to identify where learners' engagement is not as strong as it could be, for example, within particular subjects or year groups. Using this data, senior leaders alert young people and their parents and carers to any concerns and provide support to increase participation. Actions are then taken to support individuals and groups of learners to overcome barriers to engagement through, for example, contact with individual families, guidance teacher calls, providing additional support or alternative learning approaches. Where staff are working in partnership with parents and carers, this has had the biggest impact. Through these approaches, teachers are increasingly able to evaluate more effectively the level of children's and young people's participation across a range of learning activities.

School leaders and staff are proactive in regularly reviewing and refining their remote learning approaches and seeking ways to continually improve engagement and participation in learning. For example, staff work collectively in professional enquiry groups, or with schools within their associated schools group, to identify common challenges and find solutions. Working in this way has resulted in staff having a shared understanding of what effective engagement looks like within their own school context and what motivates and engages learners. Using a combination of relevant data and teacher knowledge, school leaders can now highlight specific barriers such as lack of access to digital devices or connectivity issues for individuals and groups. This has enabled staff to be more responsive to the needs of families and increase engagement and participation on an ongoing basis.

Case Study – Douglas Academy, East Dunbartonshire Council

Monitoring engagement through shared lesson observations

Staff at Douglas Academy have built on their existing practice of shared lesson observations, adapting approaches to focus on learner engagement during remote learning. The school had previously introduced a collaborative enquiry model which supports teaching staff to conduct lesson observations with the purpose of reviewing and improving the quality of learning and teaching. They have adapted this approach to observe remote learning. A small group of staff meet to agree a focus in the form of a question. Each member of staff in turn teaches a lesson while the rest of the group observe a young person involved to review their experience of, and participation in, learning and teaching. Observing staff use the agreed focus as the basis for evaluating the young person's learning experience. After each lesson, staff share observations and identify learning and teaching approaches and strategies which positively impacted on individual learner's participation, motivation and engagement in the lesson. This information is then used to plan appropriate resources, learning tools and approaches in future lessons. Once all of the lesson observations are completed, staff share their overall findings and conclusions with the wider staff team. Collectively, they use these findings to identify whole school action points to improve learner's experiences overall, which results in positive impact on engagement, participation and motivation.

As staff continue to adapt to using digital platforms as a key tool in remote learning, this approach has allowed staff to build confidence and be creative in a safe and supported environment. Using online observation, staff focus on a range of indicators of engagement, such as whether young people unmute during live lessons to make comments, how well they answer questions and their interaction with other young people during group work. The first question constructed for enquiry was: "what can teachers do to enhance pupil engagement and develop young people's accountability and independent learning skills?". Staff have already reported different strategies and approaches which are having a positive impact on young people and are gathering findings and evidence to share with staff. This approach is empowering staff to lead school improvement which is based on the needs and responses of young people within their school community. This has resulted in continuous conversation about how the experience of learners can be improved within the remote learning context. Monitoring of learner engagement in this way enables the school to show positive trends in improved participation by specific cohorts of pupils. The school team is reflecting on how they continue to adapt and use this model as pupils return to school.

Case Study – Liberton High School, The City of Edinburgh Council

Using information to plan and support learning which improves learners' experiences and motivation

To monitor and evaluate levels of participation, the school has developed a three point scale to support staff when evaluating young people's involvement and contributions during and after remote learning lessons. The three point scale used by teachers ranges from full, partial to no engagement and is underpinned by teacher professional judgement on how young people are progressing in their learning. Using this data, senior leaders alert young people and their parents and carers to any concerns and also use this information to celebrate young people's achievements. This data is regularly reviewed and used to identify those young people requiring additional support. For example, a few young people in the senior phase now have bespoke learning programmes to reinforce learning concepts. Data gathered by the school now shows a reduction in the number of senior phase pupils not engaging in remote learning activities. Weekly house meetings focus on addressing particular challenges young people are facing at home and in their learning.

At the start of the second lockdown, staff identified a group of young people who were not engaged in remote learning during the previous lockdown. To re-engage these learners, support for learning teachers now make weekly calls to check in with families and young people to see how pupils are getting on, to offer advice and follow up any issues with class teachers. Learners are provided with three support sessions across the week to direct them towards particular lessons and assignments. This support helps them to organise their week and encourages them to contact class teachers about any specific issues. These approaches have increased engagement as well as supporting positive home school relationships.

Approaches to increasing participation and engagement

"The key to improving pupil engagement and motivation is offering a variety of contexts for learning and asking the young people for their feedback to drive continuous improvement."

Improving engagement and motivation in learning remains a key priority for schools. Schools describe how they have established clearer and more realistic expectations of engagement and participation for learners. A few schools provide learners and their families with clear plans in advance outlining when aspects of remote learning will take place across the week. This is helping children and young people and families to plan

learning around other commitments and support and increase engagement. In some primary schools, staff feel that engagement in learning is supported best where a single digital platform is used to enable children and families to access materials and information, and to communicate with teachers and staff.

Schools use social media, school websites and individual telephone calls between teachers and families to support communication about remote learning plans and any concerns about the participation of individual children and young people. Improved and targeted communication with parents and carers is helping to increase children's and young people's participation and engagement. The use of feedback from parents and carers has been helpful in supporting teachers to reflect on effective engagement and adapt approaches to ensure the right balance of remote learning activities. For example, parents and carers have highlighted that too much live learning on screen can be overwhelming for some children and young people making it difficult for them to remain focused and on task. Within most primary schools, there is an emphasis on planning remote learning activities that are flexible and family friendly to encourage participation. In a few schools, children and young people are involved in planning their own learning, which results in a greater sense of ownership.

Schools recognise that providing children and young people with opportunities to engage with their peers helps to increase participation and engagement. This is also helping to meet children's and young people's social and emotional needs and prevent loneliness and social isolation. A few primary schools ensure that every class meets online in the morning to go over the timetable for the day. The children enjoy seeing their whole class online together and are supported by staff to share conversations and stories, and have fun together. Teachers keep the link open so that the children can let them know when they are finished or ask for help. In a few secondary schools, young people are encouraged to participate in social activities, such as quizzes or assemblies. Young people report that they enjoy working in virtual break-out rooms as they get the opportunity to see and work with peers and also get more help from their teacher when working in smaller groups.

Headteachers report that where learners have a voice in shaping remote learning approaches this has a notable impact. For example, schools use digital tools to provide young people with the opportunity to suggest what they would like to experience during remote learning sessions. In some schools this had led to greater opportunities for choice during tasks.

Secondary schools have taken steps to improve engagement by adapting approaches to remote learning delivery. This includes teachers providing more structured learning and teaching sessions in the early stages of the week and finishing the week with summaries of learning and quizzes to check understanding, particularly in the broad general education. Young people's engagement in their learning is monitored through their participation in these quizzes. Some schools have adapted timetables to ensure that young people have shorter lessons and regular breaks to reduce screen time and support engagement.

Staff continue to support and maintain connections within and across the school community to increase participation and engagement. Whole-school online events

such as assemblies and seasonal parties are popular, resulting in high levels of engagement from children and young people. In some schools, children and young people lead these activities and this has a positive impact on their engagement and motivation. Schools describe the positive uptake of whole school activities such as quizzes or family-based scavenger hunts.

Case Study – Cunningsburgh Primary School, Shetland Islands Council

Listening to parents and children to increase motivation and engagement

Staff at Cunningsburgh Primary School built on their strong relationships with parents and carers to inform their approach to engaging and motivating learners. Gathering the views of parents and carers and taking these into consideration when designing remote learning is one of the main areas that has made a difference in increasing motivation, participation and engagement in learning. The headteacher values parents' and carers' input as key to ensuring children engage with the school during lockdown.

The school has been able to address the challenges that parents and carers had identified during the first lockdown in 2020, and to build on successes. Many parents and carers felt that learning away from a screen was just as valuable as online learning. Therefore, between August and December 2020, staff focused on developing and encouraging children's independent learning skills. They created an 'independent learning folder' covering all curricular areas and used it in class. Staff feel this was good preparation for the current context, as children were used to working through a programme of work independently and subsequently have been able to replicate this routine at home. In addition, the headteacher responded to individual children's and families' needs by promoting teacher contact either in small groups or by one-to-one support to motivate and encourage participation. Staff wrote to younger children at home and delivered 'play packages' to motivate and encourage engagement in learning and to maintain a level of individual contact for children with their teacher. School staff continue to monitor individual participation and take steps to engage with families if a child needs further encouragement and support.

Case Study – Thomas Muir Primary School, East Dunbartonshire Council

Adapting the curriculum to motivate and engage learners

A main challenge has been providing a curriculum that is balanced to encourage and motivate children's learning. Staff wanted to ensure that the curriculum is enjoyable and where appropriate, an element of fun is added to enthuse children and help them engage fully with their learning. Different approaches from a variety of teachers is leading to creativity and children benefit from this.

The senior leadership team maintains a whole school focus on planning for remote learning. Children's mental health is seen as a priority across the school and is a strong component of each school activity. Successful whole-school interdisciplinary learning has included activities around 'Winter Photography' and 'Fair Trade.' These themes generated a positive response from the school community and allowed children to celebrate their successes online, sharing the information and learning from these activities. Many interesting photographs and written work by children were circulated across the school community and the content enjoyed and appreciated by all. This type of approach is having a positive impact in helping the school community, across the ages and stages, to stay connected and in touch with each other. A very popular series of lessons looking at 'how to draw comics' has been put together in partnership between the school and a local artist to encourage children to engage in a fun and purposeful learning in art and design. This is proving very motivational for many children, including a number who may normally feel reluctant to engage in remote learning activities.

Ensuring that remote learning and teaching is engaging and motivating for individual learners

"We recognise that one size does not fit all and so have encouraged each faculty to be creative in their delivery of remote learning. Pre-recorded lessons, whilst allowing young people to view at different times, do not allow for individual variations and so we have opted for a range of methods of delivery."

Schools recognise that high-quality learning, teaching and assessment is key to ensuring high levels of engagement, motivation and participation. They describe how identifying the right balance and blend of live learning, pre-recorded activities, and independent learning tasks across the week is important in maintaining high levels of engagement and motivation. Balancing this with planned opportunities for children and young people to learn outdoors and in the community ensures that children and young people experience variety in their learning and are not always engaged in 'on-screen' activity. In addition, schools are working to ensure that learning tasks in all

forms are planned at the right level of difficulty to ensure learners achieve an appropriate level of challenge to keep them motivated.

Headteachers describe how they have built on their experience of previous periods of remote learning to support teachers to offer a broader range of remote learning activities. This includes providing learning across the curriculum though different learning contexts. Staff increasingly provide activities to encourage motivation and enjoyment for learners. For example, in one school, music and singing tuition is available online to motivate and engage those involved. Other schools offer opportunities to attend story reading sessions and pupil-led events.

Most schools have recognised that children's and young people's motivation and engagement is better when staff involve them in planning their own learning. A few schools describe how they provide children with regular opportunities to feed back on their learning across the curriculum, to identify next steps, and involve them in jointly planning learning contexts. In addition, where staff build in opportunities for personalisation and choice in how learning can be undertaken and presented, learners show increased motivation. Teachers describe the opportunities that online learning has provided to enhance motivation in learning. For example, offering senior phase young people independent research opportunities before engaging online with visiting speakers has increased their participation in discussion and learning. As a result, staff report that young people are motivated to take ownership of their own learning and improve their research skills across the curriculum as the learning tasks feel more real and relevant. A few schools report that lessons learned from these approaches will be continued once they return to in-school learning.

Case Study – Aberlady Primary School, East Lothian Council

Ensuring consistency of approach to support participation and engagement

To improve the engagement and participation of children, staff wanted to ensure that all learners enjoyed high-quality remote learning experiences. As the result of the analysis of the outcomes of a survey issued to parents and carers and to children, they agreed whole school learning and teaching approaches. This supports consistency for learners and parents and carers who have children at different stages. Every task now contains clear expectations through learning intentions and success criteria, and core learning is differentiated to meet the needs of all children.

Case Study – Aberlady Primary School, East Lothian Council – continued

Teachers give detailed feedback to children on at least one piece of core learning per day. Methods of assessment and feedback include children's self-assessment of their writing. They indicate how they felt the task went by using traffic lights, self-marking forms and the use of highlighters. This has been well received by families as they can use the information to support their children better and children know how they can improve their work. The regular contact with children and families continues to support high levels of engagement and participation.

Teachers create daily teaching videos to support core learning tasks. Online daily drop-in sessions have been enhanced to include a clear learning focus, for example a writing plenary, a numeracy introduction, or feedback on completed tasks. The school reports 100% attendance regularly at these daily sessions and all children have at least one quality daily input from a teacher. Families know the content of learning in advance which is focused on core learning and is therefore valued. In addition, staff have increased the offer for live online small group work with children's teachers or a classroom assistant. This has also supported children's engagement and motivation.

Feedback has been received from children through the daily drop-in sessions and the pupil survey. Parents and carers have given their views through the Parent Council and a second parent survey. This has enabled staff to be highly responsive to the learning and can make changes to the offer on a weekly basis, which has also helped to improve and sustain motivation.

Meeting learner needs to support engagement in learning

"It's so important to learn from the barriers that parents face supporting their child's home learning and to take time to reflect on this as a whole staff team. In our school context, parents were looking for more off-line resources, so we provided that, as well as supporting online resources which enable the children to engage more confidently with their learning."

Schools recognise that meeting the needs of children and young people is key to supporting engagement in learning and feel that they are better placed in the current period of school closures to achieve this. Staff describe how access to time in school has been increased for a few children and young people who did not previously engage well in remote learning or whose engagement is affected by lack of access to technology. Schools report that this has had a positive impact for the learners involved and has positively impacted on their participation and motivation. Schools are also

supporting engagement in learning and aiding communication by providing additional practical help for individual learners or groups where appropriate. For example, in secondary schools, pupil support staff offer support during live learning by using break out rooms to work with individuals, or small groups of young people to offer targeted help with learning. This is improving the engagement of young people who require additional support with their learning.

Schools highlight the important role of partnership working to help meet children's and young people's needs and as a result, support increased participation and engagement. Some schools use additional staffing to provide individualised and targeted support for children and young people facing barriers to learning, including those with additional support needs. In one school, partnership working with family support agencies is helping address individual learner needs and support entire family groups to access learning. Another school is working with Sleep Scotland to help children and their families overcome sleep issues and support their engagement with learning. A few schools have assigned a staff member to mentor and support individual learners and this is helping to address barriers to learning. Other schools are providing support sessions for small groups or individuals, including supported study sessions out-with the school day. One school has worked with partners to address previously low levels of engagement of children with English as an additional language (EAL). Through one-to-one tutorials to build the skills of learners in the use of digital platforms and tools such as text-speak, there has been a significant increase in the engagement of children with EAL during the second period of remote learning. A few schools identify supporting the participation and engagement of children and young people who require additional support with their learning as an ongoing challenge. They would value further support from partners where appropriate.

Case Study – Sgoil Bhagh a'Chaisteil, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Western Isles Council)

Adapting staff roles to support engagement and participation

The school has deployed two staff members to support learners identified as missing their learning opportunities. They work with individual pupils and their families, as a conduit for information and communication between the school and families, and to support children and young people to engage in their learning. The staff team understands fully the needs of the community and liaises closely with external agencies to support in any way they can. They liaise with teachers, pastoral care staff and school leaders to target specific families and children who are vulnerable or may be in need of short-term support. This can be around bereavement, poverty, barriers to learning or disengagement in learning. A recent survey of parents and carers highlighted the work of this team as being invaluable to families in relation to pupil engagement and motivation.

Case Study – Tollcross Primary School, The City of Edinburgh Council

Meeting the needs of learners and families

The school employs a range of strategies to engage, motivate and encourage participation for individual learners. Teachers conducted an audit of digital devices and provided devices to those learners who needed one. Daily live check-ins were introduced for all children, with additional afternoon check-ins for P4 – P7. Live teaching sessions were supplemented with the provision of online social and collaborative spaces for children, including online playtimes. Staff recorded 'how to' videos to support flexible engagement with learning activities. Weekly telephone contact is made to vulnerable families to support their engagement with services within the local community. Staff also provide online one-to-one wellbeing support for children who require this. Daily one-to-one support is also provided by pupil support staff for children with additional support needs. Tutoring and user guides support families to connect to online learning effectively. Opportunities are provided through the 'Big Share' for children to share their work.

Reflecting on lessons learned during the first lockdown, the school identified a need to provide additional support to families where English was an additional language and where levels of engagement were low. Devolved school funding was used to employ an additional pupil support assistant on a temporary basis. This enhanced the school's ability to provide targeted support to children and families. As a result of the monitoring and subsequent action taken by the school, there has been a significant increase in the number of children engaging in remote learning since January 2021.

Further feedback was sought from parents and carers in January 2021 and appropriate action taken. This included the introduction of optional 'learning share' calls at 2.45 pm daily. Weekly learning grids are shared with parents and carers on the Friday of the previous week. This supports families to plan learning around family and work commitments. The use of repetitive maths sheets was reduced and more open-ended tasks provided. Staff training was provided on using a whiteboard app and the 'add room' function to enable children to work more collaboratively.

Emerging strengths in supporting pupil engagement, participation and motivation

- **The establishment of clear and realistic expectations for engagement and participation in learning that take account the individual context of the school.**

- **Systematic approaches used to monitor and evaluate children's and young people's engagement in their learning.**

- **Steps taken by school leaders and staff to foster and maintain strong, productive connections within and across the school community and with families.**

Areas for continuing improvement in supporting pupil engagement, participation and motivation

- **Maintaining a focus on meeting the needs of all children and young people to support their motivation, participation and engagement learning during 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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