Home > Coronavirus (COVID-19) > Education and childcare: coronavirus > Schools: coronavirus > Stay Safe. Stay Learning: supporting the education system > Stay Safe. Stay Learning: supporting the education system [HTML]

GUIDANCE

Stay Safe. Stay Learning: supporting the education system

Guidance for governing bodies, headteachers and practitioners about what they are being asked to do to support continuity of learning, and how the actions taken will be supported.

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Contents

Continuity of learning
Introduction
Common expectations
Activity
Support for practitioners
Policies and guidance
Parents/carer expectations

Continuity of learning

The response to COVID-19 has dramatically changed our lives. In this challenging context, the education system has been disrupted but remains of central importance.

During this time when most learners are not able to attend settings and schools in person, Welsh Government and its partners are working across the education system in a number of ways to offer support to leaders, governors, practitioners, parents, carers and learners.

The Minister for Education launched Wales' 'Stay Safe. Stay Learning' programme on 20 April to support education professionals and learners as we respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of this programme, this guidance has been developed for headteachers, teachers, teaching assistants, governing bodies and management committees of schools and settings for their provision of education to children and young people aged 3 to 19.

For the purposes of this guidance 'settings' also includes funded non-maintained early years settings, pupil referral units (PRUs) and other providers of education other than at school (EOTAS). Reference to governing bodies should be read as also applicable to management committees.

This guidance is non-statutory. It has been developed in conjunction with local authorities, Diocesan Authorities for Church in Wales and Roman Catholic Dioceses, National Academy for Educational leadership, trade unions, regional consortia and Estyn.

Separate guidance has been provided for staff working in hubs and schools developing effective provision for children of critical workers and for vulnerable children.

The following organisations are contributing to the ‘Stay Safe. Stay Learning’ programme.

- Regional School Improvement Consortia
- Local authorities
- Estyn
- National Academy for Educational Leadership
- Qualifications Wales

Introduction

The COVID 19 pandemic, and the response to it, has transformed life in Wales and across the globe.

We are asking schools and settings, headteachers and practitioners to work in ways which are very different to their normal practice, and to engage with different groups of learners in different ways. Welsh Government is clear that this provision will not mirror what schools and settings would offer during normal times, and is currently considering how the legal framework can be altered to reflect this.

At the same time, we recognise the unique pressures this situation is putting on our education profession and the imperative for the well-being of practitioners and learners to be at the forefront of our actions.

Welsh Government has set out our shared priorities for our education system in the **Stay Safe. Stay Learning policy statement** for this period when most learners are not able to attend schools and settings in person. It highlights our shared commitment to combine equity with excellence and the importance of considering the needs of every learner as we work through these extraordinary challenging times. Our priorities are to support:

- the safety of all our learners and our education workforce
- the physical and mental health and well-being of all our learners and our education workforce
- the ability of all our learners to keep learning
- learners’ transition back into school or setting and onto the next phase of their learning when the time comes.

The purpose of this non-statutory guidance is to provide further detail s on what governing bodies, headteachers and practitioners are being asked to do to support continuity of learning at this time and how the actions being taken in schools will be supported. For the purpose of this guidance, ‘practitioners' includes all those involved in supporting the provision of learning in schools and settings.

Schools and settings will be at different stages in developing their support for learning at home. This guidance does not seek to replace existing effective practice but may help to refine and develop it further. It is not a blueprint and is not intended t o dictate activity at local level. It does, however, provide a common reference point for all organisations working with schools and practitioners.

This guidance has been developed with local authorities, diocesan authorities, trade unions, regional consortia Estyn and the National Academy for Educational Leadership Partners and stakeholders are also involved in the development of Stay Safe. Stay Learning advice and resources which support this guidance.

Due to the uncertain nature of the pandemic and of the unpredictable effect on the current education landscape this guidance will be kept under review and updated as things change.

Common expectations

This section suggests some common expectations for governing bodies, headteachers, teachers and teaching assistants to consider when providing continuity of learning for children and young people.

Headteachers and governing bodies

Governing bodies /management committees should provide support to headteachers to ensure there is a clear vision for continuity of learning for their individual school or setting. This should adhere to the Stay Safe. Stay Learning: Continuity of learning policy statement principles and maintain a focus on the well being of learners and the education workforce.

Careful consideration should be given to what is practically achievable in the current situation. We should not try to duplicate the school experience within the ho me environment. It is important to strike the right balance between home life and work life and find innovative and creative ways to engage learners and empower parents and carers to support learning.

Governing bodies should support their headteachers to articulate that vision for all staff and be clear about expectations for their work in supporting learners Governing bodies should support their headteachers to communicate expectations of Stay Safe. Stay Learning to parents/carers. In doing that, schools will wish to remain mindful of the unprecedented circumstances and the wide range of issues that families may be dealing with, including parents'/carers' capacity to support learning in their home. They should also clearly communicate what support is available from the school and signpost to other relevant organisations or support.

Governing bodies should support their headteachers in being clear about the support that is available to school staff including for headteachers.

Headteachers and senior leaders should plan the approach for their school or setting that ensures routine contact with learners. This should include arrangements which allow the school to identify and respond to parents/carers and learners who remain out of contact, and which identifies those with ongoing issues with digital connectivity for learning. Schools should discuss and agree their approach to supporting learning in hard to reach families with their local authority.

Headteachers and senior leaders should have a clear understanding of those learners that are most likely to be disadvantaged during this period and develop approaches to provide specific support for those learners.

Headteachers and senior leaders should draw on guidance and develop their school or setting's approach to a blend of flexible online and offline remote learning for learners both at home or attending Hubs.

Remote learning can

- take place more independently at different points in time, based on the learner's wishes or home circumstances (asynchronous)
- take place with multiple learners and teachers at the same time, usually online (synchronous).

Asynchronous approaches provide greater flexibility and can be easier for parents/carers and learners to manage at home, so should be the main approach considered by schools and settings when organising distance learning.

However, headteachers may consider synchronous approaches to be appropriate in specific circumstances in support of learner engagement and well-being. Where this is the case, governing bodies and headteachers should have full regard to safeguarding guidance and Welsh Government guidance: Live-streaming safeguarding principles and practice for education practitioners in the mitigation of risks to learners.

Assessment activity should not mirror what schools and settings would undertake during normal times and Welsh Government is reviewing how the legal framework can be altered to reflect this W here assessment does take place, it should be formative in nature and focus on supporting learners.

Governing bodies should support their headteachers to consider what school policies should be reviewed during this period having regard to any updates to guidance from local authorities, regional consortia or Welsh Government These can include:

- home and flexible working
- use of digital technology
- safeguarding

- health and safety

Teachers

Teachers should focus on the well-being of their learners. Supporting learners to engage and learn through effective contact and communications is a part of that.

Teachers should take action that aims to address any disadvantage arising from where learners live, their age, their additional learning needs, the language of their school or their family circumstances. This may include differentiated approaches to learning for specific groups or individual learners.

Teachers should use our national digital platform Hwb and its associated tools to maximise what can be achieved and have regard to guidance on their use Other digital tools and platforms can be used in line with school and local authority policies.

Teachers should make available a range of flexible and developmentally appropriate learning activities that provide a blend of learning experiences that promote engagement.

In support of headteachers' communications, teachers can direct learners and their parents/carers to advice and support about learning at home. Further information can be found on the **Welsh Government website**.

Teaching assistants

Teaching assistants should work with teachers to focus on the well-being of their learners. Supporting learners to engage and learn through effective contact and communications is a part of that.

Teaching assistants should engage remotely with groups of learners where applicable, re-enforcing messages about the importance of adherence to school or local authority policies for online safety and/or use of personal telephones.

Teaching assistants should support teachers to produce and make available learning activities that provide a blend of learning experiences that promote engagement.

What could characterise activity

This section provides some considerations for headteachers, governing bodies, teachers and teaching assistants of what could characterise activity that they could undertake. Each school or setting's approach will vary according to their context and the availability of the right skills and technology.

Distance learning aims to ensure that the learners continue to learn, but not by trying to re create the usual classroom conditions or setting provision within the home.

Practitioners should develop learning experiences that provide a blend of online and offline activities to balance screen time. In the interest of equity, offline learning activities should be provided for all learners unable to access technology while the issue of their connectivity is being addressed.

Practitioners should consider what learning is appropriate to their learners based on:

- time for maintaining and developing literacy, numeracy and digital skills
- building resilience and reflection on personal well-being
- opportunities to maintain connections with teachers, support staff and peers during this period of potential social isolation
- decisions on the most appropriate form of distance learning.

Distance learning should include physical activities that learners could undertake at home or in line with health and social distancing guidance.

It is not expected that practitioners review the progress of their learners as they would do under normal circumstances. However, schools and settings will wish to have arrangements in place to both monitor learning provision/learner engagement, and to provide some feedback to parents/carers.

Assessment should be used where appropriate to support learners as they engage with their learning in an unfamiliar context, and provide feedback to help them recognise the next steps in taking their learning forward.

Headteachers and practitioners are encouraged to work collaboratively and share resources and expertise across and between schools and settings.

Headteachers and practitioners are encouraged to reflect on any feedback they receive from parents/carers and learners and work with them to organise learning experiences. This may involve new and additional activities to gain parent/carer and learner feedback on their experiences of distance learning and support from the school.

When considering support for learners to maintain and develop their Welsh language skills, practitioners should be mindful of what parents/carers may need to support such learning at home. The challenge for many learners is that there is no Welsh speaking parent/carer in the home. As schools prepare programmes for learners, they are encouraged to consider creating:

- opportunities for learners to interact in pairs/teams so that they can use Welsh formally and informally with each other
- activities or direct them to resources that require learners to use video or voice recording to speak Welsh.

Headteachers should promote well-being by encouraging flexible working, effective, safe and appropriate use of IT and communications with staff, while being mindful of staff who are also looking after children at home.

Support for practitioners to enable continuity of learning

While we commit to support ongoing learning, we recognise this will require new ways of working and possibly new skills for our practitioners in enabling distance learning. Information, guidance and resources will be regularly updated on the Distance learning area on Hwb.

We are working with key partners to offer support and professional learning to enable practitioners to adapt, where it is needed. Practitioners will wish to discuss their learning needs and access to professional learning with their line managers. This may include professional learning needs in relation to supporting learner (or staff) well being and re nurturing relationships through this period of disruption.

Professional learning to further develop the education profession's digital capacity and capability is being provided by the regional consortia and other stakeholders for practitioners to engage with as appropriate.

We are supporting and facilitating a national and concerted effort for schools and settings to create and share high-quality programmes for distance learning. This includes resources to support a wide range of activities – including for those learners and families who do not have access to internet connectivity and digital devices.

Guidance and support on the use of the Hwb toolset to support continuing learning for learners of all ages is available on the Distance learning area on Hwb.

We will continue to work with Qualifications Wales and Awarding Bodies to ensure that teachers contributing to centre assessed grades for GCSE, AS level, A Level and Skills Challenge Certificate, as well as (where relevant) vocational qualifications, are provided with support and guidance.

Policies and guidance that will guide practitioners

This section seeks to remind practitioners of the policies and guidance available from their school or settings, or from their local or diocesan authorities.

Practitioners should follow the school or setting's policies regarding online safety. Further guidance can be found on the **Online safety zone on Hwb**.

Practitioners should continue to follow the school or setting's policies regarding data protection. Home computer equipment must not be used for any work that contains confidential information unless you are working via the school or setting's secure remote access facilities.

Practitioners should not be asked to personally contact individual learners on a daily basis, except where they have agreed with their senior leaders a system to contact vulnerable children and families. Practitioners are encouraged to make virtual contact with learners based on routines developed by headteachers.

Practitioners should take whatever reasonable steps they can to carry out their work responsibilities in a way that is not detrimental to the well-being of their family and should discuss any concerns with their line manager. Practitioners' workload is an essential consideration and their well-being should be paramount.

Practitioners who are unable to work owing to illness or any other reason should report this promptly to their line manager by phone and follow the school or setting's and local authority's procedures.

Staff should not be expected to pay for any additional equipment needed to undertake their role.

What should parents/carers expect of practitioners?

In this section, we outline what parents/carers can expect of practitioners to provide clarity on how they can work together to support continuity of learning. Learners will need different support depending on many factors, including age and learning needs. Alongside parents/carers, it is the practitioners working in schools and settings that know learners best; that enables them to seek to provide the right level of learning and support that children need. Queries should be dealt with in a timely fashion by schools.

Parents/carers should receive regular information from headteachers explaining the approach being used to maintain contact with their children and to support distance learning. Schools and settings will also provide information for parents/carers so they can better help their children engage with the learning at home.

Practitioners should signpost parents/carers to further guidance to help them understand their role in supporting their children to learn at home. If parents/carers have concerns about their children's mental health, schools should provide signposting to support.

What could characterise activity

Schools or settings will be the first point of contact for parents/carers when it comes to their children's continued learning (accepting that in some very specific instances this may be an alternative provider or the local authority).

Distance learning aims to ensure that children continue to learn, but parents/carers should not try to re create the usual classroom conditions or setting provision within the home.

Practitioners should engage learners by making resources available and signposting parents/carers to suitable support.

Practitioners should be mindful of parents carers wider responsibilities (this could include working from home or additional caring responsibilities) and provide flexibility for learners, especially younger learners.

Practitioners should provide support for non-Welsh speaking parents/carers to support their children to maintain and develop their Welsh language skills. Some suggestions could include:

- offering ideas about 'everyday' practical things for their children to do or play using the Welsh language
- providing an English summary of the activity and translation of the main terms used so that the parent/carer understands what is required
- suggesting some points about the activity for the parent/carer to discuss with their child. Even if the discussion is in English it is an opportunity for the learner to use translanguaging skills.

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