



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

GUIDANCE

Guidance on learning in schools and settings: coronavirus

This guidance provides advice on learning and teaching that schools and settings may wish to provide.

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Introduction

This guidance has been developed to set out expectations and priorities for learning in schools and settings.

The purpose of this guidance is to give schools and supporting partners a common set of priorities for learning throughout the response to COVID-19 and as we move to recovery.

Staff are operating in unprecedented and highly challenging circumstances and have demonstrated again the capacity of our education profession to rise up and meet significant challenges.

This guidance is intended to reassure and support schools and practitioners as they seek address the needs of all learners.

These challenges require schools to adapt their curriculum planning to be flexible and responsive to changing circumstances and to enable learners to make progress. Therefore, this guidance provides a high-level set of expectations for schools and settings in developing approaches to learning and seeks to close the gap between our learners while raising expectations for all. As schools and settings develop approaches to provide learning in school and outside school, they are able to draw on **blended learning guidance**. This guidance is being updated to reflect the changing situation.

We know the impacts on learners will have been wide-ranging and will vary according to individual circumstances, for example learners in Welsh-medium schools and settings where Welsh is not spoken at home. As such, we set out here a single approach to promote learning progress for all learners, expecting this to be adapted and developed for each school's and learner's needs and challenges.

Consideration of the United Nations Convention on Rights of the Child (UNCRC) alongside our well-being goals has highlighted the vital role that our schools and settings have in addressing the needs of every learner. No one can be left behind. Our focus remains on learner health and well-being as the prerequisite for learning, but also involves more detailed planning for learning and progression for the medium and longer term.

Schools and settings continue to play a pivotal role in supporting local communities, parents and carers in our drive to stay safe and stay learning. Our national mission and education system at every level remain focused on supporting all our children and young people to realise their potential and succeed through these exceptional times.

What should learning look like?

A school's or setting's approach to remote and onsite learning has had to adapt to the changing circumstances that we have faced during the response to COVID-19. Schools should continue to develop an approach to learning that is flexible enough to adapt to different scenarios as well as differing amounts of in-school learning and learning at home or elsewhere. Similarly, as we move towards recovery, schools and settings will need to address gaps in learning due to COVID as well as ensuring learners develop further. Both the current disruption and recovery require schools and settings to prioritise key learning: deciding what learning is critical to their learners and their progression in the time they have.

In the context of these uncertainties, a set of broad principles is required that can and should be applied regardless of the scenario. Our aim is to provide clarity, focus and direction for learning, both in the context of the school/setting and in the context of the home or elsewhere, with flexibility for schools to adapt to a range of scenarios. This ensures learners have coherent, consistent and joined-up experiences of learning rather than conflicting demands, unnecessary repetition or a lack of connection between the two contexts. There will be additional considerations for specific learners, including our youngest learners and learners who face barriers to learning. In the case of learners preparing for qualifications we are already providing additional support such as the Recruit,

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Recover and Raise standards programme and are developing a suite of learning resources for WJEC qualifications. But there will need to be additional support provided within schools and colleges to support learner wellbeing and progression.

Priorities for learning

In summary, when considering their approach to learning, schools and settings should consider the following:

How to prioritise learning:

- What is the purpose of learning? All learning should have a clear purpose in mind, focused around what is important for learners now and in the longer term.
- How should learners progress? How do we assess that learning? learners should make meaningful progress throughout this period. Learning should be designed to support increasing depth and sophistication of learning over time. We encourage the use of assessment to help learners move to the next steps in their learning.

What learning should include:

- health and well-being: learning should support learners' mental, emotional, physical and social well-being, as well as recognise the importance of outdoor learning and play including home-based opportunities for this
- literacy, numeracy and digital competence: learners should have opportunities to develop and apply these skills across the curriculum
- broad and balanced learning: learners should have learning experiences that span a broad curriculum and that include opportunities to develop a breadth of understanding and a range of knowledge and skills. Learners should not be denied access to whole subjects that they would otherwise have access to.

Co-constructing learning:

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- partnership with parents, carers and learners: schools should develop a common understanding and language with parents, carers and learners; this can help underpin learning and support learning experiences, as well as providing constructive feedback on the remote learning.

Purpose

In summary:

- all learning should have a clear purpose in mind, focused around what is important for learners now and in the longer term
- as schools and practitioners develop their priorities and focus for learning, they should then seek to ensure that learning drives towards these
- learning should acknowledge the situation of each learner following the disruption and develop clear learning actions in response

Adjusting the approach to learning requires schools and practitioners to understand their priorities for learning and the needs of their learners. In thinking about the priorities and focus for learning, schools and settings may wish to consider the four purposes of the Curriculum for Wales as an articulation of our aspirations for every learner in Wales.

As schools and practitioners develop their priorities and focus for learning, they should then seek to ensure that learning drives towards these. The key priorities for learning outlined in this guidance should be considered as part of that, but schools and settings may also wish to consider:

- our vision – what knowledge, skills and dispositions do we want learners to develop?
- what challenges are learners facing and how can we help them overcome these?
- how can we ensure learners make progress? Are our expectations high enough?

Progression supported by assessment

In summary, learners should make meaningful progress throughout this period. Learning should be designed to support increasing depth and sophistication of learning over time. Assessment should be focused to help learners move to the next steps in their learning.

Progression

Over the course of the disruption caused by COVID-19 and as we move towards recovery, our expectation is that all learners should continue to make meaningful progress. This is critical to learners' long-term education and their lifelong well-being. As learners progress, they develop an increasingly sophisticated understanding of concepts and application of knowledge, skills and learning should support them to do this. It is important to see progression in this way: deepening understanding and application of knowledge and skills, rather than simply covering more and different content or topics.

The existing programmes of study support practitioners in determining what the next steps of progression should be for their learners. They may also wish to use the principles of progression and descriptions of learning in the Curriculum for Wales guidance to support this.

Learners will make progress at a different pace and each individual should be challenged and supported appropriately to move their learning forward, taking account of any barriers to their learning that need to be addressed.

Assessment

The purpose of assessment is to support each individual learner to make progress at an appropriate pace, ensuring that they are challenged and supported appropriately. As learners continue to learn in different contexts, assessment should not be about 'testing' in an attempt to 'catch up' and cover everything they would have done before the COVID-19 outbreak. It should help develop a holistic picture of the learner – their strengths, how they learn and

areas for development – in order to enable them to be ready to learn and to agree their next steps. Assessment is an integral part of the learning process, with practitioners working with learners to help identify their strengths, areas for development and next steps in learning.

Learning across the breadth of the curriculum should draw on a wide range of assessment approaches, building a holistic picture of the learner's development. Practitioners with younger children will continue to use observations to assess progression in learning through play-based activity. It is important that the observations focus on skill development that may have developed positively and unexpectedly during this period, and that there is not a focus on 'learning loss'.

Working with groups of learners in the school or setting, practitioners will spend time with individuals and develop their understanding of the way they learn, thus enabling them to support their progress as they continue to learn both at the school or setting and at home or elsewhere. When planning their learning approach, practitioners will also adapt and develop to ensure that assessment forms a fundamental part of supporting learners when they are not present in the school or setting.

Online personalised assessments are available throughout the school year to provide schools with a flexible means of gaining information on their learners' reading and numeracy skills. They have been designed to support progression and engage learners in understanding where they are in their learning journey. As such, practitioners are encouraged to use these assessments at a time that they consider appropriate to support the progress of individual learners and to help them to identify the next steps in learners' learning.

Learners can access the feedback on their skills in reading and numeracy through their Hwb accounts. This feedback can help support individual progress in these cross-curricular skills, providing learners with an understanding of their strengths and possible next steps.

Health and wellbeing

In summary:

- learning should support learners' mental, emotional, physical and social well-being
- learning should recognise the importance of outdoor learning and play
- wellbeing is a critical enabler of learning for all learners – learners of any age who are not content, safe and secure will not learn effectively

Practitioners should continue to focus on supporting wellbeing as a foundation for learning.

Mental and emotional wellbeing

For many learners, simply engaging in meaningful learning experiences will support their mental well-being; this will help them to feel a sense of purpose, progression and enjoyment in learning.

Communication and conversations can offer important support. Conversations about how learners are feeling will continue to be critical. Staff should encourage learners to discuss their questions and concerns.

All learners should have access to a range of tools and support for their emotional and mental well-being at school. As before the pandemic, dedicated specialist support will be available to those specific learners that require it, while universal support will support learners more generally in understanding their own well-being, in building resilience and in developing coping mechanisms to manage the challenges of COVID-19. Schools should consider how youth work approaches or universal pastoral support could be used.

Relationships and social wellbeing

Education settings are social places and therefore play a vital part in developing a sense of belonging and connectedness in their learners. This happens in

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multiple interactions throughout a day in a school or setting and not just in the classroom.

Practitioners should ensure that learners have time, space and structured activities to maintain relationships with other learners and with staff.

Physical wellbeing

Schools and settings should consider how learners can enjoy activities to support their physical health and to understand and develop healthy behaviours. Particular emphasis should be placed on enjoyment as this supports them to develop health-affirming behaviours. This includes enjoying physical activities and understanding the importance of a healthy, balanced diet and help them to access and enjoy foods as part of this. The pandemic may have had an impact on learners' access to these. Their sleeping habits may also have changed.

Play for all learners

Practitioners should recognise the important role of play for learners of all ages. This is critical to their development, their well-being and their socialisation.

All learners should be given opportunities to play and where possible to socialise, both through structured activities and unstructured play.

Outdoor learning

Schools and settings should maximise the time learners spend outdoors. This has important physical, mental and educational benefits and helps combat transmission of COVID19.

There are organisations that can support schools and settings when considering outdoor learning; a wide range of resources are also available. Schools and settings can access support via Hwb as well as through the Wales Council for Outdoor Learning at www.walescouncilforoutdoorlearning.org/, including their High Quality Outdoor Learning for Wales (Outdoor Education

Advisors Panel, 2018) guidance.

Literacy, numeracy and digital competence

In summary:

- learners should have opportunities to develop and apply these skills across the curriculum
- these skills are fundamental – they unlock learning and further knowledge acquisition
- opportunities should be authentic – it is important that these skills are embedded within other broader learning rather than applied in isolation to wider learning.

Learning should continue to contribute to raising standards in literacy, numeracy and digital competence. These skills form the foundations of all learning and are essential for learners to be able to unlock knowledge and skills across the curriculum.

Digital competence, problem-solving and creativity will help enable learners to learn through digital means. Supporting learners' digital competence in particular will be important in facilitating access to learning outside school.

The development and application of these knowledge and skills will be critical during this period. In their absence from school, learners may have missed opportunities to develop and use these skills, which may affect their ability and readiness to learn.

An adapted approach to learning in schools should provide authentic opportunities to develop and apply literacy, numeracy and digital competence, and embed these in all learning across a broad and balanced curriculum. Practitioners can use a wide range of topics, activities and resources to develop knowledge and skills. It is important that these skills be embedded within other broader learning rather than applied in isolation.

The National Literacy and Numeracy Framework and the Digital Competence

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Framework present a common approach supporting schools and practitioners to ensure learners have frequent opportunities to develop, extend and apply these cross-curricular skills.

This should include opportunities across learning time to:

- develop listening, reading, speaking and writing skills
- apply numeracy and solve problems in real-life situations
- use a range of technologies to function, communicate and make sense of the world.

Broad and balanced learning

In summary:

- Learners should have learning experiences that span a broad curriculum and include opportunities to develop a breadth of understanding and a range of knowledge and skills that then lead to further depth.
- It is critical learning draws on a range of disciplines and that certain disciplines are not lost. Learners should not be denied access to certain subjects that they would otherwise have access to.

Learners need to acquire both breadth and depth of knowledge and experience in order to be fully engaged but also to help them to develop and to widen the opportunities available to them. Throughout the disruption caused by COVID-19, it is critical that this is not lost.

It is important that learning continues to provide breadth, drawing on different subjects, domains, disciplines and topics. Areas such as the creative arts should not be lost; it can offer opportunities to develop skills and knowledge such as creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem-solving, personal effectiveness, planning and organising. Schools and settings may also want to draw on the Curriculum for Wales guidance on cross-cutting themes and skills integral to the four purposes. As learners develop and specialise, it is important that schools continue to provide a broad and balanced set of options that support individuals' learning pathways. Schools should be as ambitious as

possible in offering options.

Schools and settings should also continue to support learners to develop effective communication skills in English and Welsh. This is critical in preparing learners to take part in a bilingual Wales.

Partnership with parents, carers and learners

In summary, schools should develop a common understanding and a clear concise language with parents/carers and learners. This can help underpin learning and support learning experiences.

Learners

Regular active engagement between the learner and practitioner is at the heart of the learning process and is especially important as learners continue to learn in different places and take more ownership of their learning as a result.

Learners should be supported to have responsibility for their learning, engaging in dialogue and communicating with practitioners regarding what they are learning, how they are learning and their progression in learning. Learners will need different levels of support to contribute to the learning process depending on their individual context. Learning away from the school or setting, however, provides an opportunity for learners to develop knowledge and skills to take ownership of their learning.

Parents and carers

The participation of parents and carers in learning is essential for developing learning experiences which involve learning both inside and outside of school. Parents and carers engaging with learners at all ages should help consolidate school-based learning. Schools will have to develop understanding for parents, carers and learners to understand their roles in this process. Communication should always be clear, concise and effective.

Schools and practitioners should consider:

- how schools or settings will support parents and carers to understand and engage in their child's learning at home
- communicating to families the importance of sharing learners' experiences during this period
- reassuring children, parents and carers. Many families and will be anxious about putting children at risk and schools have a role in reassuring them. Communication should be factual, clear and based on the latest evidence and guidance
- how feedback on learning should be presented, focusing on supporting the learner to move forward by reassuring them, acknowledging effort and achievement, and agreeing those next steps.

Legislative requirements

The basic curriculum requirements for Wales, and associated assessment arrangements for schools and non-maintained nursery settings, have been amended as part of the Coronavirus Act 2020, subject to monthly reviews. Schools must make all reasonable endeavours to fulfil their curriculum duties. This means schools should do everything they reasonably can to teach to the full curriculum duties. If after taking all reasonable steps schools have not fulfilled their curriculum requirements then they will be considered to have met their legislative duties. These notifications must be reviewed and updated on a monthly basis.

Developing a blend of in-school and out-of-school learning

At any level of operation, schools and settings will need to think carefully about how time in the school or setting should be used. During this period, contact time will be valuable and precious. Practitioners should think about the balance and relationship between learning time in school and learning elsewhere, using contact time carefully and effectively and identifying how time at home or

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elsewhere can support making connections and consolidating learning. They should consider a wide range of pedagogical approaches that effectively use school and out-of-school learning to empower learners. Learning time at home can include practising skills and deepening knowledge that has been introduced during contact time but also could include acquiring new knowledge and understanding. Time at home can also allow older learners to research, prepare and think before exploring and consolidating concepts, knowledge and skills during contact time. They should seek to support these skills both in school and out of school. Practitioners should always seek to develop digital skills in the context of wider learning rather than trying to teach them in isolation.

In developing their approach to learning experiences, schools and settings should consider [guidance on blended learning](#).

Responding to different situations

Many uncertainties face the education system as we prepare for the next academic year.

The UNCRC's right to an education applies without exception, regardless of the scenario or any barriers to learning faced by individuals. A further lockdown or a period of blended learning does not absolve local authorities of their duty to provide a suitable education. However, it is recognised that that duty may need to be implemented differently for some learners for periods of time.

If during the next academic year there is a return to lockdown, or some form of blended learning approach is necessary, the following expectations apply in terms of contact and duration of learning.

- All learners should be contacted regularly to 'check in' – this would provide an opportunity to check on the safety and well-being of the learner as well as to explore their learning experience and consider possible additional support.
- All learners should be provided with the duration of learning time they would receive were they in their school or setting, regardless of whether or not some of their learning is taking place at home or elsewhere. There will be exceptions to the implementation of this expectation; however, it should be

the starting position for all learners.

Preparing an approach

In summary:

- schools can use Curriculum for Wales approaches to help adapt and become more flexible to changing conditions during COVID-19, but this is not the same as schools' wider preparation for the Curriculum for Wales
- over time learning should look to become more consistent with the principles and ethos of the Curriculum for Wales.

As schools begin to think about learning and teaching for the next term and school year, the **Curriculum for Wales guidance** may offer useful support. The recent disruptions have highlighted that now, more than ever, learners' education should be based on the four purposes. Practitioners will be developing and changing their approaches in response to the changing situation. The four purposes offer a central focus for the learning and teaching they develop. Many of the answers to the flexibility, autonomy and challenges of the foreseeable future are found in the Curriculum for Wales guidance, which has been developed with practitioners over recent years with greater flexibility as a key principle. The new curriculum should not be seen as an additional burden, but rather an important solution for many of the challenges we are now facing.

As a long-term consideration, schools and settings will of course need to consider how they will prepare for rollout of the new curriculum. We have published **Curriculum for Wales: the Journey to 2022**, which sets out expectations and suggested approaches for reform and we will be publishing a Curriculum Implementation Plan to set out the support that schools can expect.

Phase-specific guidance: Foundation Phase

The return to operations has an important significance for early years learners who are at a critical stage of cognitive development (which supports their approach to learning). Schools and non-maintained settings should ensure

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learners are fully supported in this development, given the implications for later learning. The ethos, approach and pedagogy of the Foundation Phase remain critical, and can be applied to all learners in the early years and Key Stage 2.

Practitioners may consider a blend of approaches that include problem-solving, creative and critical thinking; in addition, provision can be adapted to ensure that children are able to access a breadth of learning experiences. A clear vision for learning and the significance of the learning environment are critical to access experiences that allow younger children to apply, extend and consolidate their skills. Consideration should be given to how parents and carers could be supported to engage in their child's learning at home, to help ensure access to rich learning experiences in a blended learning environment.

Phase-specific guidance: Secondary school ages

It is important that secondary schools continue to provide a breadth of learning and continue to offer opportunities to specialise; the response to COVID-19 should not prevent learners from accessing these. Schools should be as ambitious as possible in their menu of offering, including within and towards GCSE specialisms. They will need flexibility in order to manage this. It is important that all learners have learning that engages them and provides them clear opportunities for progression and stretch.

Many older learners are of course able to participate in learning in a variety of ways with increasing independence. Schools should continue to promote positive learning through digital means as this can support problem-solving approaches and digital competence, but should provide a wide range of learning experiences which support well-being and allow progression.

Qualifications

We announced GCSE, AS and A level exams in Wales would be cancelled on 10 November 2020 and confirmed that a teacher managed assessment approach would be taken on 16 December 2020. This approach centres on maximising the opportunity for teaching and learning, managing the workload

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burden on teachers, supporting learner wellbeing, and providing a consistent assessment approach across Wales.

Our approach to qualifications and assessment will continue to be aligned with and responsive to the COVID-19 situation and learning experiences to support learner well-being and progression. Our priority remains ensuring that learners in exam years develop the knowledge, skills and confidence they need to progress into the next phase of their education, training or employment.

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