Department for Education

Guidance

Remote education good practice

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This good practice guide should be used by staff responsible for the curriculum and its delivery in schools, including the named senior leader with responsibility for the quality and delivery of remote education provision.

It offers suggestions to help schools meet the expectations for remote education set out in the schools coronavirus (COVID-19) operational guidance. Further support and information for teachers and leaders can be found on Get help with remote education.

We recognise that schools vary significantly in context. This may mean that what works well in one type of school may not be suitable for other kinds of school. However, the principles below apply in many contexts, and some approaches have worked well across a wide variety of schools.

Ensuring access to remote provision

Most pupils returned to school full time on 8 March 2021. Despite this, there is still a risk of localised outbreaks of coronavirus (COVID-19) or of small numbers of individual pupils being unable to attend school.

Where a class, group or small number of pupils need to self-isolate, or there are local or national restrictions requiring pupils to remain at home, we expect schools to have the capacity to offer immediate remote education. For details of the remote education expectations schools are required to meet, please see the schools coronavirus (COVID-19) operational guidance

The period since 23 March 2020 has been one of great innovation in remote education. A wide range of approaches has been developed, tested and refined. Despite the challenges, remote education has made a significant contribution to enabling students to continue to learn and progress during the pandemic.

What matters most in remote education

This good practice guide for remote education focuses on approaches to the delivery of the curriculum. This presupposes clarity about what is to be taught in a carefully sequenced curriculum.

Replicating the classroom remotely

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) has found that the effectiveness of remote teaching is determined by many of the same factors as determine the effectiveness of live classroom teaching. For example:

- ensuring pupils receive clear explanations
- supporting growth in confidence with new material through scaffolded practice
- application of new knowledge or skills
- enabling pupils to receive feedback on how to progress

These characteristics of good teaching are more important than the medium of delivery, be it in the classroom or through remote provision (whether that remote provision is, for example, live or pre-recorded). It is important that schools consider how to transfer into remote education what we already know about effective teaching in the classroom.

Live classrooms enable important interaction between teachers and pupils through, for example, questioning, eliciting and reflective discussion. These complex teaching skills in the classroom are not always easy to recreate in a remote environment, but where remote education recreates at least some aspects of this interactivity and intentional dialogue, teaching is likely to be more effective, support pupil motivation and lead to better progress.

Pupils in the early stages of their formal education are likely to have particular needs which cannot easily be addressed in the same way as those of other pupils. Likewise, some pupils with SEND will require specific approaches tailored to their circumstances. Some suggestions are given for these cases later in this document.

Access to appropriate devices and connectivity is essential for technology-led approaches to remote education. However, securing access for all pupils is a significant challenge in many contexts. To help mitigate potential digital barriers that certain children and young people may have, it may be helpful for schools to:

- maintain an up-to-date record of which pupils and families do not have sufficient devices or appropriate internet access
- consider how school technology resources can support pupils without sufficient remote facilities. This could include providing laptops and chargers to identified families with any usage or loan agreements necessary to help safeguard school property
- ensure that any equipment obtained under DfE's Get help with technology programme is clearly identified and ready to be re-distributed for a similar purpose

Where pupils and students continue to experience barriers to digital remote education, schools should work to overcome these barriers. This could include distributing school-owned laptops or supplementing digital provision with different forms of remote education such as printed resources or textbooks. Where printed resources are used, these should be supplemented with other forms of communication to keep pupils and students on track or answer questions about work.

Effective remote teaching provision

Since pupils experienced disruption to their education from 23 March 2020, schools have made huge progress in developing their remote education provision.

While there are a number of ways to implement high-quality remote education, remote-access technology offers many advantages which enable schools to continue a relatively normal programme of teaching across all or most curriculum subjects.

Interactive platforms

Schools are expected to use a single, interactive platform such as Microsoft Teams or Google Classroom for their remote education provision. By using these and similar systems, it is possible to create virtual classes by drawing information from schools' Management Information Systems, enabling a single point of access for all lessons and resources and allowing teachers to host both live and recorded explanations and lessons.

Government-funded support is available for schools and colleges to get set up on one of two free-to-use digital education platforms. They can choose to use either:

- G Suite for Education (Google Classroom)
- Office 365 Education (Microsoft Teams)

The Key for School Leaders provides feature comparison and case studies on how schools are making the most of these platforms, to help them make the most appropriate choice for their school.

Linking platforms to applications

It is possible to enhance these platforms by using applications which allow for easy video recording of teachers teaching, explaining and questioning. Loom is a popular video recording application which many teachers find straightforward to use and can easily be linked to platforms such as Microsoft Teams.

Tests and quizzes are an important part of effective teaching and can be easily created to precede or follow teaching sequences. When teaching live, it is possible for teachers to question individual pupils and for pupils to pose questions to teachers or peers, for example using the 'Chat' function. Google forms, Kahoot, Classkick, Socrative, Edpuzzle are just some other examples of other software which work well for rapid feedback and allow live marking.

Schools can use these media to continue to deliver most of their normal planned curriculum, and, where available and relevant, textbooks (both 'hard copy' and electronic) could be issued for pupils to use at home to complement and support lessons.

Where lessons are recorded, they can be accessed later by pupils, making flexible use possible in the context of limited or shared device access (for example where a pupil might be sharing a device with a sibling or parent). These and similar platforms can make it easier for teachers to monitor pupils' progress because work can be viewed or submitted through a single system. This in turn may make it easier for teachers to adapt work in the light of pupils' progress.

Other resources, which include other good-quality free and subscription-based online resources, can be linked or embedded. For example, DfE-funded Isaac Physics provides free online teaching resources in physics. Teaching resources are available through good teaching practice and resources on Get help with remote education.

Because these platforms enable the creation of simulated or virtual classrooms, it is easier to carry over what we know about effective teaching from in classrooms to the virtual environment. This can include clear teacher explanations of new content which are sequenced to build on previous learning, targeted questioning, and scaffolded practice.

Maintaining aspects of school life online

These platforms can also be used beyond the individual lesson context for other events such as whole staff briefings and professional development sessions, and for teachers to lead events such as year or whole school assemblies. It is important that these aspects of school life are maintained during any period of disruption.

In some cases it is possible to expect a normal school day to be worked remotely by both pupils and teachers, incorporating recorded or live direct teaching time as well as time for pupils to complete activities independently. Recognising that this will not always be practical, where it is possible the routine can prove beneficial to pupils and support them in the management of their work and time.

Sometimes, it is necessary to operate more flexibly, for example to accommodate contexts where pupils are having to share a single device within the home, meaning that access to recorded lessons is also needed. However, frequent contact between pupils and teachers is crucial. This contact may, for example, be through presence in a remotely delivered lesson, questioning, feedback, or some other form of exchange about schoolwork and wellbeing as part of pastoral support.

Continuing the planned curriculum

Continuing to teach the normal planned curriculum in the remote environment is important. Subjects where this is more challenging are those that would normally include significant elements of practical work in the live classroom, for example sciences, music or technology. However, in these and other cases, video demonstrations (and there are many ready-to-use examples linked to the curriculum available on platforms such as Oak National Academy or YouTube) can substitute well for practical work, particularly if accompanied by teacher explanation, commentary and a text book or electronic resource.

Physical education

Supporting pupils to be physically active is important for their physical and mental wellbeing. There may be challenges to delivering physical education remotely, but resources and advice are available from organisation such as the Association for Physical Education and Youth Sport Trust. Remote lessons are available on Oak National Academy.

Technology training

It is important to ensure that training is regularly refreshed with teachers, and that appropriate trouble-shooting support is available, so that transfer to the remote environment can happen seamlessly when needed.

Support for teaching staff to set up and use technology effectively is available. A peer support network of schools and colleges are in place through the EdTech Demonstrator Programme offering training on ways to embed digital platforms and devices to strengthen recovery plans and secure long-term, sustainable practice.

Communication

It is essential for staff, and preferable for pupils, to use school email addresses. Set up groups to streamline communication with a whole class. Use existing online resources and packages with school or teacher-created resources including:

- worksheets
- tests and quizzes
- video or sound recordings of explanations hosted on platforms such as YouTube, or available on a school, remote-access area

It is important to note that high-quality remote teaching is far more than setting work for pupils to complete, although setting tasks to complement sequences of teaching plays an important role. Evidence shows that lengthy or open-ended projects or research activities are in most cases less likely to lead to strong progress or outcomes. [footnote 1] Such approaches should generally be avoided in favour of the more interactive, teacher-led approaches to delivering the school's planned curriculum described above.

Finding solutions in remote provision

Schools identified some common challenges in the provision of remote education across the pandemic. Here are some suggested solutions to those common challenges.

Safeguarding and online safety

Keeping children safe online is essential. The statutory guidance keeping children safe in education provides information on what you should be doing to protect your pupils online.

Safeguarding and remote education during coronavirus (COVID-19) provides guidance to help schools, colleges and teachers support pupils' and students' remote education during coronavirus (COVID-19). This includes guidance for schools on safeguarding and GDPR considerations when delivering live lessons.

A lack of devices

Schools can distribute school-owned laptops accompanied by a user agreement or contract. Where schools need additional devices in order to support disadvantaged children, they should contact DfE's service team at covid.technology@gov.uk. Affected pupils can be supported to come into school to use school resources within any rules in force at the time.

Additionally, textbooks can be used at home to provide a structure to learning, supplemented with other forms of communication to keep pupils on track or answer questions about work.

Where mobile phones are being used by pupils to access content (and where pupils are having to rely on mobile phone connectivity) there may be limits to the amount of data they can access without incurring significant expense. Schools can get technology support from DfE for issues with devices and internet access.

Pupils having difficulties submitting work

Multi-functional remote platforms allow for the submission of most kinds of work. Email can also be used to send work to teachers for review and feedback and screenshots can be taken and emailed as attachments. Additionally, smartphones can be used to photograph work which is difficult to submit in other ways. Post or school drop-off points can also be considered.

Keeping pupils motivated and engaged

As set out in the schools coronavirus (COVID-19) operational guidance, schools should monitor pupil engagement with remote education provision. Schools can log participation and motivation levels and feedback to parents, either individually or formally through regular reports. They can also contact pupils or parents by telephone to explore ways to secure re-engagement.

Schools can create whole-class or whole-school feedback loops. For example, a weekly newsletter which pulls together examples of excellent work and awards points and rewards for excellent engagement or outcomes. This could be emailed to all parents and pupils, or posted to those without digital access.

Assessing pupils' progress

Teachers can use quizzes or tests on core content as a regular feature, asking pupils to complete these in a specified time and email them back. Using the features of a multi-functional platform, teachers can create regular, pre and post-lesson quizzes. Consideration should be given to ensuring availability for pupils without ready online access, including through distribution of hard-copy versions.

Organising structured remote teaching suitable for very young pupils

It is recognised that very young pupils are likely to have particular needs which cannot easily be met in some of the ways described above. For such pupils, it is likely that the priority will be progress in early reading. Ensuring continued access to appropriate reading books and resources for early readers should be considered as part of remote education planning.

Helping parents, carers or other adults at home to continue to support children in their early reading, where appropriate and practical through structured practice of phonics content, is another important part of remote education for children at this stage. Schools should teach children to read using a structured curriculum of systematic synthetic phonics. Any online education offer should mirror that which is taking place in school as much as possible. Parents could be signposted by schools to any phonics resources that could be used at home, such as catch-up videos and any other resources. These may be provided as part of the Systematic Synthetic Phonics programme being used by the school.

Other content for these pupils is likely to include providing guidance for supervising adults to ensure that time is used as productively and developmentally as possible. Schools should also encourage parents to read with their children and out loud to their children as much as is possible and practical. As well as phonics resources, where possible schools should signpost parents to any online reading schemes they have bought into, or to where high-quality books and stories are freely available online.

Supporting pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

For many pupils with SEND, the teaching envisaged by this guidance would need to be adapted. SEND pupils have a wide range of specific needs. Their teachers and schools are likely to know these needs best, and how they can be most effectively met to ensure pupils continue to make progress wherever possible if they are not able to be in school.

It is likely that more individualised planning may need to happen in many cases, and that the support of adults in the home will be a significant advantage where that is possible. However, in some cases, the suggestions in this guidance may also be useful for pupils with SEND and so should be considered on their merit.

The National Star College is available to offer guidance and training on ways to ensure the curriculum is accessible and inclusive for all pupils. This includes guidance on assessments to ensure intervention is boosted where possible through technology. Support is available until 31 March 2021 accessed through National Star's SEND Hub. Further support for 2021 to 2022 will be released in due course.

Further support for SEND and vulnerable pupils is available on Get help with remote education.

Teachers having difficulties creating online content

While many schools will want to retain the tried-and-tested education resources they already use, some may find it helpful to use resources such as Oak National Academy to offer lessons in most school subjects. Oak delivers a sequenced curriculum, with some elements of choice, which can be used flexibly by schools as their main remote provision - or to complement other parts of remote provision.

The curriculum is published on the Oak National Academy website, so schools can consider how it aligns with and complements their own curriculum. Oak lessons are available from reception to year 11, are free to use, and can be integrated with platforms such as Microsoft Teams and Google Classroom. Specialist content for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) is also available.

Teachers can easily collect results of online quizzes and tests to monitor progress. Oak represents a good option for many schools when remote education is needed, but headteachers should also be aware of other commercial, educational resources available. The British Educational Suppliers Association's LendED platform, for instance, provides a searchable list of resources for remote education. Other free, online teaching resources are also available, such as those from the department-funded Isaac Physics. A variety of teaching resources are available through good teaching practice and resources on get help with remote education.

Helping parents to effectively support remote education

Good communication between schools and parents (about the approach the school is taking) can help. This could include, where appropriate, group seminars, briefings, or one-to-one telephone calls where necessary, to inform parents and elicit their support.

The DfE has published information for parents and carers on remote education and how they can best support their child while learning from home, where this is needed. This includes resources and advice to help parents and carers on how to establish a routine with their child, and how best to support mental health and wellbeing during this period.

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1. See: Kroesbergen, E.H., Van Luit, J.E.H. & Maas, C.J.M., Effectiveness of Explicit and Constructivist Mathematics Instruction for Low-Achieving Students in the Netherlands (2004); Khlar, D. & Nigam, M., The Equivalence of Learning Paths in Early Science Instruction. (2004); OECD (2016), PISA 2015 Results (Volume II): Policies and Practices for Successful Schools, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264267510-en ↩

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