

Remote / Distance Learning guidance for North Wales Schools

January 2021

What is Remote or Distance Education?

In the context of this paper, we will define remote or distance learning as a broad term which encompasses all learning that takes place outside the classroom, with the teacher not present in the same location as the pupils. This could be either live teaching or material prepared by the teacher and accessed by the pupil at a later date. In contrast, Blended learning consists of a mix of face-to-face and remote methods. This would be a relevant title if learners were accessing some of their education in school with direct contact with the teacher during lockdown period

Purpose of guidance

- To support Head teachers and teachers in planning remote learning as part of provision for learners
- To support Head teachers and teachers in managing parental and stakeholder expectations
- To support Head teachers and teachers in making best use of live learning
- To support Head teachers to evaluate remote learning practices and when reporting to stakeholders including the governing body

Guidance overview

1. Guidance Context
2. Expectation for Learning during the lockdown period
3. Considerations when planning Remote Learning
4. Practice in Remote Learning – what does the evidence say?
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1. Guidance Context

Schools are currently operating in extraordinary and challenging circumstances and, in a very short period of time, have had to manage significant change in their methods and practices. No more so than in the use of technology and the digital learning environment which has become an essential part of these practices, notably through Blended and Remote Learning. Schools across North Wales have shown significant creativity in responding to this change and the needs of learners, whether they are learning at home or in school. Likewise, there are difficulties and challenges that school staff face in doing so.

Welsh Government clearly set out expectations of schools (***Guidance on learning in schools and settings: coronavirus*** updated January 15th 2021) in which they state what learning should look like for learners. This document builds on that and gives an overview of practices school can adopt to further strengthen their practices in remote learning.

Delivery of this expectation and how learning will look in practice has to be flexible to accommodate the local context and varying needs of different learners and their parents. Whilst taking account of pressures on parents, in particular those who are trying to balance supporting home learning with working from home themselves, we also need to be mindful of the pressures on head teachers, teachers and wider school staff and the parameters within which they are inevitably working. They face a balancing act of maintaining face-to-face contact with pupils on site whilst planning, preparing and delivering online learning for the whole age and ability range, providing feedback on learning, and often providing IT support. Whilst teachers need to be available to offer support for learning to both pupils and parents, boundaries need to be set to allow staff a work-life balance.



Teachers and leaders know their schools and their learners, and are the right people to make detailed decisions about the design of their pupils' learning. This document aims to bring together identified successful practice for teachers and leaders in North Wales to consider as they develop their remote learning practices and respond to challenges.

2. Expectation for learning during the lockdown period

The curriculum in Wales differs from other regions of the UK, therefore expectations linked to learning are also different and specifically tailored to improving pupils' progress within our national context. In order for pupils to make progress and succeed in their education in Wales, teachers provide a range of activities which support and maximise learning, these activities often necessarily differ from activities and provision which are seen in other parts of the UK.

Welsh Government guidance states that *'if during the next academic year there is a return to lockdown 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.*

Likewise, Welsh Government expectations of remote learning for pupils in exam years notes when learners in years 10, 11, 12 and 13 are required to learn remotely, and for the period of the spring term until half term:

- *We expect this group of learners to receive daily contact from their school in support of learning, motivation and well-being. We expect them to receive four hours of meaningful learning per day, which will be an engaging combination of synchronous and asynchronous learning and support, using digital and non-digital means as appropriate to the group and the subject. We are not setting out expectations at a level of detail below this – teachers and leaders know their schools and their learners, and are the right people to make detailed decisions about the design of their pupils' and students' learning.*
- *We expect learning resources provided by schools to be of sufficiently high quality to enable learners to progress as closely as possible to how they would have progressed if they were in class. We expect resources and activities to reference and contextualise widely available content from sources including Hwb, WJEC, BBC, SAC and Universities.*
- *We expect schools to support digitally excluded learners in accessing remote learning opportunities by distributing school devices with appropriate end user agreements. If there are problems in issuing devices or connectivity challenges, schools must report this to their local authority EdTech lead.*
- *We expect schools to be aware of and record learners' engagement with the remote learning offer*

3. Considerations when planning remote learning

- Ensuring pupils are safe, both on and off-line
- Ensuring access to technology is key, particularly for disadvantaged pupils. Schools need to think carefully about whether pupils have access to the right kind of devices when using



digital remote education. If learners do not have a device and a device cannot be provided, or are unable to access digital learning (for a range of reasons), it might be better to consider non-digital approaches as well. This might include sharing of hard copies, paper based tasks or packs. There should be no detriment in provision whichever approach is taken.

- When using digital remote education, internet access is relied upon. Again, there needs to be consideration as to whether pupils have this and what can be provided if they don't.
- Pupils with additional learning needs may not be able to access digital learning or may struggle with this
- All pupils will need to learn through a range of approaches, including physical, social and creative styles. The balance of these may need to differ between different age groups.
- Equality of access of provision for key worker and vulnerable pupils in school.
- Schools must consider pupil wellbeing when planning remote learning provision and especially in relation to screen-time.

4. Practice in remote learning – What does the evidence say?

Quality of teaching is key and is more important than how lessons are provided

- Pupils can learn and make progress through remote teaching. Fundamental to all learning through whichever medium, are the key elements of effective teaching must be present with clear explanations, scaffolding and feedback. This is far more important than how or when they are provided. Research shows that there was no clear difference between live remote teaching or using pre-recorded video. What is important is whether the explanation builds clearly on pupils' prior learning or how pupils' understanding is subsequently assessed. Allowing time for giving feedback to learners and assessing formatively is key in ensuring progress.

Opportunity for Peer Interactions is important

- Opportunities for learners to see each other and to work together online can provide motivation and improve learning outcomes. Practices can include collaborating on an activity, peer marking and feedback sessions, sharing models of good work with each other and opportunities for live discussions around content.

Supporting pupils to work independently can improve learning outcomes

- Working independently will be a natural way of working for pupils learning at home. Supporting learners, especially vulnerable learners to work independently by providing checklists or daily plans is of particular benefit.

Pupils make the most progress when their wellbeing is good

- Ensuring Pupils' wellbeing includes being aware of their physical, mental and social health. Long periods of time on-screen are not good for children's health and development at any age, particularly for younger children. Home learning activities which include a range of on and off-screen physical, social and creative pursuits, including tasks tailored specifically to enhance wellbeing, improve pupils' ability to perform at their best across the whole curriculum.

5. Practice in Remote Learning –guidance and examples of practice in North Wales schools

Remote learning is one way of delivering a high-quality curriculum using good quality learning.

Remote education provision needs to be aligned to the classroom curriculum as much as possible. As



in any classroom curriculum, it needs to be carefully sequenced to ensure that pupils obtain the building blocks they need to move on to the next step. Learning Objectives and Success Criteria should be made as explicit remotely as they would be in the classroom. Remote education is not the same as digital education. Sometimes, it may be more effective to deliver remote education through worksheets or a textbook, although by now, most schools have a digital platform so that they can provide online education where that is the most appropriate method. Online methods can include both live and material prepared by the teacher and accessed by the pupil at a later date. It is important that remote learning isn't over-complicated. When using digital remote education, the platform shouldn't be too complicated to use while lessons do not need to be full of graphics and digital illustrations. Simple graphics that highlight the key concepts and features is sometimes all that is needed. More important are the key elements of effective teaching i.e. clear objectives, expectations and feedback.

Examples of effective practices in North Wales schools:

- Learning is a combination of live sessions, live chat, pre-recorded videos, tasks and activities set to be completed with support of teacher/parent as well as independent tasks.
- The timing of the live sessions varies to accommodate working parents, multi-sibling households, and the availability of digital devices. Some schools offer a live registration session first thing in the morning followed by a literacy or numeracy session where new learning is introduced. Others find it is more beneficial to do a live session part way through the day to address any difficulties encountered whilst completing tasks. Some checked in a second time at the end of the day to review learning.
- Tasks set and shared on a daily rather than weekly basis, in order to control the pace of learning and maintain engagement. Some schools provide a weekly overview/timetable for those families who are unable to join a daily check in due to parents' work commitments.
- Specific practice in Foundation Phase learning includes planning opportunities to repeat and consolidate new and existing skills through play/active and experiential based learning experiences; planning opportunities so that the children are free to respond in a way that's developmentally appropriate for them e.g writing, drawing, make short video/audio recording, take a photo and model making; using submitted examples from children as an example of effective practice for their children (with permission).
- Use recorded material to enhance learning at home for example make videos of reading stories, singing songs and number games/facts
- Teachers in clusters arrange meetings, sometimes lined to age groups, to discuss and share ideas re: tasks and activities that have worked well. There are examples of co-planning and co-creation of resources between schools.
- Most secondary schools follow the 'normal' school timetable with some adaptations to facilitate learning. Lessons are a little shorter to allow learners a break; the day is slightly truncated to improve learner focus and completed tasks are uploaded to a learning platform during or at the end of the day. Classes may be live in some instances or pre-recorded. Live lessons involve teacher initiation of a task, followed by learner independent work with the teacher available for questioning and a plenary session to end the lesson. There will be no one prescribed way of undertaking this; the focus should be on learning and accessibility of support and resources for the learner.

Feedback and Assessment for Learning are more important than ever

Feedback and formative assessment are still as important as in the classroom. It can be harder to deliver immediate feedback to pupils remotely than in the classroom, but many teachers have found



some smart and innovative ways to do this through chatroom discussions, live 1-to-1 interaction, messaging and adaptive learning software such as Headsprout etc. It is important for teachers to stay in regular contact with pupils and are available to learners for at least parts of every day. Some schools have daily whole class feedback sessions to close the school day while others do this on a more individual basis where every child has a weekly slot with a teacher. Low-stakes quizzes and fun assessment tasks can be built in to remote education, as can written assignments and retrieval practice activities with older learners.

Examples of practices in North Wales schools:

- Daily check ins between pupils and teacher to review work completed and explain or introduce new learning activities
- In Primary schools the teacher is available online throughout most of the school day for support and feedback including celebrating home learning and addressing any misconceptions. Teachers highlighting children’s increasing ability to demonstrate positive dispositions to learning, including critical and creative skills in line with the Four Purposes of the new Curriculum for Wales.
- Teacher giving group feedback sessions to enable individual feedback and peer interaction.
- Teachers make best endeavours to ensure that ALN pupils work on their IDP targets.
- ‘Helpwr Heddiw’ sessions integrated into live session to encourage pupils to maintain their Welsh oracy skills.
- Live small group work with a TA supporting e.g. those with ALN, EAL or younger pupils, or those pupils whose progress was being supported through the Accelerating Learning Grant
- Parent evening sessions taking place remotely.

Live lessons

There is a misconception that remote learning should only consist of back to back streaming of lessons. Use of live lessons can have advantages if they are planned and delivered effectively and form part of a comprehensive package of support. Using effective teaching approaches, a live lesson can prepare a child for the day’s activities, they can make curriculum alignment easier, can keep pupils’ attention and gives the teacher more control over the learning environment. However, this needs to be balanced with a learner’s (and teacher’s) wellbeing. Time away from the screen is important for both learner and teacher. This gives the learner opportunity to partake in their own independent learning and gives the teacher opportunity to plan, prepare and have individual contact with learners giving feedback and providing next steps.

Different approaches to remote education suit different types of content and pupils. Mixed models can be seen across our schools with a blend of live teaching, recorded material, pre-prepared activities and individual learner contact.

Advantages of live remote streaming	Potential downsides to consider before using live remote streaming
Enables teachers to give clear messages to learners and ensure their understanding of a task/ concept before they proceed. This can reduce workload	Negative impact of too much 'screen time' on pupils including developing a bad posture, and other physical problems due to staying hunched in front of a screen.
Increases pupil engagement and understanding of tasks	It needs to be carefully timetabled and worked around the ‘care in school’ timetable i.e. the



	timetable of the key worker / vulnerable children who are in school
Gives the teacher more control over the learning environment	Technical difficulties can reduce equity e.g. access to chromebooks, laptops, tablets, also internet access/ connectivity issues
Learners are able to get live feedback through the 'chat' in private if desired	Evidence suggests that concentration online is shorter than the length of a typical lesson
There a number of useful tools available to keep pupils interested and involved e, e, Jamboard, live quizzes, Padlet; Mentimeter etc.	In continuous live streaming , it can be hard to build in interaction and flexibility
It can improve the engagement of pupils who lack the self-discipline to work independently	Some pupils unwilling to contribute orally and not comfortable putting cameras on.
Wellbeing - pupils can see each other and their teacher interact and collaborate. This includes vulnerable pupils who are in school.	Some teachers with toddlers at home that make live streaming very difficult.
Helps parents to understand tasks and concepts , learning intentions etc. in order to be able to support their child's learning	

Examples of practices in North Wales schools:

- Daily live lesson to introduce activities and to set the expectations for the activities.
- Providing tasks and activities that are completed independently off-screen.
- Paper packs/hard copies made available on request for those who are having difficulty with digital aspects.
- In primary schools teachers have time each day when not available online to allow them time to plan and prepare content for the following day e.g. record videos etc. Other staff are available to support during this time if needed.
- Use a 'home learning book' as a record of any work completed at home, which can be brought into school as evidence on a child's return. It also supports the idea that not all tasks have to be completed online.
- Instructions for tasks explained on a pre-recorded video to support pupils who have difficulty with reading, processing written instructions, and who are completing tasks with limited parental support. Additional, extension tasks provided that can be completed independently, consolidate skills but also provide parents with time to complete their own work if required.

Engagement and Communication

Engaging learners in an online environment is difficult. There are distractions all around and teachers aren't physically present to manage situations. Parents will also be finding it difficult adapting to a whole new way of working. Communicating and working with parents during this time, without putting additional burden on them, can support home learning. Regular communication with both Learners and Parents increases the feeling of belonging to the school community. This regular communication and improved sense of community is being seen through a variety of means in our schools. Whole-school or class digital assemblies and feedback, newsletters to pupils and parents or online drop in sessions can all help parents and pupils alike them feel part of the community, even when learning remotely. Maintaining relationships are key during these difficult times.

Examples of practices in North Wales schools:

- Engaging constructive feedback: for example using a questionnaire for parents to ascertain what is working well in the home environment and what further support is needed.
- A weekly assembly presented live or pre-recorded and regular videos of stories being read.
- Phone calls home to those who are not engaging regularly with learning to check on wellbeing and to offer support
- Weekly surgery for parents on a 1-1 basis to address any concerns about their child's learning e.g. support with IT.
- Cluster primary schools liaise with the secondary school around the timing of any live sessions as this impacts on the availability of devices in multi sibling households.
- Providing activities to engage the whole family together e.g. a weekly family quiz; sharing easy recipes that parents and children can make together, outlining the numeracy and literacy skills that this activity can develop.
- Reflecting on lockdown and developed a rationale of why they have adopted the approaches they have. Capturing this in their risk assessment and sharing with Governors

6. The above guidance has been collated from the following documentation. Much more information, examples and guidance can be found within these documents:

- Guidance on learning in schools and settings: coronavirus - [Guidance on learning in schools and settings: coronavirus | GOV.WALES](#)
- Expectations of remote learning in exam years - [Expectations of remote learning for pupils in exam years - Hwb \(gov.wales\)](#)
- Welsh Government Live streaming guidelines - [Live-streaming and video-conferencing: safeguarding principles and practice - Keeping safe online - Hwb \(gov.wales\)](#)
- What's working well in remote education – [What's working well in remote education - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- EEF Rapid Evidence Summary (Distance Learning) - [Rapid Evidence Assessment summary.pdf](#)
- Hwb Supporting Distance Learning - [Distance learning - Hwb \(gov.wales\)](#)

This regional guidance was created in consultation with all six North Wales Local Authorities

