

CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

WHAT ARE THE 'BEST BETS' OF REMOTE LEARNING?

Schools are taking a range of different approaches and it is too early to say with confidence which particular approaches are definitively the best. However, we can, as Matthew Hood describes, try to identify the 'best bets' – the things which are most likely to matter. This document is, therefore, not a definitive guide as to everything a school could do – such a document would be far too long. It is an attempt to draw attention to particular aspects of teaching, and their underpinning thinking, which are probably worth schools giving consideration to.

1 | Building knowledge and skills, not just being busy

Schema theory suggests that when we learn new information we connect it to what we already know. New learning is easier when we have the hooks on which to hang it. This allows pupils to build new knowledge and skills. The implication for teachers is that we must be aware of what we want pupils to know and how it connects together. This is why curriculum planning is important. By understanding how knowledge connects together we are able to plan a curriculum that builds in a logical sequence. This matters as much remotely as it does in the classroom. It may be better to delay some aspects of the curriculum which are difficult to teach remotely and pick this up when schools reopen. These are decisions subject specialists will need to make as this will be driven by how the subject curriculum builds and develops over time.

Practical tips from ASCL members

- Learning activities and instruction should be planned coherently over time, not just an ad hoc selection of activities. Some schools have told us they are producing brief medium-term subject plans showing the learning goals they want pupils to achieve, identifying the specific knowledge and skills that matter most. These plans could be published on the school's website.
- One school told us they asked subject leaders to review their summer term planning and move particularly tricky topics/concepts to the next academic year.
- Leaders need to get a sense of the volume of work and interaction pupils are receiving. Members are telling us that too much leaves pupils and parents anxious while too little creates a disconnect and potentially the development of gaps in learning. Of course, there is no clear 'amount' that will work for all schools and families, but the point is that leaders should be mindful of it and work with staff, parents and pupils to calibrate it as best they can.
- Many leaders are telling us they have worked with middle leaders to get a shared understanding of how much time pupils should be spending on each subject per week. Some have mapped out a remote curriculum model of sorts showing the number of hours per subject, per year group. This allows subject teams to plan accordingly and helps leaders to ensure the volume of work is appropriate.

2 | Focus on effective teaching

It's understandable that many people have given a lot of thought to the platform they are using to teach. However, let's start with what we know: the quality of teaching makes the biggest difference to how well pupils learn. This effect is even more pronounced for disadvantaged children. So, when thinking about remote teaching, particularly given widespread concerns about a widening disadvantage gap, it's important to think about what matters most: teaching. For example, it's tempting to think that what matters most is whether your teachers are doing pre-recorded video lessons or live video conferencing. The reality is, whether done live or not, it probably matters even more how well your teachers do typical teaching things: explain tricky concepts, the concrete examples they use and how they give feedback to address common misconceptions. Leaders should remind teachers of this, supporting them to work out how best to do these things through remote teaching. Research into effective teaching is worth revisiting, such as Professor Rob Coe et al's ['What makes great teaching'](#).

Practical tips from ASCL members

- Some schools are supporting teachers to ensure remote teaching draws on the best we know about effective teaching, whatever their means of teaching/delivery. The key is for teachers, many of whom are inexperienced at teaching remotely, to think explicitly about what they might ordinarily do intuitively. A simple aide memoir outlining key considerations and possible approaches might be helpful (see appendix A). This is not a lesson planning proforma and shouldn't be used as such, but it is a prompt to help teachers think through how they will help pupils to learn the content in question. It might be used by teachers to plan an individual session or could be used to plan learning across several sessions.
- Leaders need to consider pupils' access to IT, particularly if their remote learning approach rests upon this (as most do). Some schools are surveying parents to assess where there are barriers, although we recognise that solving these can be difficult. Some schools are providing temporary loans of IT equipment, others are supplementing the online curriculum with an offline version of printed materials. Other schools are asking pupils what their favoured platform/approach is – although it's worth remembering evidence suggests pupils are not always very good at identifying 'what works'.
- Some pupils have specific needs, such as SEND pupils. Leaders and teachers should consider how learning materials and activities will be accessible for pupils. Some schools tell us they are using input from TAs and HLTAs to tailor materials as required, such as enlarging fonts or providing supplementary resources.
- As outlined in our previous guidance, teachers should continue to consider the balance of new content and consolidation of existing content. In some schools leaders are holding virtual meetings with heads of subjects and subject teams to support their curriculum thinking on such matters. Just having a space to talk through options, to hear what others in the school or beyond are doing, and to work collaboratively can be very positive when working remotely.

3 | Subjects as communities

It's important that the remote curriculum continues to be as rich as possible within the current constraints. While in some circumstances it might be appropriate to focus on a limited range of subjects, most pupils will find remote learning more enjoyable if it maintains a degree of richness. This means trying to keep as much subject breadth as is possible, and appropriate to pupils' age, and ensuring that subjects retain their integrity and intrigue. This means teachers should continue to tell fascinating stories, to open pupils' eyes to the great debates of subjects, and to foster a love of subjects.

Practical tips from ASCL members

- Members tell us that some are encouraging subject departments to divide the planning and resourcing work between them so that individual teachers are not working in silos and 'reinventing the wheel'. In one such school this means a teacher within a subject might take on the planning for Year 7 while someone else does the same for Year 8, and so on. Of course, such arrangements may not work everywhere but this school spoke favourably about the positive impact on teachers' workload and in ensuring coherence and quality.
- Many schools have told us they are thinking about how to maintain a sense of community for their children. Some schools are holding virtual assemblies or pre-recorded videos/podcasts, others are issuing email newsletters. A few schools are also doing this sort of work at subject level, trying to help pupils to maintain a relationship with their subjects by sending them occasional notices about relevant TV programmes or news articles – the sort of stuff teachers routinely do through their classroom dialogue.
- Some schools are thinking about how they can support Year 6, Year 11 and Year 13 pupils who are moving on to the next stage of their education. For example, one school said they are introducing a programme of compulsory and elective units for Year 13 students to help prepare them for their next stage. Likewise, you can see how a secondary school might find it useful to talk to their local college about any reading or other work they would recommend for Year 11 leavers to do ahead of September, or indeed for secondary and primary schools to be in discussions about what pupils would find most useful during this period to prepare them for September. Such things are likely to look different in different subjects.

See appendix A overleaf.

Appendix A | aide memoir for remote learning sessions

	Prompt	What might this look like in practice? Possible ideas
1	What do I want pupils to know/be able to do as a result of this session(s)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear learning goals defined by teacher and made explicit to pupils. • Medium term plan made available to parents so they can support where appropriate.
2	Is there a key question that helpfully drives the session?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Big question' to frame the session. • Is there an interesting and valid debate within the subject that might provide a hook? • Refer back to key question at end.
3	How does this relate to what's come before/after?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Session guided by medium term plan. • Make links explicit for pupils where appropriate. Don't assume it's obvious.
4	Which key concept(s) am I introducing for the first time, or needing pupils to recall?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Definitions of key terms. • Time taken at start to recall previous learning. • New concepts broken down and introduced in small steps.
5	Which aspects do pupils tend to struggle with or misunderstand? If I know this in advance, how can I address it?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worked examples. • Definitions of key words. • Check for understanding. • Make common misconceptions explicit and correct understanding. Avoid rushing instruction. Provide opportunity for pupils to go back/pause/rewind.
6	Which examples best illustrate the concept? Which will pupils find more readily relatable?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Links made to pupils' experience where appropriate. • Analogy and metaphor. Eg 'This is like...' • Introducing key examples from the subject's canon. • Which examples will be built on later?
7	What practice is necessary?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worked examples. • Independent practice. • Retrieval practice. • Elaboration – pupils have to expand an explanation, perhaps to a parent.
8	How will I check for understanding and provide feedback?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Q&A through video conferencing. • Through school's online platform. Eg. Microsoft Teams, possibly with teachers available at agreed times. • Email. • Work submitted online. • Teacher checks pupils' self-marked scores. • Whole class feedback. • Whatever method, make parameters explicit to pupils and parents.

Stephen Rollett | ASCL Curriculum and Inspection Specialist
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0116 2991122



info@ascl.org.uk



ascl.org.uk