

PROTOCOL FOR HOME - SCHOOL E-LEARNING

INTRODUCTION

The Managing Authorities and Teacher Trade Unions in consultation with the Department of Education have been looking at appropriate mechanisms by which eLearning tools, for example, Fronter, Moodle, Equella, Elluminate, Blogs, Wikis, Google Docs, Studywiz, Blackboard can be used innovatively to support the ongoing education of children who are absent from school for short periods of time in excess of two weeks.

While recognising that many schools already use a variety of eLearning tools, the Department would wish to see more schools doing so. It is envisaged that one way of facilitating this development would be to invite schools to undertake eLearning home-school pilot projects with a focus on ensuring that children who are on short term absence from school can maintain contact with their school/class teacher(s) through online learning.

Initially the focus would be on children up to the age of 18 years with support being delivered at an age appropriate level.

This document informs schools of the approach to be followed in delivering a home – school eLearning pilot for pupils who are, for example, on short-term absence as a result of illness or medical condition.

Pilots will involve one-to-one eLearning interaction between the pupil and the teacher each day/week.

It is envisaged that such pilots would cover one school term initially, at the end of which an evaluation exercise would be carried out to identify the benefits of eLearning in these situations and models of good practice, along with any recommendations.

eLearning home-school tuition should not be seen as a replacement to any other form of support from ELBs or other organisations to which a child is entitled during an extended period of absence. An eLearning pilot should not be considered by the school for pupils who are suspended or expelled.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The following points are given as guidance in the development and implementation of eLearning home-school pilot projects.

1. ELearning must not be seen as an alternative to regular attendance at school. Each case of student absence should be considered on its merits. There may be occasions when the use of certain home-school eLearning tools would not be appropriate. The potential for, and the nature of, the home-school eLearning pilot will be discussed with parents and pupils.
2. A request to a school to become involved in an eLearning home-school pilot will be made in consultation with the ELB Home Tuition team.
3. Approval to become involved in the pilot must be sought from the Principal. The Board of Governors will be informed of the use of eLearning tools and the purpose of the pilot.
4. The ELB Home Tuition team will indicate the timescale of the pilot and how it will be monitored and evaluated.
5. The pilot will involve eLearning interaction between the pupil and the teacher each day/week. This interaction will take place during pupil contact hours and will be determined by the school. A specified time limit for the pupil/teacher eLearning interaction will be determined by the teacher/school. It should be noted that this would not involve live classroom streaming.
6. No teacher or other member of staff will be compelled to participate in the pilot. Neither will any aspect of the pupil/teacher home-school eLearning interaction be used in any competency or disciplinary procedures against a teacher, excluding safe-guarding or criminal grounds.
7. The target pupil audience will be pupils who are expected to be absent from school for a period in excess of 2 weeks, due to illness or a medical condition. Pupils will only be involved where it is deemed to be appropriate following discussion between ELB Home Tuition team and the school.
8. A specific time period will be agreed, for example one term, after which a review will take place involving the school and the appropriate pupil support agencies; Education Psychology, Education Welfare, EOTAS, Health Professionals etc.
9. Both the school and the parent(s) will be required to sign a binding agreement based on a template drawn up by the ELB Home Tuition team in consultation with the school, which will cover participation in and associated expectations of the home – school eLearning pilot.
10. The agreement which will include details about the arrangements for the provision of the service, for example the location of equipment within the child's home, will be determined following consultation between the ELB Home Tuition team and the parent(s), with appropriate input from the school.

11. Mechanisms will be agreed and included in the parent/pupil/school agreement to prevent the recording of the teacher/pupil eLearning interaction.
12. Teachers involved in a home-school eLearning pilot using eLearning tools reserve the right to terminate the teacher/pupil session with immediate effect at any time based on professional judgement.
13. Any breach of this agreement by the pupil or parent(s) may result in the termination of the agreement by the teacher/school and the withdrawal of eLearning services from the pupil. Schools should make the pupil and parents aware of the possible consequences if an agreement is breached (by either the pupil or the parents) and the parents should be directly asked to do all that is in their power to make sure that the agreement is not breached. It should be made clear that if the agreement is breached their child may be disadvantaged by the removal of services.
14. Adequate planning and preparation time will be provided to each teacher who will be involved in the home-school eLearning pilots.
15. In certain circumstances, the support provided to the child through the eLearning home-school pilot (visual or aural), may be given by a teacher/tutor who is not the pupil's regular teacher, for example, the teacher may be in another school or a teacher may be employed by a number of schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- A. Guidance will be provided by the Department of Education on an appropriate protocol for schools to use with pupils and parents involved in the pilot.
- B. The pilot should be seen as a further opportunity for the Department of Education to explore mechanisms by which additional teaching staff could be employed in schools or in purpose built eLearning hubs to which schools would have access.
- C. Guidance should be provided by the Department of Education to ensure that the safe use of eLearning tools should be reflected in one or other of the school's existing policies such as ICT/Safeguarding/Child Protection/Pastoral Care/E-safety policy. etc.
- D. It will be the responsibility of the ELB/C2K to ensure the necessary hardware for the home-school eLearning pilot will be made available to the pupil concerned so that he/she will be able to engage constructively in the pilot. A central bank of equipment should be created to ensure quick access for schools in order to reduce delays in establishing the home-school eLearning support.
- E. Funding will be provided centrally to enable training sessions in the use of eLearning tools. This will be provided from an appropriate source, for example C2K, for teaching staff, pupils and if necessary, parents. Training for teachers should include wider pedagogical tuition in eTutoring and eMentoring for an adequate cadre of teachers across the system. Training should not be limited to software specific or software familiarisation alone.
- F. The Educational Welfare Service (EWS) in each Education & Library Board should provide data, on request, on the average number of children per year who are absent from school for extended periods as a result of illness or other medical condition. The nature of the illness/medical condition should be specified.
- G. If home-school eLearning pilots are established, a mechanism of monitoring and evaluation should be provided by the ELB/Education Welfare/Education Psychology services. This should include consultation with the school involved. At the outset the organisations responsible for monitoring and evaluating the pilot should be clearly identified. It is envisaged that this should include representatives from Management side and Trade Unions.
- H. It may be necessary to identify alternative providers of eLearning training, other than C2K.
- I. The appropriate level of centrally provided funding needs to be in place to cover;
 - Teacher cover for training – technical and eLearning pedagogy.
 - Teacher cover during preparation and class contact time.
 - Swift access to the appropriate hardware.
- J. The key responsibility for providing children, who are absent from school for extended periods due to illness or other medical condition, with educational support, lies with the Education and Library Board and its associated service providers.

- K. The Department of Education must provide ELBs/Schools with appropriate legal guidance to ensure the personal protection of pupils/parents/school and ELB staff who are involved in home-school eLearning tuition.

- L. The Department of Education should use the willingness of teaching staff and school support services to embrace the potential of eLearning to establish eLearning hubs which would be staffed by professionally qualified teachers. These hubs could provide opportunities for eLearning resources to be developed, for training to be delivered, both technical and in terms of eLearning pedagogy and for teacher cover to be provided to a number of schools in specific geographical areas.