

Guidance on remote learning

This guidance brings together shared practice on remote learning, informed by the experience and expertise of ASCL members, the DfE'S guidance, and the latest research.

Members should also refer to ASCL's previous guidance '[Best-bets in remote learning](#)' and the [legal requirements of the Direction](#).

A checklist is provided at the end of the paper which summarises actions and ideas for school leaders to adopt and adapt for their setting.

What is the Remote Learning Continuity Direction?

The Remote Learning Continuity Direction (the Direction) is a **legal requirement** to provide **immediate remote learning** for any individual or groups of pupils who cannot attend school due to Covid-19 (eg. because they have been told to self-isolate). From 22 October 2020 until the end of the school year, schools must provide remote learning for these pupils, in the way set out in the guidance.

More information about a school's legal obligation to provide remote learning, and about the Direction itself, is available in our document [Remote Learning Temporary Continuity Direction](#).

What does 'immediate' mean, and which pupils need to be provided for?

The DfE has confirmed that 'immediate' means the first full day that pupils cannot attend school. It is therefore important that schools have remote learning plans in place that can be activated within a day, whether for a whole cohort, or for an individual pupil.

The Direction only applies to pupils in reception to Year 11, although schools with sixth forms and colleges will probably want to offer remote learning to post-16 students as well. The Direction also states that it only applies to pupils **who cannot attend school due to Covid-19**. It therefore does not apply to students who are absent for other reasons, or to students who choose (or whose parents choose) not to send them into school despite contrary advice from public health officers. The Direction does not entitle students and families to an 'either/or' choice. If students can be in school safely, then they should be.

The DfE's expectations of quality

The DfE's guidance on opening schools sets out the quality expected of both remote curriculum planning and remote teaching. The full guidance on this can be read [here](#).

When planning your remote learning curriculum, the DfE suggests schools:

- use a **curriculum sequence** that allows access to high-quality online and offline resources and teaching videos and **is linked to the school's curriculum expectations**
- give access to high quality remote education **resources**
- select the **online tools** that will be consistently used across the school in order to allow interaction, assessment and feedback, and **make sure staff are trained** in their use
- provide **printed resources**, such as textbooks and workbooks, for **pupils who do not have suitable online access**
- recognise that **younger pupils** and **some pupils with SEND may not be able to access remote education without adult support** and so **schools should work with families** to deliver a broad and ambitious curriculum.

When it comes to teaching remotely, the DfE suggests that schools:

- set assignments so that **pupils have meaningful and ambitious work each day in a number of different subjects**
- teach a **planned and well-sequenced curriculum** so that knowledge and skills are built incrementally, with a good level of clarity about what is intended to be taught and practised in each subject
- provide frequent, clear explanations of new content, **delivered by a teacher in the school or through high-quality curriculum resources or videos**
- gauge how well pupils are progressing through the curriculum, using **questions and other suitable tasks** and set a clear expectation on how regularly teachers will check work
- enable teachers to **adjust the pace or difficulty of what is being taught** in response to questions or assessments, including, where necessary, revising material or simplifying explanations to ensure pupils' understanding
- plan a programme that is of **equivalent length to the core teaching pupils would receive in school**, ideally including **daily contact with teachers**

Obviously, this has huge implications for the planning and delivery of the curriculum this year, especially when schools are legally required to provide this immediately for individual pupils, while some or a majority of pupils remain in school.

Leading remote learning at a whole-school level

As with all aspects of the curriculum and learning, governors and leaders should have oversight of, and set the expectations for, remote learning. Some advice we've heard from ASCL leaders includes:

- Allowing time for departments / key stage teams to come together and plan remote learning. Build this into the school calendar for the remaining of the academic year.
- Encourage curriculum leaders to use their existing work on curriculum design. If they have been working on curriculum sequences and core elements of the curriculum, these remain as important (if not more so) than ever. The work they may have done over the past 18 months has not been in vain and could be the foundation of their remote curriculum.
- Carefully select the online tools you use as a school in order to provide consistency for pupils and parents, while allowing flexibility for departments and teachers.
- Ensure staff receive training for all online tools they are expected to use.
- Prioritise remote learning curriculum planning and remote pedagogies in your PD offer this year.
- Encourage all current and future curriculum planning to include planning for remote learning. Curriculum plans could be updated to show online delivery.
- Consider how teachers will have daily interaction with pupils, whether this will be live or not, and whether it will include face-to-face.
- Consider the implications, including safeguarding issues, of live-streaming lessons that have other pupils in them.
- Update your safeguarding policies to ensure they reflect any changes you've made, and that all staff are up to date on your safeguarding policies and practices.

- Consider a three-staged approach to remote learning:
 1. For individual pupils while a majority of the cohort remains in school.
 2. When a large group of pupils are told to stay home.
 3. If a whole cohort or school is sent home. In each case, pupils are entitled to the same level and quality of remote learning, but how you achieve this may be different.
- Consider how you will activate immediate remote learning, which may be different from your longer-term plans.
- Manage staff, governors, parents and pupils' expectations about remote learning, including what is on offer. Engage with stakeholders as the crisis changes.
- Consider your staffing arrangements. Some schools have freed teachers from their normal teaching timetables so that there are dedicated staff only working on remote learning. This could be by key stage or by subject areas / faculty areas.
- Work with families to understand and remove barriers to engaging in remote learning.
- Consider the workload of teachers, leaders, and yourselves during this process.

Providing immediate remote learning

Particularly when a majority or some pupils remain in school, it may be very challenging to provide immediate remote learning the first full day a child cannot attend school due to Covid. Here are some suggestions of what schools are doing:

- Invest time in producing a pack of materials that can be sent home with pupils, either physically or virtually.
- This may not cover the full breadth of the curriculum but might be focused on core subjects including English and maths.
- It may also not reflect the curriculum being taught in school that week, especially if it's produced in advance, but could include learning that reinforces learning gone before or supplements the normal curriculum. For example, the materials could embed and extend knowledge and skills taught in a previous year.
- Have a plan in place to activate your full remote learning offer as soon as possible, which should be more closely mapped to your school curriculum.

Managing parental expectations

One of the challenges since the Direction was announced has been managing the expectations of parents, the public and other stakeholders about what schools are now required to do.

- Publish a remote learning policy that sets out the minimum expectations parents and pupils should expect.
- Be clear when a pupil is eligible for remote learning. The Direction makes it only a legal duty when children have been told not to attend school (it is not a parental choice), and only when the absence is related to Covid-19.
- Be clear that remote learning is not the same as live teaching, and although there is an expectation that pupils receive daily contact with teachers this might not be 'virtually face-to-face' or live.
- The remote curriculum should be the same length and ambition as the in-school curriculum. This is unlikely to mean five hours of learning each day, although it might. However, be clear that just because pupils receive five hours of lessons a day, they may not have five hours' worth of remote learning – in many schools the published lesson time includes administrative tasks and movement time.

Removing barriers

We know significant barriers remain to providing remote learning, not least the government's decision to reduce the allocation of laptops for disadvantaged learners after the Direction became law. However, there are steps schools are taking to address these:

- Undertake an audit of parents and families to understand your local needs.
- Offer advice to parents about how best to support their children's learning.
- Have a dedicated inbox or phone number for parents to contact if they have a problem, rather than going through class teachers.
- Consider how you might distribute existing devices to families who need them.
- Consider other technological barriers and mitigate this as much as you're able, such as headphones, wifi dongles
- Have contingency plans in place, and don't rely solely on online live lessons.

Managing non-engagement / absence

One of the barriers we know exists is a lack of pupil engagement, even when remote learning is provided. This could include not attending compulsory live lessons, not completing assignments, or not sending in assessments by the deadline.

- Use and adapt your existing attendance policies and expectations.
- Be clear what expectations are when sending pupils home.
- Follow up on any persistent absentees / non-engagers using your existing processes, eg. phone calls and letters home, home visits.
- Remember that if a pupil is too ill to engage, they are not expected to – but when self-isolating after their symptoms go, they should be learning remotely.

Curriculum planning

Remote learning is unlikely to be effective unless consideration is given to the curriculum behind remote lessons, in the same way as in-school lessons. The first step to thinking about effective remote learning is therefore to reflect on your school's curriculum and how this could be delivered remotely or adapted.

- The National Curriculum is made up of certain 'composites' in each subject, which are realised by breaking them down into 'components' in the school curriculum. Use curriculum planning already done or underway to identify the core composites and components that make up each subject in each year group. Use these as the starting point for remote provision.
- Of your core components, which can be taught effectively through remote instruction (eg. worksheets, textbooks, online videos, pre-recorded explanations), and which really need face-to-face or live explanation?
- As with normal curriculum planning, think through:
 - what you want pupils to know, understand and do
 - how you will teach them this remotely
 - what tasks / assignments you will give them to practise and embed their learning
 - how you will assess their understanding in the short, medium, and long term
 - how you will use assessments to provide formative feedback and inform future remote learning
- Look for existing resources to achieve the aims above on whatever online platforms your school has opted to use – don't reinvent the wheel.
- Ensure the needs of all learners, including SEND and the most disadvantaged pupils, are being met through the curriculum.

Remote pedagogies

Once you have a clear curriculum in place, consider how you will adapt existing teaching and learning practices to remote or blended pedagogy.

- How will use online tools to introduce new content or expand on embed existing content?
- How will you set assignments and work?
- How will these be assessed? Many online platforms use tools such as quizzes that can provide instant feedback to staff.
- How will you provide daily interaction? This need not be live or face-to-face but could include asynchronicity communications.
- How will you provide formative assessment, correct any misunderstandings, and ensure pupils have mastered the skills and knowledge in your subject to progress?

Using online tools

There is a huge range of online tools and platforms available for every subject including, but not limited to:

[Oak National Academy](#)

[BBC Bitesize](#)

[GCSE Pod](#)

[Sparx](#)

While using these platforms' curricula as they are without any mapping is unlikely to result in effective learning, the resources and platforms can be used and adapted to reflect your own school's curriculum, without having to create everything yourselves.

- Try to adopt a common approach to online learning across different years and different subjects but allow for flexibility in order to respect the discipline of different subject areas.
- Use your existing quality assurance processes to ensure that pre-existing online material is fit for purpose and appropriate for your pupils.
- Be prepared to compromise: if a video explanation isn't exactly how you'd do it but does the job well enough, don't spend hours making your own.

Remote extra-curricula activities

While schools' focus must be on helping pupils catch up on the core curriculum, schools may want to consider how they use whatever remote learning processes they have put in place to support extra-curricula activities. Many schools achieve breadth and balance in the curriculum through these types of activities, and some schools are finding ways to do this remotely.

- Holding online assemblies.
- Holding remote school council / student voice meetings.
- Using passports / pledges / electives / extended projects to enrich the opportunities and experiences have beyond the formal school curriculum, especially when many students are limited by Tier 2 or Tier 3 lockdowns.
- Providing lists of useful reading, films, recorded performances, blogs, podcasts, radio and TV programmes that pupils can easily access to extend their cultural capital.

Impact on workload

The 2020-2021 school year has proved exceptionally challenging for school leaders, classroom teachers and all involved in education in schools: physically, mentally and emotionally. Providing remote learning is just one of the many areas schools are having to contend with, and this guidance must be read in that context. Remote learning will inevitably create some additional workload for staff, but there are ways schools have found to try to reduce this:

- Use flexible staffing models, such as
 - asking staff to work from home when a certain critical mass of pupils is unable to attend
 - reducing teaching time for a member staff in each key stage / subject area in order for them to focus on remote learning provision and provide daily contact with pupils unable to attend
- Adapt existing curriculum plans and schemes of work, and use the curriculum thinking that has already happened.
- Encourage staff to use, and signpost, materials that already exist. Don't create a climate where staff feel they need to reproduce every lesson as an online version.
- Accept that some materials might be 'best-fit' rather than what you'd say / do in class.
- Encourage and build in time for collaborative subject planning.
- Have a streamlined process for remote learning questions and concerns to avoid pupils and parents contacting classroom teachers directly, when they're teaching or in the evenings and weekends.

Tom Middlehurst
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The guidance provided in this document is for general information purposes only and does not constitute legal or professional advice. They represent ASCL's views, but you rely on them at your own risk. For specific advice relevant to your particular circumstances, please contact your employer's HR service or legal advisers.

A (non-exhaustive) checklist for school leaders

A Word version of this checklist can also be downloaded [here](#).

The following list reflects the key points in the guidance above as actions school and colleges may wish to take. It is non-statutory and not exhaustive.

Action	Status	Comments
All governors, trustees and leaders under the legal obligation to provide remote learning from 22 October		
All curriculum leaders, teachers and support staff understand your remote learning expectations		
A remote learning policy is published on your website, setting out expectations for the school, for parents and for pupils		
There is an action plan to activate immediate remote learning for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • any individual pupil • small groups of pupils • whole classes, year groups or school 		
Online tools have been selected and staff are trained in their use, and have PD opportunities on remote learning		
Remote learning is built into curriculum planning for all subjects and all year groups		
Remote learning pedagogy is understood by all teachers and is effective		
Safeguarding policies have been updated to reflect any changes		
Support channels are in place for parents, families or pupils who are struggling with remote learning		
Barriers to remote learning have been identified and mitigated for as far as possible		
Attendance processes have been updated to reflect non-attendance / engagement in remote learning		