

Thematic Report on Post-Primary Schools' Delivery, Monitoring and Evaluation of Effective Remote Learning

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Introduction

On 6 January 2021, Minister for Education, Peter Weir, MLA, announced that, in light of the Covid-19 crisis in public health, the Northern Ireland Executive had agreed that all mainstream education providers, including pre-school education settings, primary and post-primary schools, be required to provide remote learning at home to their pupils rather than face-to-face teaching in school, until the half-term break in the middle of February, effective from Thursday 7 January. Vulnerable children and children of key workers were to have access to schools for supervised learning. All GCSE, AS and A2 examinations due to take place in January, February, May and June 2021 were cancelled, with alternative awarding arrangements to be brought forward as soon as possible.

While indicating the intent to return schools to face-to-face learning as soon as the public health situation permitted, the Minister for Education issued Educational Continuity Directions to give legal effect to the January 2021 arrangements. The Department of Education (DE) provided updated guidance to support schools in the delivery of remote learning¹. In delivering remote learning, schools are required to have regard to this guidance. Throughout January and February 2021, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) engaged with post-primary schools to understand their experiences of monitoring and evaluation of the delivery and quality of remote learning provision, and delivering the Engage Programme².

A total of 159 schools (82% of all of Northern Ireland's 193 post-primary schools) completed the ETI questionnaire on the delivery of remote learning during the week of 25 January 2021. A summary of the quantitative findings can be found on the ETI website³. This report is informed by an analysis of the quantitative and qualitative evidence obtained from the questionnaire, and the further qualitative evidence gathered during focused discussions by District Inspectors (DIs) with just over one-fifth of schools (21% or 40 of 193) between 25 January and 12 February 2021. Examples of approaches by schools appear throughout the report. Case studies from a further five schools detail their self-evaluation of delivering, monitoring and evaluating effective remote learning from March 2020 to February 2021.

¹ [Updated Circular - 2021/ 01 - Further guidance for schools on supporting remote learning | Department of Education \(education-ni.gov.uk\)](#)

² The [Engage Programme](#) is to limit any long-term adverse impact of the COVID-19 lockdown on educational standards.

³ [Consultation on the delivery of remote learning in post-primary | Education Training Inspectorate \(etini.gov.uk\)](#)

Planning and delivering remote learning

Schools listened to pupils, parents/carers and staff about their experiences of the first lockdown (March to June 2020) and, informed by their views, contingency planning was undertaken for any further period of lockdown. By the beginning of November 2020, all post-primary schools (100% or 193 of 193) had undertaken such contingency planning to deliver remote learning, which most (90% or 174 of 193) had already implemented due to increasing numbers of pupils and staff testing positive for Covid-19 or having to self-isolate. Schemes of work were adapted for the physical and digital learning environments, with staff working collaboratively to produce resources for remote learning for current and future use.

Schools were therefore better prepared for the second extended lockdown beginning in January 2021, when the Educational Continuity Directions placed legal requirements upon schools for delivery of remote learning, with account to be taken of DE's updated guidance. With the flexibility to plan and deliver as appropriate to each school's particular circumstances, the nature of remote learning provision varies across schools, with a range of contextualised strategies which take account of the learning needs of the particular pupils.

Access for all

To consolidate and aid consistency across the curriculum, schools have streamlined from the use of multiple platforms in favour of a single platform used across the school and/or key stages: Google Suite (G Suite), Microsoft Teams (MS Teams), Collaborate Ultra (CU) and Zoom⁴ are the main platforms used to deliver lessons online in post-primary schools. However, there are instances where individual departments opt for different platforms which they find more suitable for subject-specific content and approaches.

Schools have accessed additional devices for pupils through the DE digital devices initiative⁵, as well as from the local community and businesses, and have also lent school devices to pupils. Schools have provided Information Technology (IT) resources to teachers and classroom assistants, such as iPads/tablets and styluses. In discussions with DIs, almost one-quarter of schools (23% or 9 of 40), highlighted that their governors and senior leaders have refreshed, and invested in, technological hardware and software in order to meet better the needs of pupils and staff.

While the number of pupils affected varies from school to school, digital disadvantage remains. In the questionnaire responses, three-fifths of schools (60% or 96 of 159) and, in discussions with district inspectors, more than two-fifths of schools (43% or 17 of 40) identified restricted access to IT in the home, including having to share devices, as a barrier to learning. In almost one-half of the questionnaire responses (48% or 76 of 159) and in more than one-quarter of discussions with DIs, (28% or 11 of 40) schools identified internet and/or Wi-Fi issues as a further barrier to pupil engagement and as an ongoing challenge.

⁴ The applications named throughout the report and in the case studies are used by the schools; the ETI acknowledges that a variety of applications are used by schools.

⁵ The Minister for Education announced [a digital devices process to lend digital devices](#) to disadvantaged pupils who may be unable to access devices at home on 21 May 2020 and the scheme remains open.

In the discussions, just over one-third of schools (35% or 14 of 40) indicated that the lending scheme criteria did not yet meet the needs of all pupils and that there is a continued shortage of devices for individual pupils. A small number of these schools (8% or 3 of 40) indicated that staff with legacy equipment require up-to-date, pen-enabled devices with suitable audio and video capacity for use outside school, and/or more consistent internet connectivity.

Timetabling and teaching approaches

Updated internal policies in relation to remote learning and associated guidance for staff, pupils and parents/carers set out agreed, realistic and clear expectations. As a result, whole-school communities have had a clearer understanding of registration, lesson attendance and submission of work.

Quantitative analysis from ETI's January 2021 questionnaire showed that, of the post-primary schools that responded (82% or 159 of 193), almost all (96% or 152 of 159) had developed protocols for the safe use of technology in the delivery of remote learning and had communicated expectations around remote learning to pupils, parents/carers and staff. A small number of schools (6% or 10 of 159) indicated a remote learning contract has been agreed by parents/carers and pupils.

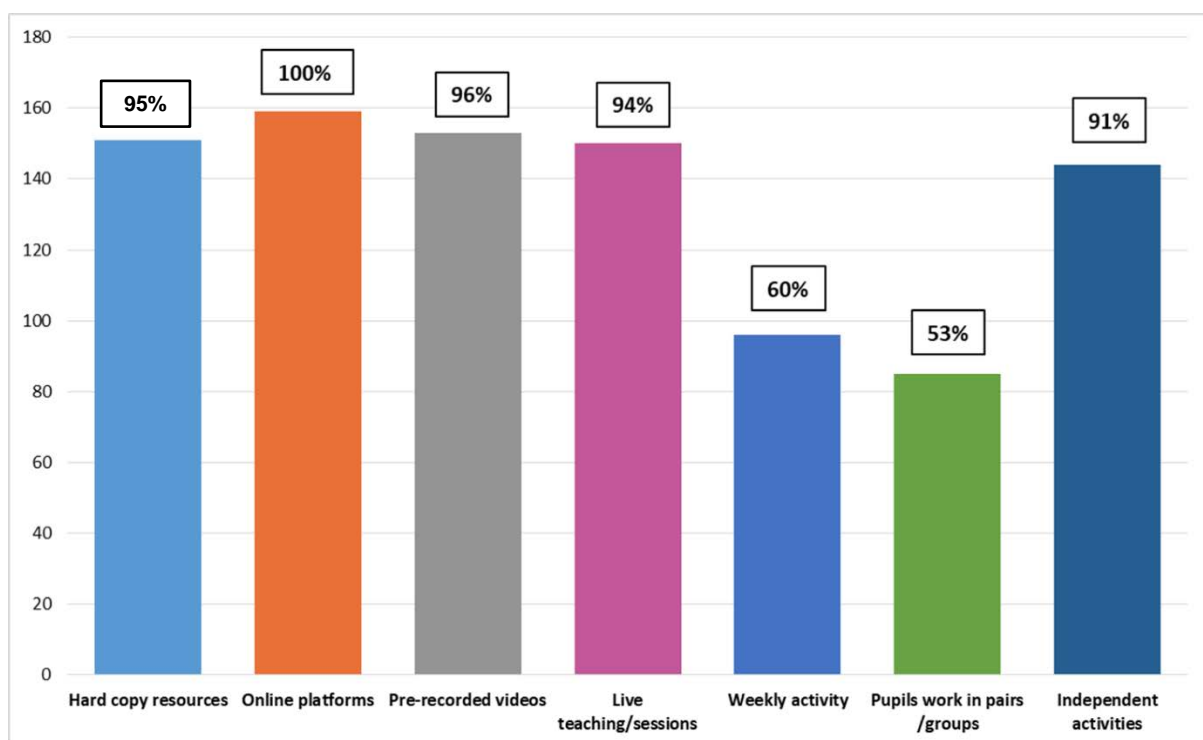
In the questionnaire responses, nearly one-fifth of schools (19% or 30 of 159) and in discussions with DIs, a significant minority of schools (30% or 12 of 40) referred to timetabling and indicated two main approaches to the remote delivery of the curriculum during this lockdown: pupils following either a flexible/reduced timetable or a normal daily timetable, with examples of shortened lessons to allow for breaks from being on screen and for the completion of work. Important considerations for timetabling included an agreed balance of subjects over the week, pastoral lessons and physical education delivered through a mixture of synchronous and asynchronous⁶ lessons. Schools continue to discourage pupils from working on a device for lengthy periods without taking breaks, in order to prevent exhaustion and potential disengagement.

Learning about the pace of delivering provision for a second extended period of remote learning has been important for schools. In discussions with DIs, a significant minority of schools (28% or 11 of 40) spoke about how teachers and departments have continued to adapt their schemes of work to meet the needs and abilities of their pupils, sustain engagement and progress learning. Contextualised strategies to balance time learning online and offline have been adopted, with provision of short bursts of catch-up and/or consolidation time offline referred to as, for example, *catch-up*, *digi-detox*, *pauses* or *breathers*. Staff remained on hand to support learning, with the catch-up or consolidation period allowing pupils to assimilate new concepts in their learning, take stock or go back over work they may have missed.

⁶ Synchronous refers to the teacher being present (live) at the same time as the learners in an online session through, for example, video conferencing. Asynchronous refers to sessions when the teacher and pupils are not online at the same time, and where resources and activities are uploaded for pupils to access flexibly.

Schools remain aware of the challenges that exist in maintaining relationships for learning, as well as social relationships, when normal classroom interactions are not possible. When providing remote learning, it has been difficult for teachers to plan for and facilitate the same levels of interaction and collaborative learning which enable pupils to develop their wider personal capabilities and thinking skills. Furthermore, for Irish-medium (IM) pupils, the interactive language strategies used in the immersion classroom have been difficult to replicate online and it is acknowledged that the best immersion for pupils is at school. Consequently live teaching and staff voice recordings in the Irish language have been central to the provision; IM staff have continued to source, produce, translate and adapt resources in light of the continued need for immersion-specific resources to support pupils and parents/carers.

Schools have been using a wide range of teaching approaches, including online platforms and live teaching/sessions, as well as hard copy resources. The bar chart, based on the quantitative data from the questionnaire responses, shows that schools recognise that effective learning happens in a whole range of ways, one of which is live lessons. DE and ETI acknowledge that there is no compelling evidence to indicate that synchronous learning is more effective at improving pupil outcomes than asynchronous approaches.



In response to parental feedback from the first lockdown, more schools have been sharing weekly schedules of learning and teaching across the subjects, including notice of synchronous and asynchronous lessons, so that parents/carers understand what is expected of their children.

A majority of schools, in the questionnaire responses (53% or 85 of 159), and most schools in discussions with DIs (85% or 34 of 40), indicated that teachers were consciously using a blend of approaches most suitable to the topic and the needs of the learners. Typically, pupils have logged in and accessed work which can include: assignments to be downloaded, completed and then returned to teachers for marking and feedback; pre-recorded video clips to supplement written tasks; voice-over PowerPoint presentations to explain key concepts or illustrate model answers; and consolidation tasks, quizzes and tests to reinforce and assess progress. Open-ended research assignments, with access to internet sources and hyperlinks, have been used to promote independence and extend pupils' learning.

Almost all schools, in the questionnaire responses (94% or 149 of 159), along with most schools in discussions with DIs (85% or 34 of 40), referred to use of synchronous approaches. They gave examples of how subject departments and individual teachers have used a variety of approaches to live lessons. A proportion of the live lesson can be allocated for pupils to complete tasks independently or with teacher support if required. In preparation for some live lessons, pupils have accessed differentiated audio and visual stimulus materials which build on their prior learning and enable them to participate, developing their confidence and self-esteem. Parts or all of synchronous lessons may be recorded for pupils, unable to attend at that time, to access later. For pupils who need additional assistance with aspects of their learning, classroom assistants have, for example, attended live lessons, provided specific online support and monitored closely the pupils' progress. As schools have continued to move forward with synchronous online lessons, they have been supporting those departments and teachers that are still at an early stage in delivering live lessons. In discussions with DIs, a small number of schools (8% or 3 of 40) expressed concerns around safeguarding, managing expectations and the appropriateness of this medium for learning and teaching.

Teachers have been extending their use of digital tools, such as Chatbox and Jamboard, to foster pupil confidence and increase participation in synchronous sessions. Schools shared examples of where teachers have found it effective in live lessons to ask all pupils to turn their cameras and microphones on for specific activities, so that the interaction online was as close to the physical classroom as possible, allowing immediate collaboration, sharing of ideas and development of wider skills. Examples of online differentiation strategies include smaller tutorial-style sessions and the use of breakout rooms for learning tasks supported by the teacher and/or classroom assistant.

In-school daily provision and support for vulnerable and key worker children continued. Individual schools have seen increased levels of anxiety amongst pupils as the isolation, with few opportunities to forge friendships and have normal social interaction with others, has led to some pupils really struggling with remote learning. There are examples where pupils who required social support and assistance to manage their workload were encouraged to attend school. One school, in discussion with the DI, shared how it has adopted a two-pronged approach to supporting vulnerable pupils. Classroom assistants have used online platforms to work remotely with individual pupils while the dedicated autism classroom has been open and functioning for those pupils whose anxiety levels are too high to remain at home.

There has been continued development of online approaches to support vulnerable pupils and those pupils who have statements of special educational need. One-to-one contact with identified pupils occurred mostly on a weekly basis and has included form teachers, heads of year and/or classroom assistants following up on the most vulnerable pupils, those harder to reach or pupils who have come to their attention through monitoring by staff or direct referral from home. Contact is made through video conference, telephone or e-mail. Classroom assistants have been in daily or weekly contact with assigned pupils and there are examples when these pupils were also supported by the special educational needs co-ordinator. Increasing numbers of newly identified vulnerable pupils, due to the current pandemic, are being monitored and supported by schools.

Practical activities and experiences

Prior to the move to remote learning at the beginning of January 2021, mitigations, including risk assessments and strategies for practical activities in the previous term, had meant a graduated return to practical work, where possible. However, in the autumn term, for key stage (KS) 3 in particular, the base room approach for bubbles meant that neither teachers nor pupils had full access to equipment and resources and there was an emphasis on theoretical content. This period of remote learning has led to a continued imbalance.

In discussions with DIs, almost one-half of schools (48% or 19 of 40) raised concerns that the limitations on technology and design, construction, home economics, physical education, science, drama, ICT, music and art and design represent a narrowing of the curriculum, negatively impacting on the integral nature of these subjects and the development of associated skills. Little or no hands-on experience for pupils in all year groups, has resulted in concerns about lower levels of motivation, particularly for pupils following vocational pathways. Schools have concerns that potential deficits in knowledge and application of skills may affect their future progression.

In discussions with DIs, a minority of schools (15% or 6 of 40) discussed the adjustments they have been making in the delivery of practical subjects during this lockdown. Teachers have been using webcams, visualisers and other devices to record or present live practical demonstrations, simulations or experiments.

A small number of schools shared how art teachers provided pupils with materials so that they have been able to engage in practical work. In synchronous art lessons, for example, the teacher has been able to collage class work, provide illustrative feedback and answer questions so that pupils can see how they and their peers are progressing. In addition, well-established departmental Twitter and Instagram accounts have been used to showcase and celebrate pupils' work. One solution in technology and design departments has been to distribute packs of components to KS 3 pupils who then assemble them by following live guidance by the teacher.

In one home economics department, there have been live lessons every week for all pupils. The teachers have been using iPads regularly to 'flip' the classroom, enabling pupils to access links and materials beforehand and comment on them at the start of lessons. The department has also set up its own YouTube channel with more than 20 videos demonstrating key skills

and concepts to reinforce and recap on the pupils' learning. To help pupils grasp new topics, Explain Everything has been used when preparing PowerPoint presentations. Home economics booklets have been updated to include QR codes which take pupils directly to tasks, demonstration videos, presentations, assessments and associated mark sheets.

One music department has been using Google Slides to show pupils how to make instruments and how to play them in future live lessons. Additionally, pupils in some schools have continued to work online with peripatetic music tutors through, for example, MS Teams. Drama depends greatly on interaction, so naturally pupils will be at a disadvantage. However, some drama teachers have been conducting online rehearsals, focusing on such independent work as monologues and building up to shared tasks in pairs and small groups of pupils: these approaches allow for prompt feedback from the teacher, self-evaluation and peer assessment. There are examples of finished pieces being performed by pupils for online competitions or the whole-school community.

Monitoring and evaluating remote learning

Based on lessons learned from the first lockdown and between September and December 2020, when increasing numbers of pupils were unable to attend due to positive cases and self-isolation, more rigorous processes were put in place to monitor the quality and effectiveness of the provision and improve consistency, and better understand why some pupils disengage.

In discussions with DIs, over two-fifths of schools (43% or 17 of 40) referred explicitly to the recent development of bespoke, often 'live' spreadsheets which have enabled staff to identify and track disengagement more closely. Such tracking sheets have helped inform better the nature of the interventions required, including correspondence with home. For example, readily available information has enabled classroom assistants working with individual pupils to monitor more closely their engagement, progress and learning needs, and adjust the support they provide.

Senior leaders have been monitoring planning, teaching, learning and assessment through various methods including regular meetings with department and year heads and the analysis of departmental evaluations. In order to continue to involve pupils in decisions which affect them directly, schools have been seeking the views of pupils on their experiences of remote learning through questionnaires and focus groups. Additionally, schools have been taking account of survey responses from parents/carers and staff. This regularly updated information has provided senior leaders with an overview of the range of online learning and teaching, as well as the barriers being encountered by pupils.

Examples of approaches shared by individual schools:

- All senior leaders have had access to GC and have felt that they have a better understanding of what is delivered now compared to the previous lockdown. Some senior leaders have sat in on live lessons delivered to a nurture group.
- There have been fortnightly surveys for pupils to communicate to senior leaders what has been going well and what changes they would like to see. This feedback has changed over the weeks from operational comments to comments about the way they prefer to learn.
- Evidence from the pupil/parent survey has continued to inform planning, still adhering to the school's core practices of good pedagogy, but reinforcing for senior leaders the need to: re-structure, refine, re-focus, re-imagine.

Registration and logging on

Schools had to establish effective systems for pupils to register remotely. Schools monitor and follow up absences accordingly. The improved monitoring and more robust internal record-keeping on registration and attendance during this extended period of remote learning, alongside more regular communication with home, have been instrumental in encouraging more pupils to log on for learning. However, for all schools, there is a recognition that registration and/or logging on do not equal engagement or active participation in the learning.

Schools have been facilitating controlled access by parents/carers to online platforms, using such apps as Showbie, so that they too were able to monitor their children's progress and observe the quality of their work, much like lifting an exercise book. Overall, of those who responded to the questionnaire and in discussions, around one-third of schools (28% or 45 of 159 and 33% or 13 of 40) reflected that parents/carers required assistance in supporting and keeping their children motivated and engaged. In response, for example, schools provided printed and/or online guidance and training to assist parents/carers in supporting their children's learning at home.

Schools have agreed strategies for when pupils are reluctant to register or log-on, including developing clear recording systems not only to collate attendance, but also to highlight non-engagement and implement a staged approach to encourage non-engaging pupils to re-engage with their education. Effective channels of communication and sensitive encouragement to the pupil and parent/carer have been crucial elements in re-engagement. Increasingly, parent-teacher meetings have been conducted online to maintain the link between school and home and to keep parent/carers informed of engagement levels and progression for the pupils.

There are examples of schools having offered individual support or smaller tutorial-style sessions to encourage engagement, particularly in instances when pupils have found lessons in some subjects difficult or lack confidence to engage remotely.

Feedback

Feedback enables pupils to identify, rectify and learn from their mistakes and helps them improve the quality of their work when learning remotely. In order to monitor pupils' progress in online learning, teachers had to adapt traditional strategies for assessment and adopt new online approaches and software to provide feedback. In the questionnaire returns and in discussions with DIs, schools shared a wide range of strategies and approaches to provide feedback when learning remotely.

During synchronous lessons, formative feedback in real time has been provided by teachers through, for example: oral question and answer sessions; the chatbox function for queries and responses; interactive quizzes; and informal testing during plenaries, using emojis and polling software. Google Forms (G Forms) and Microsoft Forms (MS Forms) have been used to collate feedback during some lessons for group sharing, and collaborative documents created in G Suite and MS Teams could be edited, amended and corrected in response to ongoing feedback and discussion. Furthermore, G Forms has been used to mark and record pupils' assignments, in order to speed up the tracking of classwork, so that marks were imported directly to electronic mark sheets for ease of monitoring and evaluation. To back up oral and written feedback, some teachers prepared model answers and exemplars for screen-sharing with the whole class or in breakout rooms: these resources help them to explain and illustrate key points or applications.

To keep such formative feedback efficient and effective, classroom management software such as Showbie and Satchel One have been used to prioritise, assign, collate, integrate and record pupils' work, with dates for completion. Teachers welcomed the use of digital pens to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of a given piece of work and to make handwritten annotations that set out how the pupils can make the necessary improvements.

In a range of departments, Quizlet and Kahoot have been used for shorter-term assessment, and Loom or Mote for giving oral feedback. For example, as an alternative to written feedback, audio software such as Mote has been used efficiently to record, then add voice notes and comments on pupils' work within G Suite. In these cases, pupils acted on prompt oral and written feedback and benefitted from the quick turnaround in the digital re-drafting process, helping them to close the gap between their current and potential achievement. Screencasting software to record visual feedback and annotations has also been used, along with video editing software to create bespoke videos for revision classes.

For both formative and summative feedback, there were examples of teachers using G Forms to create multiple-choice self-assessments that allowed the pupils to re-do the questions in order to improve their scores and promote self-regulation. To help pupils understand how their marks and grades are derived from their assessments, teachers have been, for example, designing grading rubrics and assessment indicators in G Forms, so that pupils understood and covered the key indicators in mark schemes when completing essays and assignments. Teachers have also been using digital annotations, along with hyperlinks to mark schemes, in order to provide detailed and specific feedback to pupils on their work.

When pastoral support or sensitive feedback has been required to meet the needs of individual pupils, there are examples of virtual breakout rooms providing flexibility away from the main class to give targeted feedback. Other strategies to encourage pupil engagement include motivational audio comments through Mote, for example, on pupils' work, digital certificates and postings on Twitter and other social media platforms.

However, in discussions with DIs, almost two-thirds of schools (65% or 26 of 40) expressed concerns that staff were finding online assessment and feedback neither efficient nor particularly manageable. Under remote arrangements, teachers have found marking for improvement and summative correcting of work more time consuming and challenging.

Quality and impact

The important development in monitoring during this period has been the increasingly sharp focus on the quality and impact of online provision. Monitoring has shifted beyond registration and log on attendance data to exploring more robust means of ascertaining levels of engagement and participation, with the online presence of heads of department and senior leaders.

Departments and pastoral teams have been tracking engagement and participation across the curriculum to build consistency in the provision and assess the level of 'buy-in' for particular subjects: considerations include pupil preference for subjects, style of teaching and other practical factors, such as the outworking of timetabling approaches.

At middle management level, heads of department and pastoral leaders have continued to hold departmental and team meetings online which has provided them with an overview of provision. Staff have been sharing what is going well, discussed challenges that remain and identified further training and staff development needs. Senior leaders linked to departments and pastoral teams before lockdown have continued to act in this capacity online, meeting heads of department and heads of year regularly, providing support when required and challenge when appropriate. There have been examples of senior leaders being invited into subject classrooms in GC to see the work that is set and submitted, and to sample the feedback given to pupils.

As the next step in monitoring the quality of online provision, a small number of schools referred to senior leaders accessing further professional development on observing lessons in a remote environment and sharing their learning with colleagues. These schools recognised that monitoring and quality assurance need to be handled sensitively as some teachers are at an early stage in the delivery of online lessons. When there has been a shared understanding of the purpose of lesson observations and a clear focus on sustaining improvement, this important aspect of monitoring has informed schools' evaluations of the consistency and effectiveness of provision, including what disengagement exists, and enabled staff at all levels to adapt their planning for remote learning and teaching.

In discussions with DIs, a small number of schools (8% or 3 of 40) referred to online observations of live lessons taking place or instances of the principal joining classes to talk directly to the pupils about their learning experiences.

Professional development of staff

In line with the [DE Learning Leaders A Strategy For Teacher Professional Learning \(TPL\)](#), senior leaders have been pro-active in sharing effective practice within their own schools and beyond. There have been examples of staff contributing to the EA's sharing of good practice webinars/materials or to programmes provided by others, and/or becoming accredited trainers, for example with MS Teams and Apple.

Approaches shared by individual schools:

- One member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) has completed the Aspiring Leaders Programme (Stranmillis College): the next assignment/research task is to work on observing lessons in a remote learning environment, with the intention of disseminating the learning to staff.
- One member of SLT has presented at the BlendEdNI conference and disseminated his own and others' work to school staff.
- One member of SLT attended a webinar on giving pupils feedback and has shared with staff; as a result, some have moved away from GC to MS Teams for marking and providing feedback on more lengthy documents.
- Some staff (including SLT) completed 'developing a blended and technology enhanced learning' course – disseminated and shared on the importance of teacher presence in the remote learning environment.

Varied development needs

The rapid implementation of remote learning between March and June 2020 was typically complemented by the auditing of development training needs to inform continuing professional development (CPD) of all staff. CPD which began in June 2020 and continued in August 2020, is being carried on throughout this academic year, 2020-21. ETI's January 2021 questionnaire returns indicated that almost all schools (98% or 156 of 159) provided in-house CPD for remote learning. A majority of schools (60% or 95 of 159) accessed aspects of EA's support for remote learning, which includes webinars, resources and EA C2k's online training in G Suite, MS Teams and CU, while a significant minority (35% or 56 of 159) accessed support from other providers, such as Stranmillis College and BlendEd NI.

Staff development often begins at whole-school level. However, in order to meet the varied needs of all staff in the current context, more flexible, individualised approaches have been established. Where TPL and CPD have been flexible and informed by robust analysis of information from ongoing surveys of the pupils, parents/carers and staff, staff have had regular opportunities to reflect on their own practice, identify areas for further development and give feedback to senior leaders. Consequently, senior leaders reported that investment in professional development of staff has been a significant strength: staff have become more digitally aware and have been using a variety of online approaches across the curriculum.

Approaches shared by individual schools:

- In some subjects, for example English and science, team teaching has been taking place in live lessons to upskill and support colleagues, with one staff member demonstrating effective practice.
- The Religious Education (RE) department has shared good practice in this subject. Each RE teacher agreed to share a recorded lesson to demonstrate different approaches, technologies and topics appropriate to different year groups. These informal approaches, followed by the use of group chat, established trust and 'buy-in' among staff. GC and the shared drive then allowed access to resources and approaches.
- On 'Technology Tuesdays', staff have been encouraged to trial new software/apps and learn from one another.
- 'Drop-in' remote learning clinic for staff has been held on Fridays. The shared folder has been updated for 2021 to include information to support staff and give examples of good practice, as well as further tips for remote learning.
- In-house ICT training has been invaluable, delivered by the ICT co-ordinator, head of ICT and head of mathematics - great collaboration and communication between staff, everyone wanting to support each other.

Community of practice

In discussions with DIs, a majority of schools (53% or 21 of 40) referred to digital learning leaders or remote learning leaders supported by SLTs with responsibility for leading training programmes closely matched to school context. Additionally, remote learning 'champions' identified informally by senior leaders have made significant contributions to staff development; this strategy was highlighted in a significant minority of the questionnaire responses (35% or 56 of 159). In a small number of cases (10% or 4 of 40), schools explained to DIs how the school's ICT technician or beginning teachers skilled in the use of educational technologies played a key role in staff development.

Sustaining in-house TPL and CPD have been challenging for small schools, with mainly one-teacher departments. There have been examples of collaborative inter-school approaches to professional development for staff within area learning communities and subject specialists have benefitted from sharing with, and learning from, colleagues in other schools through recently established subject specialist networks. Formal networks of good practice have also been established through, for example, local clusters and Teach Meet/NI Teachers Collaborate, with more informal sharing through social media.

Next steps

In discussions with DIs, schools shared many examples of contextualised approaches and how they have been identifying next steps for further staff development. The significant investment of time and planning by senior and digital leaders in providing professional development for staff with different levels of experience, confidence and skill, has the potential to form the basis of a coherent, multi-faceted approach to TPL in pedagogy using digital technology, in line with the policy aims of the Learning Leaders strategy.

Managing staff workload has been an appropriate ongoing priority for school leadership. The welcome 'explosion' of collaborative learning among staff, through TPL and CPD, has been accompanied by the intense adaptation of resources and schemes of work, delivering lessons and seeking to provide meaningful feedback to pupils on their learning in the remote environment.

There has been an acknowledgment by schools that monitoring the quality and impact of remote learning and teaching remains a challenge, and a recognition of the need for further guidance and training.

Wellbeing

Since Education Restart in August 2020, there has been a strong focus on wellbeing initiatives and on providing effective support at all levels to pupils, staff, school leaders and parents/carers. DE has been working collaboratively with the Public Health Authority (PHA), the Health and Social Care Board, the EA and other government departments to develop a [Framework for Children and Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing in Education](#).

The [DE Education Restart Wellbeing funding](#) has provided £5 million to help educational settings support the mental and emotional health and wellbeing of children and young people. The experience and commitment of staff in providing effective pastoral care have been essential. Importantly, there have been additional layers of support provided, with priority to (re-)engage pupils.

Staying connected

All schools recognised the need to give time for human connection, (re-)assurance and belonging. Learning from the first lockdown, there has been much more regular contact with pupils learning at home, including in live sessions. In discussions with DIs, one-third of schools (33% or 13 of 40) along with one-quarter of schools responding to the questionnaire (25% or 40 of 159) indicated that regular virtual assemblies, live and recorded, have now become a common feature, as well as virtual form classes and weekly messages posted on school social media on mental and emotional health and wellbeing. Other informal sessions have allowed pupils to 'catch-up' and chat.

Schools have continued to provide and update self-care, mental health and wellbeing toolkits on the school website. Pupils have been able to e-mail staff directly for support and re-assurance. Pastoral teams have been expanded necessarily to include: mental and emotional health and wellbeing teams and mental health first aiders. In discussions with DIs, over one-quarter of schools (28% or 11 of 40) highlighted the benefits of regular live sessions with the form teacher and/or year head to facilitate the personal development curriculum which could include a structured health and wellbeing programme focused on the challenges of lockdown and the five supports of mental health: *be active, connect, take notice, keep learning and give*.

Pastoral staff, keen to develop pupil resilience including through the preventative curriculum, have continued to work remotely with external agencies to provide mental health, resilience and mindfulness awareness workshops for pupils and to support those on the Child Protection Register. For these staff, the preventative curriculum has been flexible and responsive to the needs of pupils learning in the online environment during lockdown.

Approaches shared by individual schools:

- A health and wellbeing hub has been set up comprised of three counsellors who work with pupils and upskill other staff - at present they have liaised with heads of pastoral care, taking referrals from staff, pupils and parents. Communication has been managed remotely, and has followed current PHA guidelines. This provision has been part funded by Extended Schools and internal fund-raising.
- A wide range of mental and emotional health and wellbeing strategies has continued to be delivered to pupils and parents, including from external support agencies, for example, Action Mental Health and Youth Justice Agency. Emotional health and wellbeing has been afforded a high priority. There have been SLT meetings each week about priority pupils, themed weekly messages to pupils, and weekly parent support emails.
- There has been registration time and form class with the form teacher, as well as 'chew and chat' sessions where pupils and form teacher have been able to have a cup of tea/lunch and chat.

- Staff and a selection of pupils have accessed mental health and wellbeing training to become mental health ambassadors.
- The school has been developing an enormous noticeboard in the foyer, with a display of positive messages relating to pupils' work during lockdown - a celebration and a chance to reframe mind-sets: 'Showing how resilient and productive you have been'.

There have been individual examples of pupils and staff taking part in physical activities such as whole-school fitness challenges and competitions, as well as cooking and other activities. While notable concerns have remained about the loss of extra-curricular activities and post-16 enrichment opportunities, a small number of schools indicated they have extra-curricular clubs running online and/or weekend activities for all the family, such as yoga and quizzes, to do at home. There have been examples of pupils co-designing with staff a wellbeing survey for their peers.

Schools have been very aware of the need for routine and a continued sense of belonging for the whole-school community during these uncertain times. However, a growing sense of detachment and demotivation has been noted among an increasing number of pupils as the lockdown has continued. Over two-thirds of schools responding to the questionnaire (69% or 109 of 159) and almost three-quarters of schools in discussions with DIs (73% or 29 of 40) identified the limitations of learning from home, the lack of the usual daily structure and factors associated with social isolation as particular causes of disaffection and demotivation. In a minority of schools (13% or 20 of 159 and 10% or 4 of 40), where attendance and engagement among pupils in years 12, 13 and 14 has been lower, the uncertainty about examinations, alongside the challenges of learning new topics at KS 4 and post-16, have been identified as contributing factors.

With pupils out of school for an extended period, regular communication between home and school has been crucial; schools have used a range of social media platforms including the school website, parent app and Facebook, as well as letters, emails and telephone calls. All schools have shared information about access to guidance and support, inside and outside school with parents/carers. Schools reported that the Covid-19 pandemic has necessitated increased collaboration between teachers and parents/carers to support remote learning and that, in the main, communication and co-operation between home and school have improved since the first lockdown. However, in the questionnaire responses, almost one-half of the schools (48% or 76 of 159), expressed concerns about the level and type of support parents/carers felt confident to provide for their children when learning from home. It is recognised that most parents/carers are trying their best in difficult and challenging circumstances.

Referral systems

Schools continued to have referral systems in place with the form teachers usually the first point of contact. Working with heads of year, subject teachers and heads of department, form teachers have referred concerns from pupils, parents and carers through the appropriate pastoral or academic channels. There has been continued support from schools' education welfare officers. The facility to message the teacher directly on, for example, GC has supported this key pastoral work and enabled pupils to raise concerns with their form teacher or another member of staff. There have been instances of new, easily accessible systems to record pastoral and academic issues, share them with the relevant staff and follow them up accordingly: schools reported that these systems have reduced greatly the administrative burden on staff which had been evident during the first period of lockdown. Schools have acknowledged that it is more difficult to identify concerns about individual pupils when working remotely. However, once identified, pupil referrals to outside agencies and counselling services have continued, including online.

In the questionnaire responses, just over one-half of schools (51% or 81 of 159), along with nearly two-fifths of schools in discussions with the DIs (38% or 15 of 40), indicated that there has been an increasing number and wider range of mental health-related concerns among pupils. A small number of schools discussed with DIs (8% or 3 of 40) how they anticipate an increase in referrals following this lockdown which, due to a combination of issues, has proven much more difficult for pupils than the first one: they expressed concerns that support services will have insufficient capacity to meet the anticipated need.

In discussions with DIs, one-quarter of schools (25% or 10 of 40) referred to the Engage programme in providing support to pupils, a majority of which (70% or 7 of 10) were positive about the impact of the programme during lockdown. Of these schools, a number (3 of 10) expressed concerns about the practicalities of delivering the Engage programme remotely.

Collegiality and support for staff

Schools have continued to prioritise the mental and emotional health and wellbeing of staff, for example, by providing flexible training opportunities, reviewing staff workload and ensuring that communication is regular and clear. As far as possible, schools have also supported staff by providing them with digital devices to enable all, when appropriate, to work from home. Senior leaders maintained regular contact with school staff and there have been regular online meetings at various levels to help staff feel connected to colleagues and to reduce the sense of isolation. Other strategies have included signposting staff to relevant self-care techniques and wellbeing support. Regular surveys have been carried out to seek feedback on health and wellbeing among staff, following which, counselling and other support services have been offered if needed.

Approaches shared by individual schools:

- Thank you cards and words of inspiration have been sent out to all staff, to be received on Friday afternoons.
- A recently appointed wellbeing co-ordinator has been leading mental health & wellbeing in school for pupils and staff.
- Additional time has been allocated to heads of department to complete regular evaluations for their SLT links. These evaluations have allowed SLT to intervene promptly and resolve problems, contact pupils and parents, and deal with technical issues.

Safeguarding

While the Safeguarding and Child Protection Regulations as outlined in [DE Circular 2017/04](#) have remained applicable, schools have had to ensure that the effective implementation of their safeguarding policies and practices continues in a remote learning environment and that pupils continued to feel safe, secure and free from harm. The EA Child Protection Support Service (CPSS) has summarised [safeguarding arrangements for education staff during Covid-19 arrangements](#); this guidance adheres to the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) policy and procedures. The [ETI Safeguarding Proforma 2020-21](#) includes prompts for schools to take account of Covid-19 and update policies/procedures as applicable, including those for health and safety, in support of the physical, mental and the emotional health and wellbeing of pupil and staff.

Schools have found that much time is required to keep policies up-to-date and to manage the associated risk assessments for the whole school and for individual pupils. These updates include addenda to current safeguarding policies, such as for one-to-one counselling online, as well as discrete associated policies regarding remote learning: for example, protocols for engaging appropriately in online lessons for pupils, parents/carers and teachers. If internal school processes for making a referral, reporting a concern or making general safeguarding enquiries change, these have been shared with parents/carers. Pupils and parents/carers have been surveyed regularly, including on the effectiveness of guidance for staying safe online.

In schools, staff training has been supported by published guidance from the EA CPSS and complemented by a series of EA safeguarding webinars. Further staff development to support pupils who are struggling with the wider impact of the pandemic has included the [SBNI training in trauma informed practice](#) which raises awareness of the impact of adversity on children and young people.

It is worrying that the SBNI has recorded a sustained, noticeable drop in child protection referrals since the start of the new term in January 2021⁷ and has expressed fears that pupils at risk have no longer been visible to services because they have not been in school.

Conclusion

The key considerations outlined in ETI's [Post-primary Phase Report September 2018 - December 2020](#) included, among others, learning and teaching, progression, emotional health and wellbeing the development of skills, careers provision, assessments, qualifications and TPL.

This report complements those considerations and highlights how schools are in a better place in relation to delivering learning remotely in this period of lockdown, responding strategically and focusing more closely on monitoring and adapting the provision. Particular considerations going forward for delivering, monitoring and evaluating effective remote learning are:

- allowing for a more flexible definition of 'vulnerable' children based on individual school context and need, in particular for those pupils at risk of disengagement, falling behind in their learning and unable to progress appropriately;
- establishing a shared understanding of engagement and participation in remote learning, to secure consistent experiences and adequate progression for all pupils;
- designing a set of quality indicators for good practice enabling system-wide monitoring, evaluation and planning for improvement of online provision;
- building upon, and integrating into the Learning Leaders strategy, the application of new digital technologies and online approaches being developed by schools;
- embedding a blended approach to learning, to allow for a flexible, fit-for-purpose and sustainable provision which improves outcomes;
- continuing, as part of the Educational Technology Services Programme, to work towards equality of access to digital technology for pupils and schools; and
- monitoring the work-life balance for staff, as they continue to deliver education in complex and fluid circumstances due to the pandemic.

⁷ [Covid-19: Drop in child protection referrals during lockdown](#) (BBC News 25 January 2021).

Appendix 1: List of schools that participated in discussions with ETI district inspectors

Antrim Grammar School	St Patrick's College, Maghera
Ashfield Boys' High School	St Pius X College, Magherafelt
Aughnacloy College	St Ronan's College, Lurgan
Belfast High School	St Paul's High School, Bessbrook
Blackwater Integrated College	Strangford Integrated College
Cambridge House Grammar School	Ulidia Integrated College
Coláiste Feirste	
Craigavon Senior High School	
Dalriada School	
Down High School	
Drumglass High School	
Edmund Rice College	
Enniskillen Royal Grammar School	
Limavady Grammar School	
Lismore Comprehensive School	
Lisneal College	
Loreto Grammar School, Omagh	
Nendrum College	
Newtownhamilton High School	
North Coast Integrated College	
Omagh High School	
Saintfield High School	
Slemish Integrated College	
St Ciaran's College, Ballygawley	
St Colman's College, Newry	
St Columba's College	
St Joseph's Boys' School, Derry	
St Joseph's High School, Crossmaglen	
St Louise's Comprehensive College	
St Mary's College, Derry	
St Mary's High School, Brollagh	
St Mary's High School, Newry	
St Patrick's Academy, Dungannon	
St Patrick's High School, Keady	

Appendix 2: Reporting terms used by the Education and Training Inspectorate and methodology

Reporting terms

In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most	-	75% - 90%
A majority	-	50% - 74%
A significant minority	-	30% - 49%
A minority	-	10% - 29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

Methodology

Throughout January and February 2021, ETI has been engaging with post-primary schools to understand their experiences of monitoring and evaluation of the delivery and quality of remote learning provision, and delivering the Engage Programme:

A questionnaire issued by ETI was completed by most (82%) post-primary schools during the week of 25 January 2021. [The quantitative analysis was published in February 2021.](#)

District inspectors engaged via video conferencing and telephone with senior and middle leadership from just over one-fifth of post-primary schools (40 of 193).

ETI's [Post-primary ISEF](#) publication is available on the ETI website.

Appendix 3: Case Studies

Case Study 1: Blessed Trinity College (March 2020 - February 2021)

School context

Blessed Trinity College serves the community of north Belfast, an area well documented as highly deprived in Northern Ireland. The school enrolment is 1287 pupils: 580 pupils in Key Stage 3, 406 pupils in Key Stage 4 and 301 pupils in sixth-form. Across all key stages and post-16 there is a wide range of needs and abilities: 57.1% of pupils (735) are entitled to free school meals (FSM), 36.4% (468) are on the special educational needs register at stages 1-4 and 6.1% (79) have a statement of special educational need and 6.5% (84) are designated newcomers.

Challenge

Responding to changing educational priorities resulting from the pandemic, the school faced challenges including the:

- wide range of abilities, alongside low motivation levels for a minority of pupils;
- need for emotional health and wellbeing support for pupils and parents;
- need to upskill staff and pupils in the use of digital technologies, including creating and delivering a blend of synchronous and asynchronous lessons or resources for physical and virtual learning environments;
- disproportionate impact of lost learning for those already disadvantaged, compounded by the 'digital divide' of no, or limited, access to devices; and
- limitations of home support and suitable study space during periods of remote learning or self-isolation.

Response

During lockdown from March to June 2020, work was largely provided at Key Stage (KS) 3 and KS 4 by distributing paper copies to be completed and returned for marking and feedback, and at post-16, the majority of the work was accessed online. However, staff soon recognised that a significant minority of pupils were not engaging as anticipated. They identified that distribution was slow, the work was not stimulating across all ability levels and the completion of tasks by pupils and quality of feedback were variable.

The senior leadership team, supported by departmental and year heads, and the teachers, started tracking pupil engagement using monitoring sheets and organised meetings to gain feedback from departments, pupils and parents. Analysis highlighted ongoing low levels of pupil engagement in lessons, and the need for staff and pupils to be upskilled in digital technologies in order to maximise the impact of remote learning and teaching.

In preparing for return to school in August 2020, significant forward planning and research were undertaken by all staff to upskill for any further remote learning periods. The school produced a remote learning policy, developed safeguarding protocols for remote learning, and communicated the expectations around remote learning to pupils, parents, staff and governors. Clear lines of accountability were also established for training staff and pupils to use digital technologies, as well as for managing and quality assuring the new processes for remote learning.

Between September and December 2020, the school harnessed existing staff expertise and established an information and communication technology (ICT) group to provide training for other staff members. The ICT group provided training sessions at different levels for staff, depending on needs and confidence. Individual staff and departments also signed up to online teacher professional learning forums, for example, Northern Ireland Teachers Collaborate, to connect with collaborative groups and local clusters. The pupils were also upskilled in the use of Google Classroom (GC) through the planned programme delivered by the ICT team and its increased use was strategically incorporated by all subjects during normal timetabled classes.

As part of the re-start, the necessary implementation of the Department of Education and the Public Health Agency's health and safety measures, notably social distancing, impacted adversely on a range of pupils' learning experiences, particularly for practical subjects. The school devised a series of master classes at KS 3 to provide a level of engagement in a range of practical subjects including art, home economics, science and technology and design. However, further learning was lost with the rising absence rate due to positive cases/self-isolation across the year groups.

Feedback from parents on the new remote learning policy indicated that some families were still without access to Internet and/or digital devices. To address this fundamental issue, the school accessed 234 laptops and 40 Wi-Fi codes, through the Department of Education initiative for disadvantaged pupils, and a further 46 laptops from other sources. Staff delivered laptops to pupils' homes, set up Wi-Fi codes, spent time re-assuring parents on how to support their children's learning at home and demonstrated how to use the hardware and software provided to access GC.

Additionally, parental guides on how to access the school's virtual learning environment, with summary sheets to explain practical approaches to school work, were sent to parents.

To build consistency into remote learning and teaching across the curriculum and increase pupil engagement, all departments reviewed their schemes of work to incorporate both synchronous and asynchronous approaches. Subject teachers re-structured and re-sequenced the content of units, incorporating more stimulating and practical elements to improve pupils' engagement levels. A shift from mainly text-based work to visual approaches, along with use of interactive questioning, simulations and quizzes, has enhanced formative assessment in a number of subjects.

As a result, for this second lockdown, the school timetable and curriculum were modified to support mental and emotional wellbeing. Teachers set realistic amounts of work that pupils complete in their own time and return for feedback.

Vulnerable pupils and children of key workers can access online lessons in school and receive support from teachers and learning support assistants, as well as availing of other support systems established by the school's care team and departmental team structures.

Following a senior leadership team strategic evaluation, additional staffing, resources and time were allocated to the care team to maintain regular contact with the vulnerable pupils and their parents and carers in order to help support their emotional health and wellbeing. Contact is kept up through emails, telephone calls, text messaging, social media and, importantly, door-step visits. Additionally, a second counsellor was employed to deal with the increase in pupil referrals and, when required, teachers provide one-to-one practical support for parents having difficulty keeping their children engaged online with lessons.

Impact

Since March 2020, leadership responsibilities at all levels were kept under constant review so that their strategic work was addressing key issues, with adjustments in light of information gathered from pupils, parents and staff.

Monitoring and evaluation of remote learning is taking place during this current period of lockdown. Analysis of departmental tracking shows pupil involvement levels in remote learning, increasing from a low base during first lockdown to 70% now. A balance of live and pre-recorded lessons enables pupils to log in at times that facilitate a wide range of family circumstances. Supporting this work, the school's social media platform has been strategically developed to work in tandem with the school's mental health and wellbeing strategy. It also acts as a constant presence, mirroring the availability of the school to provide links and support for remote learning.

The school's self-evaluation is becoming more rigorous, with subject teachers and management at all levels better informed about the quality of provision for remote learning. Pupil feedback has indicated enjoyment of synchronous lessons: pupils welcome seeing and interacting with their teachers and getting real-time feedback on their progress. Pre-recorded lessons and demonstrations enable pupils to work at their own pace and they are being accessed regularly to support revision and consolidate learning.

The focus for KS 4 and post-16 examination classes is to ensure that the pace and quality of learning experiences engage the pupils and meet fully the examination specifications and modes of assessment. At post-16, teachers report that pupils are coping well in vocational subjects where coursework and assignments are integral. However, pupils in subjects that require close and ongoing instruction need more synchronous sessions through Zoom and other video conferencing apps, as well as individual or small group feedback. To retain flexibility in post-16 timetables, but still ensure pupils are on task, teachers set times when they are available to support pupils if required.

Virtual departmental meetings allow for review and adjustment of planning to meet the changing needs of pupils and, especially, at KS 3 to increase focus on engagement through innovative and fun activities alongside their key learning. Based on their own monitoring, individual departments have initiated, among others, the following approaches:

- the drama department has cut down the amount of written material, increased practical activities and is getting good feedback from pupils;
- the English department has launched a virtual writers' group for KS 3 pupils;
- the art curriculum now includes more opportunities for practical work, which is accessible from home;
- the special educational needs co-ordinator engages in weekly Zoom meetings with pupils holding statements and the learning support assistants have joined the relevant google classrooms to support the work of their designated pupils;
- teachers and pupils in a range of subjects are using Zoom more regularly for live lessons that allow for greater interaction and sharing of ideas; and
- a number of departments formed a virtual extracurricular club to provide for additional opportunities for students to interact with each other.

Regular contact with pupils and parents through social media, emails, text, parent mail, telephone and home visits is resulting in closer working relationships between the school and community, and a greater willingness of parents to be more involved with their children's work. The school finds that families welcome the help, support and re-assurance about progression in learning provided by teachers. However, despite the sustained efforts of the pastoral and departmental teams to support pupils during this lockdown, there are still a minority of pupils not engaging consistently with remote learning. This, mostly lower ability cohort has been settling into poor routines and not working with their teachers in real time or following existing timetables at home. A number of these pupils are going to bed late, rising tired and, consequently, not being well disposed to engage fully with lessons. While staff are making every effort to provide flexibility, it has proven difficult to sustain, with little evident improvement in the readiness of these pupils to learn.

The additional time and resources for the care team have enabled them to be pro-active in dealing with any pastoral and societal barriers to learning. However, the analysis of pastoral and performance data confirms that the prolonged period of lockdown, following the Christmas holiday period, and previous learning disruption during term 1, has resulted in lack of expected progress in learning, and impacted significantly on pupils' mental health and wellbeing.

For many pupils, the in-school environment provides much-needed stability and routine, which may be lacking in other areas of their life. Continuing to engage and motivate their pupils and re-engage where necessary remains a priority for leadership, pastoral and academic teams across the school.

Case Study 2: Devenish College (March 2020 - February 2021)

School context

Devenish College is located in the town of Enniskillen, drawing pupils from the town and from the surrounding rural area. The school enrolment is 621 pupils: 339 pupils in Key Stage 3, 217 pupils in Key Stage 4 and 65 pupils in sixth-form. One-third of the pupils are entitled to free school meals, approximately one-fifth are on the special educational needs register at stages 1-4 and just over one-tenth have a statement of special educational need. There is a small number of newcomer pupils.

Challenge

By March 2020, as a result of the school's roll-out of an information and communications technology (ICT) strategy from 2016-17, all of the teachers were equipped with iPads and almost one-half of the school's personal computers had been replaced by Chromebooks, with all internal data moved to Google Drive. Several departments were using Google Classroom (GC) regularly and the school's digital leaders were supporting a group of teachers from all subjects in the use of Google Suite. This framework allowed for increased integration of ICT in pedagogy. Teachers across the departments were keen to share with their colleagues and support one another's professional learning as the technology and its applications developed.

As a consequence of its ICT strategy, the school was well-placed to make the transition to remote learning and teaching on the scale required by the lockdown in March 2020. However, it was recognised that staff were at varying levels of confidence and competence and, therefore, staff development in this area was a priority.

Further challenges identified at the time associated with learning and teaching remotely included differentiated provision for mixed-ability groups, marking for improvement and feedback.

Response

At the beginning of the first lockdown in March 2020, aware that staff were at different stages in their use of ICT, a suite of staff training opportunities was made available to facilitate a speedy transition to online learning and teaching by all areas of the curriculum. Training included: the use of Google Forms to test knowledge and understanding; the use of Google Slides to design interactive worksheets; and the creation of teacher avatars to make GC warm and welcoming for the pupils.

During the period from March to June 2020, subject teachers used a series of processes and procedures to track and record pupil engagement and share concerns with heads of department, form teachers and heads of year: these processes led to general letters of concern being issued to parents.

In preparation for the 2020-21 academic year, with a view to ensuring that learners would feel confident and secure on returning to school, be ready to re-engage in the physical classroom and prepared for further periods of remote learning, the school formed five restart working groups across the whole staff: the health and safety group; the extended learning and teaching group; the pastoral care and safeguarding group; the access to ICT group; and, the communications group. A staff audit in June 2020 identified further staff development needs.

A review was undertaken of the challenges associated with remote learning and teaching for mixed-ability pupils. This process enabled whole-school reflection on what had worked well and areas for further development in the pupils' experience of remote learning, including how processes for monitoring and evaluating the quality of the pupils' work could better transfer to the virtual environment, should another lockdown occur. By August 2020, this focus on the pupils and their experiences, including keeping them safe and well, had resulted in an agreed way forward for the school in a remote learning environment. This has led to the review and subsequent adjustments to a number of child protection and safeguarding policies and the drawing up of a remote learning policy which was developed in consultation with staff, pupils and parents. Adaptations to procedures and amendments to child protection and safeguarding policies have been shared with staff, pupils, parents and carers and governors. An e-Learning tab added to the school website offers digital support to pupils and parents. In order to meet an urgent need for a more effective and efficient method of communication with parents, the school rolled out the SIMS parent app in September 2020.

Feedback received by the learning and teaching team had raised concerns around assessment and the disproportionate amounts of marking and subsequent feedback to pupils during the first lockdown; these concerns about manageability and sustainability have been addressed by the school in a number of ways. Recent upgrades to almost two-fifths of teacher iPads have included a stylus to assist with marking and staff have been trained in the use of verbal feedback using Vocaroo and Mote. Some staff are using whole-class video feedback, for example by creating whiteboard explanation videos using Explain Everything. The SIMS parent app has also assisted with the streamlining of feedback and reporting. Additionally, messages to targeted classes can now be issued instantly.

From March to June 2020, subject teachers had found it difficult and time-consuming to keep track of: pupils who were not completing work; how well the same pupils were engaging in other subjects; and, if and when parents had been contacted. Having reflected on the views of teachers, for this second period of lockdown, senior leaders put in place a Google Drive spreadsheet, populated by information from SIMS.

During the current lockdown, as the range of the approaches and strategies continues to develop, the learning experiences of pupils at Key Stage 4 and post-16 now range from mostly asynchronous (recorded) to some synchronous (live) experiences. Live experiences include opportunities, typically once a week, for: clarification of the learning activities and content; feedback on how the pupils are progressing; and pastoral care, celebration of achievements and interaction between pupils. For pupils at Key Stage 3, most of the learning and teaching occurs via GC, with opportunities for pupils to meet their form teachers for discussions in their

form classes. Classroom assistants are present in the GC as co-teachers and offer a full level of support, including working with their pupils on individualised tasks in supervised breakout rooms, if required. Additionally, classroom assistants who are assigned to individual pupils have weekly one-to-one sessions with pupils on Google Meets and/or by telephone, adhering to the school's updated safeguarding protocols.

Impact

Ongoing monitoring during March to June 2020 had identified that communication with parents did not have the required impact; additionally, responses from parental surveys indicated that, for some, the general letters of concern had put a burden on family life that was already under pressure due to circumstances arising from the pandemic.

In response, the SIMS parent app was implemented in September 2020, with a view to its being well-established, should another lockdown occur, and given the identified need to target communications about individual pupils much more sharply. Senior leaders have found that the use of the parent app has further enhanced communication between school and home, with positive feedback from parents about improved connections with school during this academic year and the second period of lockdown. However the school also continues to encourage parents to email the school directly as this has proven to be the most convenient, most effective and quickest method of communication.

The impact of a staff development calendar which has been implemented since August 2020 continues, responsive to the further and emerging training needs and requests for support; as well as online pedagogy, training continues to focus on mental health, wellbeing and upskilling in ICT. Staff have welcomed the establishment of a staff GC which gives access to uploaded staff training, including audio and video guides, allows staff to share good practice and assists staff with trouble-shooting.

The school's self-evaluation processes have led to actions which enable staff during the current lockdown to monitor better, not only the engagement of pupils and the submission of work completed by year groups, class groups and individuals, but also the quality of the pupils' work and their progress in learning. These actions also help address issues of wellbeing, workload and manageability for pupils, parents and staff.

Since August 2020, heads of department have had access to all of the GC in their departments. Within the virtual environment, subject leaders can access the work of year groups, classes and individual pupils in order to monitor and evaluate the quality of the work set and submitted in their own departments, as well as aspects of the pupils' progression in learning.

The development of the Google Drive spreadsheet has made pastoral and academic information easily accessible to all staff and has led to a higher level of pupil engagement. Follow-up communications to parents are also recorded so that staff can see both how individual pupils are engaging across the curriculum and the levels and types of communication with parents and carers. Feedback from parents on the impact of this initiative during this second period of lockdown has indicated increasing consistency across the curriculum.

The access to ICT group, with its responsibility for digital access for all learners and teachers, including access to devices, connectivity and wider technical support, continues to review 'digital strain' among the school community. Currently all pupils at key stage 4 and post-16 have access to a device other than a mobile phone and the school continues to address need throughout the rest of the school. To date, the school has received 34 laptops and 39 Chromebooks through the Department of Education scheme and most recently, 73 Mifi appliances.

The school's leadership has found that the establishment of the five working groups and the continued work of the digital leaders have contributed significantly to the school community's readiness for this further period of remote learning. The senior leaders, working groups and staff continue to monitor the provision, then adapt and modify approaches informed by the school's self-evaluation processes, including feedback from pupils and parents.

Case Study 3: Lurgan College (March 2020 - February 2021)

School context

Lurgan College draws almost all of its pupils from the local area. The school enrolment is 464 pupils; as a 14-19 school, there are 244 pupils in Key Stage 4 and 220 pupils in sixth-form. On entry to the school, most of the pupils have attained at or above the expected level in literacy and numeracy. Just under one-tenth of the pupils are entitled to free school meals, 5% are on the special educational needs register at stages 1-4 and a small number have a statement of special educational need. There is a small number of newcomer pupils.

Challenge

Prior to March 2020, a whole-school structured approach to learning and teaching had been articulated in the school development plan and was being implemented across the school. Digital learning, led by a senior leader in charge of learning and teaching, placed a strong emphasis on the teacher's pedagogical goals, with 'How might technology help to achieve those goals?' as its central premise. Alongside the implementation of a 'bring your own device' policy, Google Classroom (GC) was being used.

At the beginning of the first lockdown in March 2020, the school recognised the challenge of supporting pupils remotely to: interact with teaching materials; apply their knowledge; and, access feedback in order to assess how much progress they were making. Although aware that staff were not equally ready to embrace remote learning, the school was reassured that, through interacting with a variety of teachers, all pupils would experience academic, pastoral and emotional support that would meet their individual needs.

Response

At the outset of the first lockdown, there was whole-school agreement on the following core principles for remote learning: that teachers needed to model the application of the content; that pupils needed to interact with that content; and, importantly, that through assessment, questioning and application, teachers needed to be able to measure how well the pupils assimilated the content.

A staff development plan was developed and quickly implemented. The Digital Learning Plan guided teachers through three levels of expertise as they delivered remote lessons during the period from March to June 2020, with pedagogical questions designed to facilitate teacher reflection, along with instructions and tips for effective delivery, as well as for maximising pupil engagement and the impact on learning. The school's leadership re-assured all teachers that the whole-school approach to learning and teaching provided a structure to inform planning for learning through technology, with implementation of the first level of the plan based on teachers' previous experience with GC.

Staff training was responsive and incremental, as teachers experimented further with educational technology and some staff observed lessons remotely, including the practice of a senior leader. Teachers championing practice within and across departments 'nudged' others along and as teachers grew in confidence, they expanded their use of online tools. Subject areas had autonomy over the most suitable approaches in their own disciplines. Encouragingly, exemplifying synchronous and asynchronous approaches illustrating the 'why, what and how' of online learning, has assisted teachers in choosing which approach to use and when.

Consultation was undertaken with staff and pupils in relation to child protection and safeguarding in a remote learning environment. Communication with the pupils about 'why this matters' established clear protocols for learning online and addressed a key question: that is, when should the pupils' cameras be switched on or off? Expectations for remote learning and protocols for safety online were also communicated to parents.

In August 2020, senior leaders and staff reviewed their experience of the period from March to June 2020. The school's self-evaluation processes involved: *looking back* at social and emotional impacts, effective pedagogies and engagement by the learners; *looking next* at getting ready for the term ahead and the likelihood of blended approaches; and, *looking forward* to a post-Covid context. The sharing of feedback from teachers across subject areas was crucial in shaping and informing planning for delivery in the academic year 2020-21.

As part of the review, senior leaders recognised that, while a minority of pupils struggled with their learning, others thrived. Therefore in order to be ready for any future periods of remote learning, senior leaders and staff considered, for example, what new and/or adjusted strategies they would bring forward to address the main causes of any non-engagement.

An increasing number of departments began the first term of 2020-21 with a clear understanding of how technology was helping to achieve their pedagogical goals. Staff devised and shared practical strategies that aimed for concurrent delivery of live lessons to pupils in school and others self-isolating at home. These strategies were implemented early in the first term and as required throughout the term to maintain continuity of learning and sustainability for teaching. For example, a learning log is used within subjects to record attendance and to organise and communicate work to the pupils, providing: an outline of work for the week ahead; links to resources; and, for pupils at home and in school, a record of the lesson resources and work to access when suitable: before, during or after the lesson.

By the second lockdown, in January 2021, every teacher had embraced some way to interact with their pupils remotely: for example, digital jotters provided opportunities for live monitoring, questioning, retrieval, and whole class or individual pupil feedback. Exemplifying practical strategies in considering the feedback loop from pupil to teacher and teacher to pupil has encouraged the use of rubrics and multiple choice questions on Google Forms for marking, feedback and assessment.

Impact

Throughout the remote learning journey since March 2020, pupil voice has been central in informing approaches, strategies and decisions in, for example, how the school timetable helps pupils structure their day when managing their learning from home. Consultation with pupils in the first term of 2020-21 highlighted that the ability to interact easily with their online learning led to increased motivation. As a consequence, strategies of metacognition and retrieval employed in the first term provided the pupils with opportunities to experience how these work using technology. The strategies encouraged pupils to demonstrate dispositions such as tenacity and the ability to think more flexibly, both of which are particularly important in the context of learning remotely. This building of resilience and 'training' of pupils throughout the first term, in readiness for any further periods of lockdown, focused on encouraging the development of additional skills and dispositions such as: self-regulation; individual ownership and responsibility for learning; and managing learning from home.

There have been high levels of pupil engagement in the current lockdown. The school's learning guidance team works with curriculum and pastoral teams to monitor closely those pupils identified as being at greater risk of not engaging with remote learning, then provides intervention strategies and access to advice and support as needed. Examples of the school's active support for these pupils, as a result of feedback from parents include: consolidation periods to help pupils 'catch up', provision of laptops and practical support for pupils with individual needs, including, for example, Vodafone SIM cards for data readily available for all pupils upon request.

The professional learning and capacity-building conversations developing in the school have progressed to middle leader evaluations of their provision based on the interdependent phases (Defining and Developing, Expanding, and Embedding) within the Leading Learners Strategy. The staff continue to look back, next and forward, and are identifying 'Covid-keepers' in their current online pedagogical practice to retain for future use. Drop-in training sessions for staff have continued in the second lockdown, leading to staff developing further their individual expertise and confidence in using technology. Regular use of synchronous approaches has increased significantly.

The senior leaders are linked to specific departments and have met subject leaders to discuss self-evaluation processes and establish action points based on their reflections. Feedback from teachers on levels of pupil interaction is being used to help progress closer evaluations of the quality of the pupils' engagement in remote learning by identifying the: evidence of interaction; quality of work produced; and, impact of feedback on the pupils' progress. To help senior leaders in their ongoing review of the impact of its approaches, a parental survey on the remote learning experience during this period of lockdown has recently been launched.

The senior leader in charge of learning and teaching, including digital learning, has collaborated with other teachers in schools across Northern Ireland in developing and showcasing remote learning practice across phases in the system, including areas of good practice as part of the Education Authority's Supporting Learning project.

Case Study 4: Sperrin Integrated College (March 2020 - February 2021)

School context

Sperrin Integrated College is located in Magherafelt and its pupils come from a wide catchment area, centred on the town, and extending across a wide rural area. Almost two-thirds of the pupils enter the school with the expected level in literacy and numeracy. The school enrolment is 570 pupils: 333 pupils in Key Stage (KS) 3, 175 pupils in KS 4 and 62 pupils in sixth-form. Just over one-quarter (149) of the pupils are entitled to free school meals (FSM). Fifteen percent of the pupils are at stages 1-4 on the special educational needs register, with a further 6% (32) holding statement of educational need. There is a small number of newcomer pupils.

Challenge

Prior to March 2020, there were varied levels of confidence and competence across the school in the use of educational technology. A small number of departments used subject-specific software at KS 3, with Google Classroom (GC) and Showbie being trialled with sixth-form. At the beginning of the 2019-20 school year, seven iPads had been provided for teacher 'ambassadors' who were exploring the use of Explain Everything and various quiz-based apps. At this early stage, the foundations of sharing practice in the use of digital technology had been established, with the 'ambassadors' demonstrating to peers.

In March 2020, in response to the increasing likelihood of school closure and a move to remote learning, GC was set up for all pupils in the week before the first lockdown, with staff development sessions provided, alongside familiarisation sessions for every year group. While there was insufficient time to develop fully a policy or strategy, expectations were established for a minimum standard of work, assessment, and feedback. A central challenge was consistency of delivery across the curriculum, based on a shared understanding of effective online learning, teaching and assessment.

Response

At the beginning of the lockdown in March 2020, senior staff compiled a range of practical 'how to' videos for pupils and parents which were posted on the school website, with guidance on, for example, how to submit work and how to send and receive a message/feedback online. A corresponding series of training videos was also developed for staff.

During the period from March to June 2020, the senior leaders' well-established links to specific departments enabled them to gain an overview of the provision for learning remotely across the key stages. All teachers were tasked with taking 'one step' by developing a more engaging, online learning resource. A protocol for video conferencing was agreed initially for meetings of staff. Online staff development continued to take place, informed by individual teacher feedback and departmental self-evaluation.

To inform a policy and strategy for remote learning, and processes for monitoring the quality of the online provision, the school drew upon several pieces of research, including from the Educational Endowment Foundation and Stranmillis University College, as well as emerging guidance from the Department of Education and the Education Authority. In April 2020, the school also conducted its own surveys of pupils, parents and staff. The findings of these

surveys complemented the research and highlighted as priorities: interaction with pupils as a central part of the learning process; feedback on assignments completed to engage pupils and help them improve the quality of their work; a more structured approach to the school day and to the setting of work, including deadlines for submission; and, an understanding that the rate of learning at home is slower than in school.

In June 2020, the senior leaders, along with the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO), other key staff and governors reviewed the initial processes for remote learning. This analysis was supplemented by information gathered through pastoral contacts with home and parental and pupil surveys and staff feedback. This evaluation process informed the basis of the school's draft remote learning policy, with staff development to enable departmental staff to 'test' online classrooms and tasks from the perspective of pupils' learning experiences. Additionally, staff piloted online activities, including setting tasks, preparing assessment rubrics, and creating quizzes or surveys. The 'test' online classrooms gave staff useful opportunities to experiment with online tools and strategies.

As a consequence of the March to June 2020 lockdown, the board of governors authorised the purchase of iPads and Apple TV devices for all staff, to accelerate the wider use of apps in learning and teaching; and as a 'contingency measure' in case another lockdown occurred in winter 2020-2021.

Starting from September 2020, with new, individual teacher online classrooms created, every teacher adopted an approach of setting at least one online task per week. Increased teacher access to digital technology also helped mitigate against any lost learning due to COVID-19 related absence. As a result, pupils who were self-isolating were able to engage in work, and both teachers and pupils continued to develop their digital skills. Additionally, some teachers used Google Meets (GM) to deliver live lessons for sixth-form pupils who were self-isolating.

An enhanced staff and pupil training programme in online learning was implemented between August and December 2020. The school's expectations regarding the quality of remote learning and teaching were aligned with the principles set out in its own learning and teaching policy and in a set of internal guidelines for 'Best Practice in Remote Learning'. Departmental self-evaluation in December 2020 indicated there was significant improvement in staff confidence in the use of apps for remote learning.

The approaches and practices adopted led to a more straightforward transition to remote learning starting in January 2021. While most learning has moved online, some individual pupils receive paper-based materials where limited connectivity or other circumstances dictate.

To build the confidence of pupils to play a more active role in lessons, the Jamboard function has been used increasingly across the year groups. Where only a small number of, or the same, pupils are willing to answer questions orally, the interactive whiteboard assists reluctant pupils to post comments and ideas, thereby increasing their individual participation in lessons. Additionally, this approach, coupled with question-based assignments, has allowed for a greater connection between peers. The recent introduction of breakout rooms in GM is also being piloted to support pupil interaction during live lessons.

During the current lockdown, the most vulnerable children and those with additional needs or barriers to learning have received individual learning plans with differentiated timetables and tasks. The school has provided a bespoke GC for newcomer pupils. Telephone calls home, particularly to current year 8 pupils, have helped ease levels of anxiety. Postcards with

positive messages are mailed regularly. The learning support assistants communicate with their pupils via email daily and attend GM live sessions as required. Weekly meetings of the whole staff, including special educational needs staff, pastoral teams and subject departments aid communication and early intervention to address non-engagement by pupils.

Impact

The remote learning policy was developed further for the new academic year 2020-21, supported by a targeted staff development programme, alongside training for pupils and parents. The policy established remote learning protocols, along with roles and responsibilities of post-holders, including clear guidance on safeguarding, for synchronous delivery of lessons. It is recognised that while this policy provides clarity and consistency of approach, it remains fluid and will be revisited regularly as new technologies and approaches are adopted by the school.

The June 2020 training sessions, coupled with staff completing a self-reflective questionnaire, were strategic in bringing about change in, and further development of, teacher practice, at individual teacher, departmental and whole-school levels. Remote learning approaches were embedded in whole-school, departmental and individual teachers' action plans from August 2020, in readiness for potential further lockdowns.

To aid monitoring, evaluation and review, senior leaders have continued to be linked to specific departments, with a dual focus on sharing good practice and trialling new software. The practice of a series of training videos for staff has been maintained during the current lockdown as new and emerging learning and digital strategies, including apps are being adopted by staff to support remote learning.

Consultation with parents and pupils had indicated that there was strong support for live lessons. Teachers with experience of delivering live lessons to sixth-form shared their experiences with their peers: more teachers are trialling this approach and synchronous lessons are now delivered with KS 4 classes and to a lesser degree, at KS 3.

Effective pedagogical practice remains central to remote learning in the College, so teachers continue to set clear learning intentions and build on the pupils' previous learning. There is an emphasis on teachers providing clear explanations and instructions which take cognisance of possible processing issues, as well as success criteria for each new assignment. To deepen pupils' understanding and introduce new learning, teachers have adopted a wide range of presentational strategies such as pre-recorded videos, using Explain Everything and screen casting software; visual and auditory materials; and GM live lessons.

Completed work is often showcased in What a Good One Looks Like (WAGOLLS) examples on GC to celebrate individual pupils' achievements, as well as helping other pupils improve the standard of their work. While more challenging in a remote environment, the use of WAGOLLS allows for both peer and self- assessment and encourages pupils to improve the quality of their work, enabling them to make appropriate progress. Assignments to promote critical thinking are also used by several departments, with pupils able to see, and interact with, the responses of their peers on GC. Pupils are given feedback on their work through whole-class commentaries on the classroom stream, through GM, rubric-based comments, individual teacher comments on work submitted in the private comment function or oral feedback using Mote. These approaches have increased pupil engagement in learning, interaction with peers and motivation.

The co-ordinated approach by pastoral teams, working with families, helps identify issues leading to lack of engagement and helps pupils overcome barriers to learning: the proportion of pupils not engaging has fallen significantly between the first lockdown and the current one: currently only a few pupils have not engaged in any lessons.

Systems and protocols are continually reviewed by school management. While assessment of pupils' work is taking place and feedback is being provided, the senior leaders have identified, as a priority in the embedding of remote learning, feedback which is both meaningful to pupils and sustainable for staff. In February 2021, the SLT conducted another survey with pupils, parents and staff to evaluate the effectiveness of learning and teaching during the lockdown. The findings, cross-referenced with pupil engagement data and departmental and teacher reflections on the learning process, continue to inform further whole-school development.

Case Study 5: Thornhill College (March 2020 - February 2021)

School context

Thornhill College draws pupils from all parts of the city and from the surrounding rural area. The school enrolment is just over 1406 pupils: 611 pupils in Key Stage 3, 407 pupils in Key Stage 4 and 398 pupils in sixth-form. On entry to the school, data on the pupils' prior attainment shows that most of the pupils have attained at or above the expected level in literacy and numeracy. Twenty-six percent of the pupils are entitled to free school meals, 4% are on the special educational needs register at stages 1-4 and a small number have a statement of educational entitlement.

Challenge

Since 2018, with the establishment of its educational technology strategy group, the school has prioritised the use of digital technologies across the curriculum to enhance pupil engagement, learning and teaching. Under the direction of this guiding group, the school had already been using Google Classroom (GC) and other online learning platforms prior to March 2020.

At the beginning of the first lockdown in March 2020, the staff moved swiftly to build on the existing practice. The main challenge for the school was to ensure that staff members felt confident and were competent in the use of the online platforms to support learning and teaching through both asynchronous and synchronous lessons, in addition to their use as a communication tool, and that there was a consistent approach across the curriculum. The main challenges reported by the pupils were: connectivity or access to devices; the volume of work; uncertainty about what lay ahead; and isolation from their teachers and peers. Parents' queries and concerns were about devices, connectivity and, importantly, the lack of a familiar lesson structure and teacher direction as pupils had to manage their own learning through the GC platform.

Response

During the first lockdown, between March and June 2020, the school reported positive interaction and feedback through a wide range of consultations with pupils, parents and staff, including through surveys and the school's own social media forums. The school was pro-active in responding to feedback from pupils and, as a result, followed up by modifying the work accordingly and providing a range of support and intervention strategies. Regular telephone calls were also made to vulnerable pupils and those pupils identified as being at greater risk of not engaging with remote learning. The school was also responsive to parents by providing them with support for their children's learning journey: devices were given out; letters were sent home; and a range of guidance and support material was made available on the school app and school website, to update parents on the developments and departmental activities.

The school produced a restart recovery plan in August 2020 and an interim one-year school development plan, both informed by self-evaluation. Whole-school policies were aligned with all current health and education guidance, with a key area of focus being consistency of experience across the curriculum and across the whole school.

Senior leaders also planned for any future periods of remote learning, the first of which came earlier than expected, in October 2020, as a result of an increasing number of positive cases in the school. By this stage, significant staff development had been undertaken on the use of such online platforms as Microsoft Teams, notably for progressing from the recorded, asynchronous, materials provided during the first lockdown to wider involvement in 'live', synchronous lessons. Furthermore, through the school's bespoke learning hub, the staff were given access to step-by-step guidance, exemplar material and video tutorials on using an extensive range of online learning tools. These support materials are user-friendly and produced in-house, so they are customised to the school's context. Teacher professional learning was complemented by making a wider range of software available to staff and by investing in such hardware as visualisers to help departments share the intricacies of calculations and styluses for iPads to enable all staff to give handwritten feedback.

During the current lockdown, from the beginning of January 2021, teachers have been using a variety of approaches, including recorded lessons, live lessons and provision of work for pupils to complete. The school began by issuing its own 'What to expect from Thornhill during remote learning checklist' alongside a personalised adaptation of EA's document on 'Readiness for continuity of learning' which was tailored to the needs of the Thornhill pupils. Safeguarding protocols were consulted upon, agreed and established with pupils, staff and parents at the beginning of Term 1, 2020-21: as a result, staff feel more secure in remote delivery and all departments have been using Microsoft Teams to engage with pupils through synchronous or 'live' lessons.

Senior and middle leaders have been sensitive to the pupil voice. The original safeguarding principle of pupils' microphones and cameras being muted during lessons was reviewed following feedback from instances of delivery of learning to pupils self-isolating and by teachers self-isolating. Pupils in literacy-based subjects also articulated the importance of being aware of the tone and wider context in video sessions and their proposal to keep microphones and cameras on for longer during lessons was adopted. As a result, pupils feel more engaged and have a richer experience of whole-class discussion, with the ability to take account of non-verbal cues.

Almost all of the pupils are also engaging in a range of asynchronous activities on GC, including presentations with voice-overs, as well as receiving regular typed and handwritten feedback from staff, along with recorded oral comments through, for example, Vocaroo and Mote. These apps have helped teachers work more efficiently and give more direct, meaningful feedback that supports pupil progress in learning. However, staff have been conscious that extended screen time can be a barrier to learning, so they have also provided hard copy resources to allow for handwritten responses to complement the pupils' online work.

Parents have again been supported with their children's learning journey; curriculum delivery booklets and regular Remote Learning Parental Newsletters were sent home in response to the parental feedback during the first lockdown and highlighting key staff members such as the designated child protection teachers and the special education needs co-ordinator (SENCo).

A small number of vulnerable pupils, who were not engaging at home, are attending school and are being supported with their learning: they and their families appreciate this provision. The learning assistants, together with the SENCo and senior leaders, share a digital diary and timetables; they maintain contact with the pupils with additional needs through individual meetings and/or phone calls. If necessary, staff call at pupils' homes, observing social distancing, and provide support materials, particularly for pupils with additional needs.

Impact

The establishment of the education technology strategy group and the subsequent provision of the blended learning hub have been significant steps in the staff's increasing readiness for online learning and teaching. Ongoing staff development has increased the competence and confidence of the staff: the school's monitoring confirms that all year groups are benefitting from a wide variety of online learning and teaching experiences and that there is a consistent approach across the curriculum. Pupil engagement and levels of motivation have significantly increased since the first lockdown to almost all (90+%) engaging across the key stages. Regular communication and consultation with pupils and parents have allowed teachers to reflect, modify and amend planned learning and, when necessary, provide additional individual support.

Senior leaders have been appointed as 'remote learning links' to facilitate communication with specific departments and with pastoral teams during this current lockdown. This close co-operation at academic and pastoral levels has enabled the senior leadership team to gather feedback on current practice, reflect on the remote learning process and begin to monitor more closely the level of engagement by pupils. Through this feedback, for example, senior leaders have identified, among others, that: the online teaching and assessment in history is working well, with examples of good practice celebrated on the school's Twitter account; the English department has been successfully using breakout rooms where the pupils can discuss pieces of writing and then give feedback to the group as a whole; fewer pupils are experiencing issues with sound/listening tracks in modern language lessons, where Vocaroo has been used to check pronunciation and, as a result, more pupils have been engaging, including with the language assistant; there are extremely high levels of engagement (nearly 100%) in pre-recorded and live physical education lessons across the key stages; engagement and willingness to contribute within Microsoft Teams is very good across all year groups in technology and design; in health and social care, the staff are able to monitor the pupils' work more closely; and, the individual support for pupils with additional needs is being monitored by the learning support department, the learning support assistants, with the SENCo and senior leaders.

There is a continued focus on monitoring the quality of the work provided and completed, including the impact of teacher feedback on the pupils' progress.

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