**Principles and good practice for effective distance learning**

This document attempts to bring together some principles that define effective remote distance learning. It draws on a mixture of formal academic research and anecdotal evidence about good practice in schools – what’s working well.

**General points**

1. **Prioritise engagement with vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils.**

The biggest challenges facing a distance learner are motivation, engagement and self-regulation. These challenges are all exacerbated by disadvantage.

1. **Ensure that all pupils have equal access to the learning offered by the school.**

This may well include providing devices and internet access, but in itself this is not sufficient. Provision of equipment needs to be accompanied by direct and ongoing support.

1. **Track levels of engagement.**

So that support can be provided for pupils and families that do not engage.

1. **Ensure there is a consistent approach across years and curriculum departments.**

And try to ‘keep it simple’. Don’t over-complicate. Select a learning platform that best meets the needs of pupils and staff.

**Teaching & learning**

1. **The characteristics of effective distance teaching are no different to those of regular teaching. However, the distance provides additional challenges that planning needs to consider.**
2. **Look for all available opportunities to promote ‘teaching presence’.**

Pupils benefit from the highest possible level of interaction with teachers – they need a strong sense of the teacher’s ‘virtual presence’. The teacher should communicate warmth and an interest in pupils’ well-being and academic progress. For example, using Google classrooms, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, podcasts, videos etc.

1. **Try to give pupils opportunities to interact with their peers.**

These help to motivate pupils and improve learning.

1. **Ensure that activities maximise pupils’ cognitive engagement, promote active learning and minimise the risk of passivity.**

For example:

* activate pupils’ prior learning
* frame learning within a context and make links to prior learning
* teachers should model work to pupils
* don’t underestimate the value of feedback to pupils to encourage and guide learning
* there should be frequent, low-stakes assessment that encourages pupils to recall and apply their knowledge
* pupils should frequently evaluate their own work.

1. **Don’t put too much emphasis on self-paced or pupil-directed learning.**

These can lead to disengagement. Use a balance of closed tasks and open-ended projects.

1. **Provide pupils with strategies that help them to be able to work independently.**

For example, prompt pupils to reflect on their work or consider the strategies they will use if they get stuck. Continue to develop pupils’ thinking and reasoning skills. Disadvantaged pupils are likely to particularly benefit from explicit support such as checklists or daily plans.

1. **Consider which aspects of the curriculum you will teach.**

Some aspects are more difficult to teach remotely, consider retaining these until face-to-face teaching is possible. Adjust the curriculum, rather than changing it - decide what to keep and what to cut. Focus more on consolidating and revisiting work where possible.

1. **For Early Years and KS1, retain a focus on early reading.**

This will support access to the rest of the curriculum. Encourage pupils to read aloud in a range of situations. For example, share videos of teachers/other adults/celebrities reading stories, nursery rhymes and poetry to expose pupils to standardised English and to support language development.

1. **Be aware that pupils with SEND may need greater or different support.**

Ensure that EHCP plans still relevant and adapt if necessary.

**Emotional & mental health**

1. **Continue to support pupils’ emotional and mental health.**

For example:

* share videos of leaders and staff leading assemblies/giving talks to foster a sense of being part of the school community
* plan lessons to explore feelings, self-esteem and developing levels of motivation
* set non-academic challenges for pupils (e.g. treasure hunts, maths walks, building dens, etc)
* promote physical activity and regular sleep patterns
* encourage pupils to engage in a daily act of kindness.

1. **Set up lines of communication that enable staff and pupils to stay in touch.**

This may be more regular for disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils. This will also support safeguarding.

**Supporting staff**

1. **Support staff by providing:**

* clear guidance about safeguarding protocols when engaging in distance teaching
* access to quality-assured curriculum resources
* training in how to use different virtual platforms to support learning
* access to virtual communities of teachers for support and sharing effective practice.

1. **Support staff by ensuring they:**

* limit the amount of time that they will be ‘virtually available’ to pupils and parents
* set routines for themselves, allocate regular breaktimes and keep home and school separate
* are organised in such a way that workload can be shared whenever possible.

**Supporting parents & carers**

1. **Endeavour to engage parents and carers in home-based learning.**

But recognise that some (disadvantaged and/or vulnerable) pupils lack effective family support. For example:

* for younger pupils, provide activities to promote positive relationships within families
* provide parents with possible timetables to support structure, but with elements of flexibility
* survey parents/ask for feedback to evaluate what is working and what needs to be amended.

**Sources of evidence**

This summary draws from:

* the following three reports published by the Education Development Trust ([www.educationdevelopmenttrust.com](http://www.educationdevelopmenttrust.com))
* What are countries doing that already use remote learning extensively? What can we learn from them?
* What does the research suggest is best practice in pedagogy for remote teaching?
* An overview of emerging country-level responses to providing educational continuity under COVID-19: What’s working? What isn’t?
* the Educational Endowment Foundation ([www.educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk](http://www.educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk)) report
* Remote Learning: Rapid Evidence Assessment
* articles and resources from Cat Scutt’s work in March 2020 at the Chartered College of Teaching.