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Department for Education

Guidance

Providing remote education: guidance for schools

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Applies to England

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Summary

This is non-statutory guidance from the Department for Education on providing high- quality remote education in cases where it is not possible, or is contrary to government guidance, for some or all pupils to attend school.

This guidance is for

This guidance is for school leaders, school staff, trust leaders, trust boards and governing bodies in schools in England. The guidance may also be useful for parents and carers, and local authorities.

This guidance only applies to pupils of compulsory school age, and the word ‘pupil’ in the guidance only means pupils of compulsory school age.

Introduction

This document provides guidance to schools on providing high-quality remote education when it is not possible, or is contrary to government guidance, for some or all pupils to attend school.

Remote education should only ever be considered as a last resort where a decision has already been made that attendance at school is not possible, but pupils are able to continue learning.

Prioritising attendance

Attendance is essential for pupils to get the most out of their school experience, including for their attainment, wellbeing, and wider life chances.

Remote education should not be viewed as an equal alternative to attendance in school. We expect schools to consider it only as a last resort when the alternative would be no education, and only after it has been established that the pupil is, or will be, absent from school. In such cases, remote education can have the benefit of allowing absent pupils to keep on track with their education and stay connected to their teachers and peers.

Schools should consider the approaches set out in this guidance and work closely with pupils, parents, carers, and any other relevant partners such as the local authority, to remove any barriers to attendance as detailed in the school attendance guidance (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance).

Pupils absent from school and receiving remote education still need to be marked as absent in the register. Schools must continue to record pupil absence in the register in line with the School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024 (https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2024/208/contents/made) and attendance guidance, using the most appropriate code.

Scenarios where remote education should be considered

Circumstances where it might not be possible for pupils to receive in person education fit into 2 broad categories:

- school closures or restrictions on attendance, where school access for pupils is restricted
- individual cases where a pupil is unable to attend school but is able to learn

School closures or restrictions on attendance

Providing remote education does not change the imperative to remain open or to reopen as soon as possible. Every effort should be made to ensure pupils can be taught in person by attending their school or if appropriate and possible, attending a safe alternative site.

After exploring all options to ensure the school remains open to all pupils, there may still be some exceptional occasions when school leaders or the

local authority decide it is not possible to open safely, or where opening would contradict guidance from local or central government. If restricting attendance for pupils is the only viable option, schools should consider providing remote education to help pupils stay on track with the education they would normally receive.

It can be helpful for schools to have a plan in place that outlines any remote education procedures for teachers, parents, carers and pupils. Remote education plans are particularly useful during emergency closures where the decision to close can often be made at short notice.

Schools should consult DfE emergency planning guidance (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/emergency-planning-and-response-for-education-childcare-and-childrens-social-care-settings) in the event of school closures or restrictions on attendance.

Individual cases where a pupil is unable to attend school but is able to learn

There should only be limited circumstances where a pupil is unable to attend school but is able and well enough to continue their education remotely. These circumstances should only involve a short-term absence and might include pupils:

- recovering from short- term infectious illnesses
- preparing for or recovering from some operations
- recovering from injuries where attendance might inhibit recovery

In some exceptional cases, these circumstances might also include pupils whose attendance has been affected by a special educational need or disability (SEND) or a mental health issue. In these circumstances, after the pupil's absence from school has been established, schools should consider providing pupils with remote education on a case-by-case basis. This should be part of a plan to reintegrate back to school, and only when it is judged that providing remote education would not adversely affect the pupil's return to school.

Guidance for schools on mental health issues affecting a pupil's attendance (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mental-health-issues-affecting-a-pupils-attendance-guidance-for-schools) has further support on dealing with mental health and attendance challenges.

Provision of remote education should be made as a short-term solution allowing absent pupils to keep on track with their education and stay connected to their teachers and peers. Pupils with long-term medical

conditions or any other physical or mental health needs which affect attendance may need more support to continue their education.

Working with the local authority
Under section 19 of the Education Act 1996 (s.19 duty) local authorities are responsible for arranging suitable education for children of compulsory school age who, because of health or other reasons, would otherwise not receive a suitable education.

Statutory guidance on education for children with health needs who cannot attend school (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-for-children-with-health-needs-who-cannot-attend-school) sets out that local authorities should provide education as soon as it is clear that the child will be away from school for 15 school days or more during the school year, whether consecutive or cumulative.

The s.19 duty sits with the local authority. Schools should work closely with them and any relevant medical professionals to ensure children with health needs are fully supported at school, including putting in place individual healthcare plans if appropriate. This may involve, for example, programmes of study that rely on a flexible approach which include agreed periods of remote education.

What to consider when providing remote education to individual pupils
When a pupil is absent, the school should always seek to overcome the barriers to attendance and provide support for the pupil to attend, regularly reviewing any barriers with:

- the pupil
- parents or carers
- if appropriate, a relevant medical professional

Remote education should not be viewed as an equal alternative to attendance in school. Providing remote education during a pupil's absence does not reduce the importance of bringing that absence to an end as soon as possible.

In the limited circumstances when the school decides to use remote education for individual pupils when they are absent, the following should be considered:

- Ensuring mutual agreement of remote education by the school, parents or carers, potentially pupils, and if appropriate a relevant medical professional. If the pupil has an education, health and care plan or has a social worker, the local authority should also be involved in the decision.

- Where remote education is being used as part of a plan to reintegrate back to school, putting a formal arrangement in place to review its efficacy regularly, alongside identifying what other support and flexibilities can be put in place to help ease the pupil back to school at the earliest opportunity.
- Setting a time limit within which the period of remote education provision should be reviewed, with the aim that the pupil returns to in person education with the required support in place to meet their needs.

Good practice

Schools are likely to have established remote education plans in place already that have worked well for them when attendance in school has not been possible. If schools choose to use established remote education plans, these should be kept up to date so they remain relevant to the school's current context.

A good remote education plan should be kept under review in consultation with staff and should demonstrate a consideration of any additional burdens that providing remote education may place on staff and families.

Work provided during periods of remote education should aim to be high quality, meaningful, ambitious, and cover an appropriate range of subjects to enable pupils to keep on track with their education.

Where pupils have access to appropriate devices, remote education might include recorded and / or live direct teaching time, as well as time for pupils to complete tasks, reading, and assignments independently, depending on their age and stage of development.

Online video lessons do not necessarily need to be recorded by teaching staff at the school. If preferred, high quality lessons developed by external providers such as Oak National Academy (https://www.thenational.academy/) can be provided instead of school led video content.

Those requiring further guidance to develop remote education provision should consider the following:

- Provision being ready for pupils to access as soon as reasonably practicable, though in proportion to the length of absence and expected disruption to education.
- Providing remote education that is equivalent in length to the core teaching time pupils would receive in school where possible, being mindful of the individual needs and circumstances of the pupil and their families. These include, but are not limited to:

    - Consideration of age, stage of development, and independent study skills.
    - Any SEND or other additional needs the pupils might have.
    - The pupils' home environment, which includes having a suitable place and opportunity to study.
    - Screen time, making reasonable allowances for adequate breaks for pupils and staff during digital remote education.
    - Any significant demands on parents' or carers' help or support. Younger children, especially pupils in primary schools and some children with SEND, might require high levels of adult involvement to support their engagement with remote education, which can make it a particular challenge for these groups.
- Working to overcome barriers to digital access where possible for pupils by, for example:
    - Auditing access to devices and connectivity across the school as part of wider emergency planning.
    - Distributing school-owned devices accompanied by a user agreement or contract if and where necessary and possible.
    - Supporting families to find appropriate internet connectivity solutions if and where necessary and possible.
- If required, ensuring equal access through the provision of printed resources, supplemented with other appropriate forms of communication between the school and pupils.
- Planning opportunities for regular feedback and interaction with teachers and peers during the school day.
- Identifying a senior leader with overarching responsibility for the quality and delivery of remote education. Responsibilities may include consulting with staff and relevant leaders within the school or trust to develop any remote education plans, ensuring they are relevant and up to date.
- Having an understanding that children can be at risk of harm inside and outside of the school, inside and outside of home and online, and having systems for checking, daily, whether pupils are safe at home and engaging with their remote education.

Digital education platforms

Digital education platforms (also known as virtual learning platforms, virtual learning environments and virtual classrooms) can be used to enable continued access to teaching resources. The cloud-based features enable

teachers to embed remote education provision within school planning, as opposed to setting it as a separate event if required. Digital education platforms can also facilitate teacher-pupil interaction, including feedback and assessment, as well as enabling pupils at home to stay connected to their peers in school.

Schools using digital education platforms should keep them secure and up to date and steps should also be taken to ensure staff remain trained and confident in their use.

Schools should also consider taking the necessary steps to train staff on the accessibility features their chosen digital platforms have available.

Providing information about remote education

Schools should consider sharing any up-to-date procedures and plans in place with parents, carers and pupils in order to provide ongoing clarity and transparency about what to expect from remote education if it is required.

It is up to schools to decide how they share remote education information with parents, carers and pupils. Some schools continue to maintain pages on their websites providing information and guidance about remote education provision and links to any trusted external education websites. This is not a requirement, but it can be helpful for parents or carers and pupils to access if required.

Free school meals and remote education

Where pupils eligible for benefits-related free school meals are receiving remote education, schools should work with their school catering team or caterer either to provide good quality lunch parcels or to issue a food voucher if available. This will ensure that eligible pupils continue to be supported for the period they are unable to attend school. Guidance on free school meals for schools and local authorities (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/free-school-meals-guidance-for-schools-and-local-authorities) has more information on free school meals.

Remote education during a suspension or permanent exclusion

As outlined in the suspension and permanent exclusion guidance (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-exclusion), headteachers should take steps to ensure work is set and marked for pupils during the first 5 school days of a suspension or permanent exclusion.

Remote education should not be used as a justification for sending pupils home due to their misbehaviour. Any time a pupil is sent home due to disciplinary reasons, this is a suspension and must be done in line with the law on disciplinary suspensions. This is the case even if they have been asked to log on or access online education while suspended. After a period of off-site direction or suspension, a pupil is expected to attend full-time.

The school's legal duties to pupils with SEND remain in force.

Provision for pupils with SEND

If pupils with SEND are not able to attend school and require remote education, their teachers are best placed to know how their needs can most effectively be met to ensure they continue to access the curriculum. The school needs to put in place an appropriate curriculum, teaching and support that will enable the pupil to continue learning effectively.

Some pupils with SEND may not be able to access remote education without adult support. Schools should work collaboratively with families and put arrangements in place that allow pupils with SEND to access remote education successfully. In this situation, decisions on how provision can be delivered should be informed by relevant considerations including the support families will require and types of services that the pupil can access remotely.

The duty under the Children and Families Act 2014 (https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/contents/enacted) for mainstream schools to use their 'best endeavours' to secure the special educational provision called for by a pupil's special educational needs continues to apply when remote education is in place.

If a pupil has an education, health and care plan, whether they are in a mainstream or special school, the school must work with the local authority to ensure all the relevant duties under the 2014 Act continue to be met.

The duties under the Equality Act 2010 relating to disability and more broadly continue to apply, such as:

- to make reasonable adjustments
- not to discriminate

- to have due regard to the statutory objectives in the public sector equality duty

It may be challenging or impossible for the school to deliver remotely the kind of approach that it does in the classroom, for example the provision of certain differentiated resources and the support of a Teaching Assistant. If this is the case, the school must instead consider, in cooperation with the local authority (if the child has an EHC plan), other ways in which it and the local authority can meet its statutory duties, working closely with the parents or carers.

Delivering remote education safely

Keeping children safe online is essential. The guidance on safeguarding and remote education (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/safeguarding-and-remote-education-during-coronavirus-covid-19) provides information on what schools should do to protect pupils online during any period of remote education. The guidance includes a collection of resources which includes support for:

- safe remote education
- virtual lessons
- live streaming
- information to share with parents and carers to support them in keeping their children safe online

Schools should ensure their safeguarding and child protection policies are up to date and reflect:

- the potential need for remote online education provision
- the fact that pupils might be learning both online and in the classroom

Further information

Attendance

- Working together to improve school attendance (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-school-

attendance)

- Children missing education (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-missing-education)
- Mental health issues affecting a pupil's attendance: guidance for schools (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mental-health-issues-affecting-a-pupils-attendance-guidance-for-schools)

Emergency planning and response

- Emergency planning and response for education, childcare, and children's social care settings (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/emergency-planning-and-response-for-education-childcare-and-childrens-social-care-settings)

Alternative provision

- Education for children with health needs who cannot attend school (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-for-children-with-health-needs-who-cannot-attend-school)
- Alternative provision (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/alternative-provision)

Pupils with medical conditions at school

- Supporting pupils with medical conditions at school (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supporting-pupils-at-school-with-medical-conditions--3)

Safeguarding

- Keeping children safe in education (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2)
- Safeguarding and remote education (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/safeguarding-and-remote-education)

Children with SEND

- Deaf friendly remote learning: a checklist for teachers (https://www.ndcs.org.uk/blog/deaf-friendly-remote-learning-a-checklist-for-teachers/)
- SEND specific resources for learning from home (https://www.techability.org.uk/resources/aiding-learning-from-home/)

Advice to help schools understand the Equality Act

- Equality Act 2010: advice for schools (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/equality-act-2010-advice-for-schools)

Suspensions and permanent exclusions

- Suspensions and permanent exclusions guidance (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-exclusion)

Guidance for parents

- Parental responsibility measures (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/parental-responsibility-measures-for-behaviour-and-attendance)
- NHS guidance: is my child too ill for school? (https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/is-my-child-too-ill-for-school/)
- Illness and your child's education (https://www.gov.uk/illness-child-education)
- Learning to talk: 3 to 5 years - Start for Life (https://www.nhs.uk/start4life/baby/learning-to-talk/3-to-5-years/)

Ofsted guidance

- What's working well in remote education (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/whats-working-well-in-remote-education/whats-working-well-in-remote-education)
- School inspection handbook (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-inspection-handbook-eif/school-inspection-handbook)

Free school meals

- Free school meals: guidance for schools and local authorities (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/free-school-meals-guidance-for-schools-and-local-authorities)

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