Guidance and advice for teachers in the event of further full or partial school closures

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into

Irish National Teachers' Organisation
Cumann Múinteoirí Éireann

"*Intelligence is the ability to adapt to change*" – Stephen Hawking.

Recent months have seen a great change in the way we work, the way we learn and the way we communicate. Teachers across the country, and indeed on a global level, have altered their practice drastically to ensure continuity of education for students at all levels. Schools must be mindful that in the context of the pandemic and the evolving situation we are experiencing, further closures are possible. Future school closures may be localised, rather than a nationwide lockdown, and may be announced at short notice. Therefore, schools must plan for such scenarios and ensure that they can react in a timely manner and ensure that teaching and learning continues if pupils and teachers are forced to work from home.

The first step

Schools must first decide whether they will use technology or rely on hard copy materials should the situation arise where they find themselves faced with a sudden school closure.
If technology is the preferred method for the continuity of teaching and learning, schools will need to decide on the online platforms they will use, ensure pupils have access to required devices and establish what continuous professional development is required for teachers. Consideration should also be given to parents and provision of training in any new online platform.

Using online platforms

There are a range of online platforms and/or tools designed for use in an education context. Some schools may have engaged with such resources prior to the Covid-19 school closure, but for others this was an entirely new move, which had the potential to exacerbate stress felt by pupils, teachers and parents at an already extraordinarily challenging time.

However, now that schools have time to prepare and some degree of experience, they will be in a better place to decide **what online education platform best suits** the needs of their school community.

To assist schools in this regard, **PDST** have prepared **support materials**, exploring the advantages of the various online tools. Schools should take time to select the most appropriate platform, that will enable them to limit the impact of school closures by giving learners **access to materials, support, classwork and feedback.**

By utilising the platforms listed above, teachers can make a host of educational resources and exercises available to pupils, who can then study and complete assignments from home. Some of these digital portfolios can empower students of any age to create, reflect, collaborate and share. Teachers can use

these as a means of communicating with parents and sharing photos of events during the school day. Many of the online platforms are effective in facilitating assessment as children can upload work samples and get feedback from their teacher on it.

For some pupils, an inability to access devices and internet connection will be barriers to online learning. If children do not have a suitable digital device to use for remote learning, schools should endeavour to provide the necessary equipment on a short-term basis. If the required devices are not available, schools can explore the option of using the ICT grant (April 2020) to purchase the resources.

Where online platforms are not an option

Where access to ICT is problematic and online learning cannot take place, schools may explore other ways of facilitating teaching and learning. Preparing hard copies of resources and activity packs is another option.

Learning packs could be delivered to pupils' homes by post, but if this incurs a significant expense, teachers may be able to organise collection from the school building. A collection / drop off point at the school (or on the school grounds if restrictions are in place that prevent access to indoor spaces) would be useful to allow parents return completed packs at the end of a given week for assessment by the teacher.

Communication

Good communication is central to successful remote learning, and schools must ensure that an **agreed channel of communication** is in place to allow pupils engage fully with content when they are working from home.
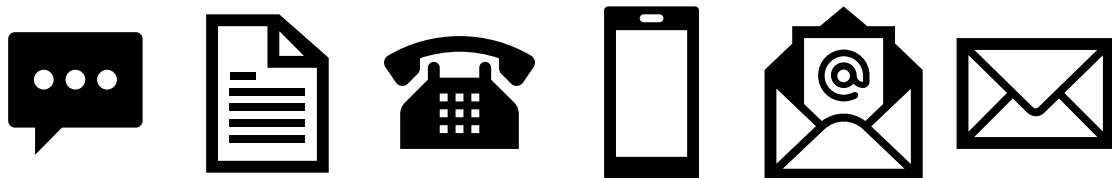
Parents must be aware of teachers' expectations relating to the level of support that is necessary to facilitate their child's learning from home. The **frequency of contact** between teacher and parents should be **agreed** at the outset to ensure consistency at a whole-school level.

Effective **two-way communication** is imperative as children will require timely, constructive, and informative **feedback** from their teacher. Pupils must be able to share their learning activities and allow teachers to monitor their learning progress so that they can plan appropriately.

Planning activity packs

We cannot predict when we may be faced with an enforced school closure, so teachers will aim to have resources prepared in advance and ready to go should an announcement be made that a class will be sent home for a self-isolation period, localised lockdown or national closure as happened in March of this year.

Some advice for teachers in planning for such scenarios:

- Prepare a pack for each child in the class (e.g. call this their "**personal pupil pack**").

- Ideally this will be a sturdy plastic **wipeable box with a lid** that is easy to store within the classroom. (The virus that causes COVID-19 survives for longer on hard surfaces so these items should only be used by one child and can be cleaned daily with anti-bacterial household cleaning products).

- Within this box each **pupil should have his/her own**
    - ✓ pencil-cases
    - ✓ plastic (wipeable) pocket folder
    - ✓ at least one copybook / notebook with a wipeable cover or plastic covering
    - ✓ at least one book from the school library (with wipeable covering)
    - ✓ laminated 100-square

    For older children

    - ✓ Geometry set / mathematics resources
    - ✓ Laminated list of verbs / key vocabulary for Gaeilge
    - ✓ Dictionary
    - ✓ Spare, unused workbooks that a school may have from previous years

    For infants

    - ✓ Mini-whiteboard and marker
    - ✓ Marla / playdough stored in a small, sealed plastic bag
    - ✓ Colouring pencils /crayons

- Teachers, in their **fortnightly / short-term plans** should include a list of suggested learning activities and tasks that could be assigned to pupils in the case of an emergency class closure. Where relevant, a couple of **photocopiable resources /revision tasks** should be distributed to pupils in an A4 plastic sleeve each week/fortnight and this can be added to their box.

- Teachers might also instruct children to store any **unfinished learning activities** in their box.

- In the **A4 plastic pocket** within their box, teachers can include **general activities** and tasks (appropriate to the class level) such as:

    - ✓ Book review template
    - ✓ News report / article template
    - ✓ Letter writing template
    - ✓ Cloze procedures (Líon na bearnaí as Gaeilge)
    - ✓ Written comprehension / Léamhthuiscint
    - ✓ Maths problems
    - ✓ Quizzes
    - ✓ Crosswords or word searches
    - ✓ Handouts based on SPHE topics and wellbeing

    For younger children

    - ✓ Colouring activities
    - ✓ Match and classifying/sorting exercises
    - ✓ "My news" template
    - ✓ Laminated key vocabulary / sight words

- The **notebook** mentioned earlier as one of the components of the pupil box could serve as a "**free writing**" copy. Children can use this for creative composition and may write freely about any topic of choice, and in any genre. This is a simple idea that can be continued in the home setting at any time over the course of the school year. Children have the autonomy to decide what they wish to write about and there are a variety of different styles that they can practice:

    o Diary writing (personal accounts)
    o Recount writing (a report of an event)
    o Fiction (short stories)
    o Instructional writing (e.g. rules of a game *the children can even come up with a new idea and create their own game!)
    o Poetry (Limericks, acrostic poems etc.)

- **Revision material** would be recommended as children can work independently with minimal interruption to parents/guardians at home.

- **Longer-term project work** will be useful as children can work on this at home using their research and inquiry skills.

- These pupil packs, which can be stored and **ready to go**, will be short-term and allow children to continue learning and working until other elements are set up (the afore-mentioned online platforms etc.).

Useful resources

INTO have previously compiled a list of useful resources and tips for teachers when setting learning tasks that pupils (including ideas for infant classes, older children, and SEN) can complete from home. It is important to strike a balance between online and hands-on, practical activities so teachers may find it useful to include some of the ideas for learning in the home environment (helping in the kitchen, outdoor activities, sorting and classifying, making lists, shape recognition) on a laminated sheet for parents – especially parents of pupils in infants classes.

https://www.into.ie/2020/03/18/tips-and-tricks-home-learning/
https://www.into.ie/2020/04/20/support-for-teachers-at-primary-level/

Some points to consider when preparing activity packs and resources:

- ✓ Where practicable, books should be covered in transparent, wipeable plastic covering that can be cleaned with a suitable household cleaning agent between uses.

- ✓ Pupils should be encouraged to perform hand hygiene before and after using any shared item within the classroom and teachers must continue to reiterate this message and encourage children to follow this routine at home.

- ✓ Children should be encouraged to make careful choices and minimise handling of books.

- ✓ Teachers may segregate class library books into separate plastic boxes (preferably with lids) and allocate a box to each "pod" within the class bubble.

- ✓ Where possible, children should have one specific notebook / copybook for homework exercises and the use of plastic, wipeable covers is advised to enable cleaning before and after handling.

Summary

In summary, the hands-on, practical nature of teaching and learning at primary level, is challenging to replicate outside of the classroom environment. Finding and using an effective means for remote learning and communication will be challenging, but schools should

- ✓ Use systems that are already in place in the school that teachers, parents and students are familiar with, for example Microsoft Teams, Aladdin Connect, the school website and the school/class Twitter page.

- ✓ Offer CPD for teachers in use of digital technology as well as guidance to parents where required

- ✓ Maintain collegiality and collaboration among teaching staff to pool expertise and areas of interests

- ✓ Avail of outlets such as the Irish educational community on Twitter (#edchatie and #edshareie) for advice and ideas on teaching and learning in a remote context.

- ✓ Establish a clear, agreed, consistent channel of communication with parents which will be used should the school find itself faced with a sudden school closure.

- ✓ Ensure that the Acceptable Usage Policy is reviewed and updated (guidelines on devising an AUP are available on the Webwise website which can be accessed here)