**INTO ADVICE ON WORKING FROM HOME:**

**GETTING THE BALANCE AND MAKING IT SUSTAINABLE**

(October 2020, updated January 2021)

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**INTRODUCTION**

INTO know that all our members want to do the right thing by their schools and pupils in these very difficult circumstances. DE and the employing authorities should ensure that teachers and school leaders’ wellbeing is prioritised along with the children they teach.

***This advice refers mainly to teachers and principals in traditional school settings. However, please note this advice applies to ALL INTO members, whether in schools or other approved education settings.***

Teachers who have children who have not yet reached school age and have no available childcare must not bring those children to school with them and should work from home.

Teachers have been identified in the current guidance as Key Workers and can access the facility for supervised learning of their children in the child’s own school. Where this provision is not available and teachers cannot arrange safe alternative childcare arrangements, they should advise their Principal (or Chair of Governors in the case of Principal members) that, unless their presence is absolutely essential to the safe operation of the ‘supervised learning’ in their place of work, that their school should allow them to work from home.

Where teachers are working from home the advice remains:

* **A day at home should becommensurate with a normal school day, but do not try to replicate a school timetable;**
* **Do as much or as little as you and your family can cope with;**
* **You are a teacher, not a superhero;**
* **The parent/carer of your pupil remains the child’s primary educator;**
* **Do not judge yourself against what you may hear others are doing, all schools/classes and teachers are different;**
* **Where schools have not afforded you the opportunity to prepare effectively for a further lockdown this is an emergency situation;**
* **A reasonable expectation of you is what you can get done while juggling the reality of your life in these current circumstances.**

Reference [**Printout Sept 2020**](https://www.into.ie/app/uploads/2019/07/2020_09_Printout.pdf) **p.5 working from home; avoiding burnout, p.4 safe use of display screen equipment. Additional articles are available relating to COVID-19 issues.**

**General Principles/Guidance:**

* Members/teachers working from home must have their own health and caring responsibilities taken into account, and the expectations of all concerned should be reflective of this.
* One key learning point that has emerged worldwide during the current pandemic is that schools should not expect to make similar progress to taught lessons in any given period of remote learning.
* Personal circumstances will vary and may impact on the number of hours a teacher can reasonably be expected to be engaged in preparation for and delivery of remote learning. INTO asks that schools update advice to parents on these matters to inform and manage parental/carer expectations. The provision by schools of general guidelines to teachers are more realistic in the current situation rather than schools seeking to be prescriptive or precise in their requests of teachers. Schools and members/teachers should be sensitive and mindful of potential difficulties faced by parents in trying to ensure that their children are engaged in the work that is provided by schools. What is sent home should be an offer of work that might be useful if circumstances allow for it to be done by pupils, rather than a demand for completion. Sufficient and specific non-teaching time must be left aside during normal working hours.
* Time should be set aside for members/teachers to engage in professional development opportunities at their own discretion and of their own choosing. Due to the current circumstances, prescriptive and time bound exercises in relation to CPD are not practical and are to be avoided.
* The format of remote learning should be aimed at reducing input and improving output.
* Members/teachers should bear in mind that this is a temporary measure and that remote learning can never be a fully effective substitute for face-to-face teaching and learning.
* Where members/teachers have a particular management responsibility/ Teaching Allowance, schools should factor in time for them to do this if the work is business critical.
* The unique challenges of this situation mean that work undertaken by members/teachers during this unprecedented period cannot and should not be used in relation to effective teacher procedures either now or in the future.
* To avoid burnout and fatigue members/teachers are advised to take regular breaks throughout their working days.
* Schools should have a rota of teachers available for face-to-face supervised learning. Teachers not on the rota, and working from home, should provide differentiated remote learning activities for the pupils in their class.
* Should you have any other concerns regarding working from home please contact your INTO School Representative or Northern Committee Representative in the first instance for further advice and guidance (see INTO diary and [website](https://www.into.ie/ni/about/our-people/committees/northern-committee/)).

**Principal members**

* Day-to-day management and administrative responsibilities of school leaders should continue only where they are business critical at this time, but it must be recognised this will impact on their available time to deliver remote learning where they are teaching principals. Where necessary teaching principals should contact their Employing Authority to request additional admin days.
* Principal members should be mindful of their own caring responsibilities in school and at home and ensure their Board of Governors have realistic expectations regarding their own workload at this time.
* There needs to be a hiatus on some aspects of school development planning and similar activities. Schools should concentrate on those things that are business critical and are necessary to the safe operation of schools.
* The conditions imposed by COVID-19 should not impose negatively on a principal or teacher’s terms and conditions.

**Communications inclUDING Conference Calls**

* Methods of communication between teacher, pupils and parents/carers should only be through secure platforms already established as safe and agreed methods used by each school.
* Members/teachers must ensure that all communication is of a professional standard and communication should be appropriate to the audience for which it is intended. All electronic communications will be discoverable at a later date.
* Communications with parents/carers should take place only where absolutely necessary and should be sensitive to and mindful of the wider context of the global pandemic we are in the midst of.
* INTO members should not routinely be required to contact pupils who appear not to be engaging with online activities.
* Essentially, spending time telephoning pupils has the potential to detract from the time that teachers actually have to remotely engage with pupils. This additional workload could prevent them from fully carrying out the tasks to the required standards.
* While this may not be a GDPR issue, INTO have always requested its members to be cautious when contacting pupils at home, especially from their own homes or personal mobile phones.  Normally there are specifically nominated home/school liaison teachers who are assigned this duty and INTO would expect that this continues.
* INTO must also be mindful that this practice of telephoning pupils at home, coupled with the perceptions of both pupils and parents, may have child protection issues.
* There could also be a potential security breach for teachers using their own phone numbers, computers/devices and IPS addresses to contact students from home.
* INTO always advises its members to be aware and sensitive of pupils’ family circumstances which may not lend themselves to affording remote learning equipment. This will avoid embarrassment for parents/carers where access to online materials may be limited or non-existent.
* In addition to the above point INTO always advises it members that in some situations parents and carers may have difficulty helping young people with the work set.
* During this stressful time INTO members are advised to be careful not to knowingly add to family pressures that may exist in some of our isolating households.
* However, INTO does, because we represent a professional body whose main aim is educational achievement, accept that a gentle reminder to the parents of pupils, who may suffer a detriment if they are not engaging, be needed.  This contact should only be with prior school approval. INTO would prefer this duty to be carried out by email.
* Where lack of engagement or other legitimate concerns regarding child protection and so on are apparent, teachers should refer these to the appropriate member of staff as identified in the relevant school policy.
* Schools should ensure parents and pupils are made aware that it is unreasonable to expect replies both immediately or outside of normal working hours and to be mindful of the time it may take teachers to reply to all parents/carers and pupils. The same applies to communications between management and staff and vice versa.
* Staff conference calls should be during normal working hours, with the agreement of the staff involved. Account must be taken of the availability of the necessary hardware, software and broadband access of staff members.  Such calls should be treated as a meeting and have an agenda provided in advance of the call.
* Teachers must be mindful of the school safeguarding policy and it should be followed in regard to all contact remote or otherwise. Communication with pupils should follow agreed school policy. INTO notes *“OECD has stressed that the success of all pupils during this period and particularly those from disadvantaged groups is linked to maintaining a close relationship with their teachers.”*

**ICT**

* Individual privacy of members/teachers, online security, GDPR and safeguarding must all be considered before delivering online tutorials, materials, sharing of files, emails and other communications. Should these present any issues for members they should raise concerns with their employer and with their INTO School or Northern Committee Representative.
* Schools should be mindful of the requirements of the [Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1992](https://www.hseni.gov.uk/articles/working-safely-display-screen-equipment) when requesting that staff work from home. The provisions of the [Disability Discrimination Act](https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/protection-against-disability-discrimination) also apply to staff required to work at home and reasonable adjustments may need to be agreed.
* Members’/teachers’ skills in ICT, access to hardware/software, equipment and broadband were all highlighted in INTO Remote Teaching & Learning survey in June 2020 ([September 2020 Printout](https://www.into.ie/app/uploads/2019/07/2020_09_Printout.pdf) p.13) as areas of concern and varies from home to home. Training and resourcing needs should be identified by school management and delivered.
* Pupil access to the work which teachers have prepared and sent home either as hard copies or electronically will vary from home to home and postcode to postcode. Broadband speed, sophistication of available hardware, numbers of appropriate ICT devices, workspace and other necessary facilities in households must be considered.

It is essential that in line with the [Restart Guidance](https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-school-and-educational-settings-northern-ireland) schools have been working on a contingency plan for delivery of remote learning and continue to allocate time, taking due heed of the guidance on teacher time budgets in [TNC 2020/01](https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/TNC%202020-1%20Agreement%20Between%20Management%20and%20Trade%20Union%20Side%20of%20the%20Teachers%20%20Negotiating%20Committee.pdf).

* Online lessons take a number of forms. Schools should have a robust policy agreed with staff and signed up to by pupils, parents and staff before embarking on all forms of online teaching. The access to online learning will be dependent on provision of equipment and broadband and will change due to locality. INTO notes that there is no compelling evidence to indicate that such synchronous learning is more effective at improving pupil outcomes than asynchronous approaches through for example pre-recorded lessons.

Teachers are reminded that they cannot be pressurised to undertake live streaming, they can say no and use alternative teaching methods which they prefer in meeting the learning needs of their pupils.

As highlighted by British Association of Teachers of the Deaf, live lessons present issues for pupils and teachers who have additional needs. Access for all should be prioritised.

* Particular cognisance must be taken of Nursery and KS1 pupils and those with additional needs and their dependence on adult support to complete most or all tasks.

**PREPARATION/ MARKING/ ASSESSMENT:**

* INTO notes that schools' normal assessment policies have been developed in circumstances when pupils are on site regularly. It is highly unlikely these will be able to be applied without amendment to learning that takes place remotely. Rather the main focus of assessment activity during the current period of remote learning for Years 8-11 should be on levels of engagement and well-being and formative assessment for learning.
* Members are advised to be careful in preparing work for pupils that they do not place unrealistic demands upon themselves or generate an unreasonable amount of work for their pupils. In providing work to pupils, members should bear in mind that activities aimed at consolidating and re-enforcing previous learning are the most meaningful in the current circumstances.
* Marking during this period should remain professional and be primarily pastoral.
* Expectation in relation to marking/assessment of work should be limited to a few selected pieces of work each week. These pieces should be determined by the teacher’s professional judgement.
* In post-primary settings priority should be given to those pupils who are working toward accredited qualifications. This too must be reasonable and manageable.
* In the event of school closures, due to Government direction of lockdown members/teachers should refer to the prevailing public health and government guidance on travel and working from home.
* During any periods of working from home, members are instructed not to engage with any monitoring and associated activities such as book scoops, observations.
* Any work provided during school closures must not be used for the purpose of monitoring or evaluation either now or in the future.
* Requests for records of work must be reasonable and take account of workload implications and personal circumstances of members of staff in regard to their access to ICT resources and relevant health and safety and employment legislation which applies at home. Requests should also be accompanied with a clear reason for each request.
* In addition to previous advice in respect to work completed at home, INTO reminds members that there is no expectation that all work provided or suggested to parents must be marked either during the period of school closure or when schools reopen. More focussed marking on limited and select pieces of work is better than a high volume of marking across all key stages.

**Other Professional Tasks:**

**IEP writing**

* An IEP has a number of targets, individual to a child, written by the teacher based on assessment and where possible, discussion with the pupil, following identification of areas of need. The IEP is evaluated, may be reported on, and in turn will identify the next targets for the next term for the teacher to be teaching the pupil.   
    
  Due to sudden changes in the school term and/or pupil attendance many IEPs will not be fully delivered. Teachers should evaluate what they can of the most recent IEP from the work that was done, there should be no expectation of the IEP targets being completed. Going forward modifications or continuation of targets may be required.

***Teachers like lots of people, are feeling very worried and stressed right now. It is ok to feel like this no one has all the answers. INTO are mindful of the increased stress and strain that this situation is placing on the mental health of our members.  To this end INTO has provided some*** [***advice and guidance***](https://www.into.ie/ni/2020/03/24/teachers-take-care-2/) ***on this which can be found on our website.***

***We will continue to press the Department for increased support for members’ health and wellbeing during and after the COVID-19 crisis.***

***Members are also reminded that they can avail of existing counselling services through*** [***INSPIRE Wellbeing***](https://www.inspirewellbeing.org/workplaces/contact-us)***.***

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**In providing this advice INTO have considered all available guidance including the following:**

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/Updated%20Circular%20Remote%20Learning%20-%20January%202021%20%28002%29.pdf>

[**Circular 2020/05**](https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/Circular%202020-5-Guidance%20for%20Schools%20on%20Supporting%20Remote%20Learning.pdf) Guidance for Schools on Supporting Remote Learning to Provide Educational Continuity

[**Circular 2020/06**](https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/circular%20curriculum%20planning%20202021.pdf)Curriculum Planning 2020/21 (23 June 2020)