

Meeting of:	Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committee
Date of Meeting:	Thursday, 10 June 2021
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Learning and Culture
Report Title:	Development in Blended and Remote / Distance Learning Practice in Vale of Glamorgan schools
Purpose of Report:	To update Members on development in blended and remote learning practices in schools during autumn 2020 and spring 2021
Report Owner:	Director of Learning and Skills
Responsible Officer:	Carys Pritchard, Principal Improvement Partner
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	Councillor Lis Burnett, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Education and Regeneration
Policy Framework:	The recommendations of this report are within existing policy framework and budget
<p>Executive Summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This report, which is shown in Appendix A, summarises the findings from meetings undertaken between Improvement Partners from the Central South Consortium (CSC) and school leaders and staff in the Vale of Glamorgan during the autumn term 2020 and spring term 2021. • During this time there was a strong focus on approaches to continuing learning and blended learning practices, and how schools were providing support for learner wellbeing and engagement. • The report outlines findings in relation to developments in provision, wellbeing, support for vulnerable learners, engagement of pupils and parents as well as quality assurance activities undertaken by schools. • The report also includes a number of ‘cameos’ that exemplify provision from a number of schools across the Vale of Glamorgan. 	

Recommendation

1. That Members consider the findings of the report and the approaches developed by schools to ensure the continuing of learning and support for learner wellbeing and engagement.

Reason for Recommendation

1. To advise Members of the support provided to learners between September 2020 and March 2021 in relation to the continuity of learning, wellbeing, and engagement.

1. Background

- 1.1 During the autumn term 2020 and spring term 2021, the Improvement Partners' work with schools focussed on approaches to continuing learning and blended learning practices, and how schools were providing support for learner wellbeing and engagement.
- 1.2 The report attached in Appendix A outlines the findings of this work. The content of the report is based on virtual and face to face meetings with school leaders and staff.

2. Key Issues for Consideration

- 2.1 This report comments on the main findings from meetings undertaken between Improvement Partners from CSC and schools in the Vale of Glamorgan during the autumn term 2020 and spring term 2021.
- 2.2 It outlines work undertaken by schools during autumn 2020 and spring term 2021 to support the continuity of learning.
- 2.3 It sets out a summary of main findings under the categories of provision, wellbeing, support for vulnerable learners, engagement of pupils and parents, as well as quality assurance activities undertaken by schools.
- 2.4 Since the report has been written, support for schools in relation to remote and blended learning has continued through ongoing reflection work with improvement partners, sharing best practice webinars, engagement in professional learning programmes and support for targeted schools.

3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?

- 3.1** The Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 (“the 2015 Act”) requires the Council to think about the long-term impact of their decisions, to work better with people, communities and each other and to prevent persistent problems such as poverty, health inequalities and climate change.
- 3.2** Support for learners contributes to the Council's Wellbeing Objectives drawn from the Corporate Plan 2020-25. There is specific alignment with our wellbeing objectives to work with and for our communities and to support learning, employment and sustainable economic growth.
- 3.3** This report recognises the distance learning approaches and the focus on wellbeing used by schools to maximise access to learning and minimise inequalities for vulnerable pupils.
- 3.4** The report recognises the wide range of support provided by schools for families including information sharing sessions, training / tutorials, meetings to address any concerns, socially distanced visits to support parents with setting up IT equipment and connection to the internet.
- 3.5** This report outlines how partnership work has supported schools to develop and facilitate effective blended learning provision, recognising the need for education provision to be flexible and responsive to future needs.

4. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

- 4.1** There are no financial implications resulting from this report.

Employment

- 4.2** There are no employment implications resulting from this report

Legal (Including Equalities)

- 4.3** There are no legal implications resulting from this report.

5. Background Papers

None.

Development in Blended and Remote / Distance learning practice

Context

This report summarises the findings from meetings undertaken between Improvement Partners from Central South Consortium (CSC) and school leaders and staff in the Vale of Glamorgan during the autumn term 2020 and spring term 2021. During this time there was a strong focus on approaches to continuing learning and blended learning practices, and how schools were providing support for learner wellbeing and engagement. It outlines findings in relation to developments in provision, wellbeing, support for vulnerable learners, engagement of pupils and parents as well as quality assurance activities undertaken by schools.

Remote learning: Autumn 2020

During the autumn term 2020, and into the spring term 2021, all schools have continued to amend aspects of their remote learning.

During the autumn term, time was used to develop pupils' and practitioners' digital skills. In nearly all schools, significant time was invested in staff professional learning and engagement in action research, in order to ensure familiarity with learning platforms and tools to support remote learning. As a result, staff confidence in delivering remote learning has increased.

During the autumn term 2020, staff in Palmerston Primary undertook action research work on developing feedback practices using various online tools. This resulted in the school deciding to use the Google Classroom rubric tool to provide formative feedback to pupils. This online tool is now being used consistently across key stage 2 and evidence demonstrates that pupils use the feedback well to amend and improve their work and to undertake additional challenges. Palmerston's journey in relation to the action research and impact of the tool has been captured in a CSC case study: (<https://www.cscjes.org.uk/search?query=Palmerston&strict=false&popupUri=%2FResource%2F16b46359-dae4-4820-b139-86b5580a70fd>).

The autumn term was also used well to consolidate pupils' digital skills, again to ensure familiarity with learning platforms and digital programmes. For example, schools integrated the use of specific digital programmes as part of classroom activities and homework tasks were set using the learning platforms.

In Wick and Marcross Church in Wales Primary, the school operated a 'flipped classroom' model during the autumn term. Some pupils worked with the teacher live in the classroom, whilst others worked online, with support, on the distance provision. As a result, nearly all pupils are very confident and fluent in accessing work on the school's digital platform.

During the autumn term, a few schools also supported parents to familiarise themselves with the school's chosen learning platforms. For example, Pendoylan Church in Wales Primary provided a tutorial for parents / carers to familiarise them with the learning platforms and their functions.

Remote learning: provision

During spring term 2021, schools have built effectively on previous practice in developing their remote learning provision.

Overall, schools make appropriate use of their chosen learning platform. In the foundation phase, many schools use Seesaw. In key stage 2 and in the secondary schools, the learning platform in most cases is Microsoft Teams or Google Classroom.

Across the primary sector, there is a strong focus on the provision for wellbeing, literacy and numeracy. Schools are also ensuring a focus on topic / thematic work. Schools have aimed to ensure that pupils have access to a broad range of activities that align closely to the experiences that they enjoy in school.

Since January 2021, there is increasing use of live contact with pupils in most primary schools. This provision is varied across schools and is dependent on the needs of pupils, parents and staff. In some primaries, live contact is used for 'catch-up' and wellbeing sessions. This usually happens on a whole class basis or in smaller groups. Increasingly in primary schools, there is an element of live teaching as part of the provision, particularly to support literacy and numeracy. In a few primary schools, a more extensive provision is provided with schools trying to incorporate more creative and thematic work as part of their live teaching provision. There are examples of schools providing 'drop in' sessions during the day for pupils to check their work and any uncertainties with their class teacher. Live sessions are also being used extensively in primary schools to support whole school acts of collective worship and celebration events.

In the few primary schools where the use of live contact is limited, the schools make use of asynchronous video materials created by the school. Many parents have expressed that this is their preferred provision as it allows flexibility for them to support their children with the work at a more convenient time.

In the secondary sector, during the firebreak and from January 2021 onwards, there has been a significant increase in the use of live teaching. Again, there are slight

variables across the local authority, dependant on needs of pupils, parents and staff. In a few schools, such as Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Morgannwg and St Cyres School, most of the lessons are now live contact with the pupils. In other secondary schools, there is more of a blended approach with a mix of live lessons, webinars and time for personal responses to tasks.

Wellbeing

Pupils' wellbeing remains a key priority for schools as part of their remote provision. To support pupils' wellbeing, a range of approaches have been developed by schools. Examples included:

- Regular telephone calls by school staff
- Promoting wellbeing activities such as mindfulness sessions and yoga as part of the remote learning provision
- Regular physical exercise activities and daily challenges for pupils
- Promotion of activities to be undertaken outdoors, for example nature walk, bug hunts
- Activities to promote healthy eating including home cooking tasks
- Wellbeing and physical challenges for pupils and their families to complete
- Range of extra-curricular activities provision for pupils
- Ongoing use of established interventions such as Thrive and Emotional Literacy Support (ELSA) in schools, with activities provided online or through targeted session in schools
- Opportunities provided for pupils to meet socially online, for example, Gwenfô Church in Wales Primary created a Google Playground Group for pupils to socialise in a more informal manner
- Responding to findings from pupil wellbeing questionnaires, for example, Victoria Primary established an online friendship group for pupils who noted that they felt lonely

Barry Island Primary is trying to maintain a whole school approach especially regarding pupil wellbeing. They have for example, invited families to enter a 'Valentine's day competition' based on friendship. The school's Thrive practitioner has begun working with small groups of learners (five at a time) who staff have identified as being vulnerable in terms of their wellbeing. These weekly sessions focus on developing learners' perseverance, self-esteem and resilience.

For the week commencing 8 February 2021 Ysgol Sant Baruc decided to change their usual online provision. During this week a very successful 'Bwrlwm Baruc' was held where pupils had the opportunity to join a wide range of activities with a particular focus on wellbeing and creativity. Pupils had the opportunity to join two different online activities daily from a menu of different options. The range of workshops included a scavenger hunt, nature craft, Lego and Minecraft activities,

singing and making musical instruments, sketching, yoga, and a wide range of physical education (PE) challenges. In addition, during the week the school set themselves a challenge to walk the length the Welsh coastline and invited pupils and staff to walk around their local area and share their steps and pictures with the school. Feedback from pupils, parents and staff to 'Bwrlwm Baruc' has been overwhelmingly positive, and the school successfully managed to walk the equivalent of the distance around the coast of Wales.

Supporting the wellbeing of staff has also been a priority for headteachers and senior leaders. Several strategies have been set up by schools to ensure that staff are not isolated including the establishment of WhatsApp groups, regular briefings or meetings, professional learning opportunities focussing on wellbeing and social events.

Y Daith established a 'pyramid' communication system whereby members of the senior leadership team (SLT) contact teachers and teachers contact learning support assistants (LSAs) on a weekly basis. This weekly contact was always undertaken during a video call in order to establish a purposeful face to face check in.

There was a strong focus on leaders' wellbeing during meetings with improvement partners. In addition, Central South Consortium funded emergency coaching and support to be made available for all headteachers and deputies across the region.

Supporting vulnerable learners including those with additional learning needs

Nearly all schools have placed a specific emphasis on supporting families with vulnerable pupils and those with additional learning needs. This has included more regular communication with these families and trying to find purposeful ways to support them.

Schools have supported these pupils through:

- Daily phone calls
- Live 'check in' sessions with key staff members or the additional learning needs co-ordinator (ALNCo)
- Differentiated work folder / learning activities on the learning platform
- Video calls from 1 to 1 LSAs to support work and wellbeing
- Ongoing use of established interventions with activities provided online
- Targeted sessions provided in school
- Additional catch up meeting with the pupils and parents
- Home visits
- Loan of additional resources e.g. IT equipment, paper copies

Stanwell School have set up a successful online learning group to address a small number of pupils who were poor attenders due to school-induced anxiety. The 'Stanwell Online Learning' group was set up end of the autumn term to address persistent non-attendance pupils who had not returned to school from September 2020 for a variety of different reasons. There are currently 12 pupils across Years 8-11 in this group. These pupils are offered the choice to engage only in their one or two favourite subjects and have a separate Google Classroom just with one member of staff who facilitates this by liaising with the different subject teachers. They then have a video call each day from the staff member who supports and encourages them and provides more work for them to keep progressing. This group is intended as a gradual reintegration programme for complex case pupils. These pupils were all previously non-attenders, but significant input from pastoral staff and careful liaising with both parents / carers and pupils has resulted in strong progress being made in a short period of time.

Engagement

During the first lockdown, engagement figures for schools in the Vale were variable. There is now a stronger focus on tracking the engagement of pupils, and schools have a clearer picture of engagement figures. Schools are also developing a clear understanding of acceptable level of engagement by pupils.

Leaders at Stanwell School have instructed teachers to indicate if they have had no contact, no attendance at live lessons or no indication that work has been attempted in any lesson that week. The Year Tutors then record pupils who have been identified by five or more subject teachers that week as a concern and this is the school-defined 'satisfactory engagement' measure.

Schools track engagement through a variety of ways including the monitoring of logins and downloads, and through the tracking of submission of work. This is supplemented by use of pupil and parental surveys.

Llandough Primary has developed a tracker to demonstrate pupils' engagement with the literacy, numeracy and online work. There is a strong focus on monitoring the engagement of specific groups of pupils, for example additional learning needs (ALN), pupils eligible for free school meals (eFSM) and English as an additional language (EAL). Provision is being amended by the school in response to the findings, and the tracking enables the school to focus on engaging targeted pupils.

Schools are also supplementing tracking information about engagement with the use of pupil and parental questionnaires.

Pencoedtre High have produced a pupil engagement tracker in order to raise engagement with students and parents. Staff were asked to use the School Information Management System (SIMS) 'effort' marksheet on a fortnightly basis to comment on engagement with online work. Pastoral leads and their support teams then identify where pupils are not engaging and make the necessary phone calls / emails or other interventions to increase the commitment of the pupils and their parents. Following data entry from all staff in departments, Leaders of Learning also have an overview of engagement of all year groups. The school produces an engagement report to parents on a fortnightly basis that provides a summary of a pupil's engagement with online learning activities. Feedback from parents is encouraged through engagement in a brief questionnaire about provision. To support the process, online form tutorials have been setup to discuss and remove barriers with pupils and offer encouragement.

Leaders are following up on low engagement in a number of ways:

- Staff visit families of concern, ensuring that learners are seen and further action can be taken if necessary
- Invite pupils who are having difficulties engaging with the learning to attend school to receive additional support.
- Further equipment has been shared with families who struggle to access learning due to poor technology
- Support offered for parents in the use of the learning platform
- Meeting with parents to discuss any concerns e.g. socially distanced walk (Cadoxton Primary) and virtual coffee morning (Holton Primary).
- Encouragement to participate through the use of Dojo points and prizes.

In Oak Field Primary there is a 'no excuses' culture around engagement, which is carefully tracked. If a pupil misses the daily class meeting, an email is sent. If there is no response by the end of the day, the class teacher rings home and resends the link to missed learning. Home visits are made to harder-to-reach families. If a pupil is not engaging, they are classed as 'vulnerable' and expected to attend school in-person. This resulted in significantly improved engagement figures for online learning during the spring term, from 55% in the week beginning 4 January 2021 to between 88%-92% during February 2021.

Supporting parents

In order to address barriers to learning at home, schools have been in regular contact with parents / carers to support them with home learning. This has included:

- Information sharing events for parents to explain arrangements and to address any concerns

- Specific training / tutorials for parents on the learning platforms
- Information and guidance materials for parents / carers on school website
- Meetings with individual parents to address specific concerns
- Socially distanced visits to support parents with setting up equipment and connection to internet
- Online parents' evening

In Holton Primary, a 'Task and Finish' group (including two parent governors) meet termly and have provided leaders with beneficial information that has helped the school improve its blended learning offer. Also, an additional email account has been set up to enable parents / carers to access direct support from the school's newly established 'tech team'. As well as offering technical assistance, this team provides beneficial advice to parents / carers, for example, signposting to online tutorials and guidance.

At Cogan Nursery around 38% of children come from a minority ethnic background or have English as an additional language. There is a strong focus on stories as part of their blended learning provision. Staff have carefully chosen stories that are available in different languages on video sharing websites in order to make learning activities accessible to all and to enable parents to engage with the blended learning work.

Victoria Primary School has established a successful online parent wellbeing forum. Parents and carers can ask questions or raise any queries with the school via the forum, and staff provide a respond. This has ensured an effective and timely communication channel between the school and the home.

In Oak Field and Cadoxton Primaries, successful 'celebrations of learning' conferences have been held between class teachers, pupils and parents / carers. Conferences were held during the school day with 15-minute slots for individual pupils over a period of two weeks. During the conference, pupils talked about their learning, shared what they are particularly proud of as well as their next steps. Discussions were also held regarding the continuity of learning during lockdown. Parents / carers have valued this opportunity to discuss progress and to see evidence of their child's work.

Self-evaluation of blended and remote learning

A number of key activities have been undertaken by schools to review provision and to identify best practice and inform improvement planning. This has included:

- Informal discussions with pupils and parents / carers
- Informal discussions with staff
- Analysis of questionnaires undertaken with pupils, staff and parents
- Analysis of engagement figures
- Scrutiny of teachers' planning for remote learning
- Scrutiny of pupils' work
- Attendance at live sessions and online lessons
- Use of CSC documents to support self-evaluation of practice

Albert Primary used the 'Guidance for schools in remote learning' document produced by CSC to support their self-evaluation of practices.¹ The document identifies key priorities for learning. With each priority there are several questions to consider and identified resources to support development further. The questions were discussed in detail by members of the senior leadership team and findings shared with the school improvement partner.

Schools have responded to the findings and feedback received and have amended provision. For example, feedback has resulted in:

- Increase in live contact time and additional 'check-in' opportunities for specific groups of pupils in a few primary schools.
- Reduction of screen time e.g. Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Morgannwg introduced one afternoon a week where pupils worked off screen to address concerns about screen fatigue.
- Reduction in length of live sessions in secondary schools and the development of a more 'blended' approach.
- Increase in wellbeing activities, for example, St Helen's Roman Catholic Primary introduced 'Wellbeing Wednesday' in order to engage pupils and their families in wellbeing activities offline.
- Enhanced provision being provided online for specific group of pupils, for example, additional support provided to support pupils' reading.
- Refining feedback processes in order to ensure that pupils responded to teachers' comments, for example, Ysgol y Bont Faen adapted their provision through introducing Mote. This enabled key stage 2 pupils to have more meaningful oral feedback from their class teacher which resulted in further improvements to their written work.

¹ <https://www.cscjes.org.uk/blended-learning>

- Further support for parents in Welsh medium schools who do not speak Welsh, for example, staff at Ysgol Dewi Sant filmed bilingual presentations to ensure all parents / carers could support their children with their work.

In Victoria Primary, Year 2 staff noticed that there was a dip in engagement in check-in sessions on Wednesdays and this was also reflected in the number of tasks completed mid-week. Children were also looking less engaged in live sessions on Wednesdays. On reflection, they identified that the natural excitement of seeing friends after the weekend was wearing off as the week progressed, pupils were beginning to be fed up with the routines and whole situation of lockdown, and online learning was taking its toll. An email communication was sent to parents / carers outlining what they had noticed and how they were going to address the issue. Staff were clear that normal timetabling wasn't working, and light relief was needed. A project was set for afternoon sessions. Based on the theme of Beatrix Potter, pupils were to create Mr McGregor's garden in any way possible. Clear communication with parents got them on board, and with the teachers' enthusiasm, pupils were excited for home learning again. Valuable time was spent celebrating each other's work and children took great pride in sharing their work. A small change of approach made a significant impact on the engagement, enjoyment and quality of work produced by pupils.

A similar situation emerged in Reception class, with a dip in engagement figures at the end of the week. Staff responded by introducing 'Fancy Dress Friday', singing and dancing sessions and introducing popular games which again impacted positively on engagement.

During the spring term 2021, the work of the improvement partner has focussed on remote learning. There has been an emphasis of working alongside school leaders and seeing, where possible, first-hand evidence. This has included leaders and improvement partners undertaking joint monitoring activities looking at examples of planning, scrutiny of pupils' work, attending online sessions, discussing with staff, and undertaking listening to learners' activities.

In Oak Field Primary, a listening to learners activity was arranged for the improvement partner with the senior leader with responsibility for teaching and learning and the Year 2 class. During the activity, the improvement partner had the opportunity to discuss with pupils their remote learning experiences. Pupils were keen to talk about their work and share how their opinions had led to change in the provision. The parents / carers of the pupils were also present in the meeting and they shared their positive views on the school's blended learning provision with the improvement partner.

In St Cyres School, the headteacher, with full support of the teaching staff, instigated a number of live online lesson visits to include the improvement partner

and members of the senior leadership team. The lesson visits covered a range of subjects both across the curriculum as well as all year groups. Following each lesson, a professional dialogue ensued between the teachers, the headteacher, improvement partner, and in some cases members of the senior leadership team. This discussion allowed teachers to outline how they have been able to develop their practice while focusing on the engagement and progress made by pupils during the live lessons.

Next steps

1. CSC to continue to provide ongoing support and advice for schools across the region on blended and remote/distance learning.
2. CSC to continue to provide support to teachers to develop their skills and confidence.
3. Improvement Partners to continue to support schools, where appropriate, in monitoring the quality of provision for blended and remote distance learning.
4. CSC to continue to share effective practice in relation to blended and remote / distance learning.