

PRE-SCHOOL, PRIMARY, POST-PRIMARY, SPECIAL AND EOTAS

Considerations for planning and self-evaluation in the academic year 2020-21

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Context

Across June 2020, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) met with reference groups of curricular co-ordinators, Heads of Department and leaders from a cross-section of schools across Northern Ireland to seek their views on the challenges of remote learning and teaching, and what approaches they might take in moving towards the return to school. The resulting [phase-specific publications](#) presented the views of settings and schools in June 2020; additionally a [Safeguarding Remote and blended learning: challenges and approaches](#) paper was published.

All pre-school settings¹, primary, post-primary, including Irish-medium and Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) settings and special schools across Northern Ireland are preparing for the 2020-21 academic year, moving towards the return to school². The return is in the context of the Minister of Education's announcement of 6 August 2020³ that all schools will return on a full-time basis.

[The Department of Education has published information and guidance](#), including around the practical and logistical arrangements for the re-opening of schools. In addition, voluntary and private pre-school settings need to consider the guidelines from the Department of Health.

This interim paper provides considerations based on a number of key Department of Education (DE) publications and illustrates how schools may continue to link the school development planning and self-evaluation processes in 2020-21 with the [Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework](#) (ISEF).

Considerations for implementation of planning, learning, teaching and assessment

In curriculum planning for 2020-21, schools will note that the DE and the ETI have recognised the need for a flexible approach to school development planning in the coming academic year and therefore the school development plan⁴, whether a transitional, amended or extended plan, for 2020-21 does not need to be an extensive document. The focus of school development planning is on raising standards, particularly standards of learners' achievement in literacy, numeracy and Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

The DE's [Guidance to Boards of Governors and Schools on School Development Planning](#) considers the outworking of the school development planning requirements in the context of the Covid-19 outbreak. It is recognised that in 2020-21, schools will need to consider a plan which addresses the specific challenges and whole-school priorities that will be faced in the next academic year as a result of COVID-19.

The DE has acknowledged schools' plans in 2020-21 will be very much working documents that will evolve and adapt in light of wider societal and public health changes and lessons learned at school and system level about blended learning. It will be important, therefore, to continue to review regularly the progress made on the action plans for the upcoming academic year and, if necessary, amend the actions being taken to meet better the priorities.

¹ In this instance, this refers to all DE funded pre-school settings, nursery schools, nursery units, private pre-school settings, voluntary pre-school settings and Irish medium pre-school settings.

² The term school is used throughout the document to include pre-school settings, primary, post-primary including Irish-medium settings, special schools and EOTAS settings unless otherwise indicated.

³ <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/news/weir-sets-out-revised-plans-reopening-schools>.

⁴ [Transitional, amended or extended for 2020/21](#) (primary, post-primary, including Irish-medium and EOTAS settings, and special schools) and Standard 10 in the Health and Social Care [Minimum Standards](#) (pre-school settings).

The DE's [Curriculum Planning 2020-21](#) sets out key considerations schools will wish to reflect on in planning for delivery of the curriculum. The Northern Ireland Curriculum is designed to help individual learners gain the knowledge, skills and attributes needed for life in the 21st century. The DE suggests that the starting point for all schools in preparing for 2020-21 should be how best to continue to deliver the spirit of the statutory Northern Ireland Curriculum in each area of learning to meet the needs of individual learners.

The flexibility of the curriculum aims to empower schools in normal circumstances to make the decisions needed to provide a curriculum that is adaptable and responsive to the needs of individual learners. The curriculum is designed to have limited prescription giving schools as much flexibility as possible in what they choose to teach, for how long and how often and to use approaches that best suit their learners. Schools, therefore, continue to have the freedom within the six areas of the pre-school curriculum and the minimum entitlement of the statutory curriculum to develop content they believe is best for the learners within their school community, at this particular time.

Different contexts for learning are not replacing the curriculum but are realising its vision, aims and objectives in new, appropriate ways. There is [Curricular Guidance for Pre-School Education](#) and [CCEA curricular guidance](#) to support delivery of the six areas of learning in the pre-school curriculum and the minimum entitlement of the Northern Ireland Curriculum in schools, including the development of wider skills and dispositions.

School leaders and teachers can use their knowledge and professional expertise to adapt their usual plans and practice to suit their own unique circumstances, providing the content they consider is best for their learners, informed by their inherent understanding of the children and young people in their school community.

Schools will know that it is important to understand where learners are in regard to their learning after the period of remote education. Normal formative assessment approaches within the classroom setting will be the most useful way of identifying the needs of individual learners. These approaches will focus on making learners feel confident and secure in what they know, while supporting engagement with learning.

Planning for blended and remote learning

Schools will be continuing to plan for blended and remote learning as contingency arrangements. They will be reflecting on their pedagogical goals and assessment methodologies and how technology might support learning. It is suggested that in the Northern Ireland context for 2020-21 blended learning is broadly defined as:

An approach to education whereby schools will combine classroom-based teaching and learning methods within school, with a range of remote learning in order to deliver the Northern Ireland curriculum.⁵

The DE has not prescribed e-learning tools to be used by schools, as this will vary according to the learner's profile and the area of learning/individual subject and task context. The C2k system, however, provides a secure platform and a range of tools to support teaching and learning. The Education Authority has developed a plan for Teacher Professional Learning during 2020-21, with an emphasis on supporting teachers in their use of online tools to support the delivery of the curriculum.

⁵ [Circular Number 2020/05: Guidance for schools on supporting remote learning to provide educational continuity](#)
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The DE's [Guidance for schools on supporting remote learning to provide educational continuity](#) recognises that schools will give consideration to the age and learning needs of learners, as well as the content of particular areas of learning or subjects. Remote learning provides opportunities for collaborative and clustering arrangements within and across schools to explore co-planning and co-teaching, for example, to provide thematic experiences which offer learning across the curriculum.

In planning for contingency arrangements, schools will need to think about: which aspects can be delivered face-to-face in the classroom environment; which aspects can be delivered remotely online or supported by parents in the home learning environment; and, which aspects may not be able to be delivered owing to the school's individual context. A blended learning approach has specific challenges for pre-schools and special schools. Remote learning for younger learners and those who may have additional learning needs will typically need more involvement from parents, whilst some older learners may be able to learn more independently.

The DE's publications are supplemented with more detailed resources, guidance materials and case studies produced by the Department's Continuity of Learning Project⁶. These guidance materials can be accessed at <https://www.eani.org.uk/supporting-learning> and via the C2k network.

For example, the [Moving to Blended Learning in the Primary School](#) and [Moving to Blended Learning in Post Primary](#) documents provide non-statutory guidance relating to the actions that schools should consider to encourage continuity of learning for every learner. They provide a common reference point for school governors, leaders and staff.

The Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework

INSPECTION AND SELF- EVALUATION FRAMEWORK						
Overall effectiveness						
Outcomes for Learners	PL	Quality of Provision	PL	Leadership and Management	PL	
Standards attained	S/AI	Quality of curriculum including (breadth, balance and appropriateness)	S/AI	Effectiveness and impact of the strategic leadership	S/AI	
Progression		Effectiveness of guidance and support in bringing about high quality individual learning experiences		Effectiveness and impact of the middle leadership		
Wider skills and dispositions/capabilities		Effectiveness and impact of planning, engagement/ teaching/training and assessment in promoting successful learning		Effectiveness of action to promote and sustain improvement, including self-evaluation and the development planning process		
Governance (for schools)		High degree of confidence	Confidence	Limited confidence		
Care and Welfare		Level 1. C&W impacts positively on learning, teaching and outcomes		Level 2. C&W does not impact positively enough on one or more of learning, teaching and outcomes		
Safeguarding	Level 1: Reflects the guidance		Level 2: Reflects broadly the guidance		Level 3: Unsatisfactory	

⁶ This project involves the DE, the CCEA, the ETI, the Education Authority, the Catholic Council for Maintained Schools and other sectoral support organisations working collaboratively.

The Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework (ISEF) provides a framework to support the organisation's discussions and reflections which are continuing and will evolve in planning to address the specific challenges and priorities that will be faced in the next academic year as a result of COVID-19.

Key elements of the framework, *Care and Welfare (including Safeguarding), Outcomes for Learners, Quality of Provision and Leadership and Management* are identified as priority areas based on the feedback received from school leaders regarding the current challenges in Guidance to Boards of Governors and Schools on School Development Planning (Item 9):

Arrangements for and approaches to the implementation of planning, learning, teaching and assessment: How are we...?	
Supporting the physical, mental and emotional health and well-being of pupils and staff	<i>Identifying and addressing underachievement, particularly for those pupils who have experienced barriers to engaging in remote learning</i>
Developing effective approaches to delivering services to vulnerable learners and those learners who have statements of special educational need	<i>Enhancing parental engagement to support their child's learning</i>
Developing an effective programme of professional learning for teachers	<i>Developing effective approaches to remote/blended teaching, learning and/or assessment</i>
The colour-coding of this table indicates a direct correlation of the priority areas to the key elements of the ISEF: <i>Care and Welfare (including Safeguarding), Outcomes for Learners, Quality of Provision and Leadership and Management</i> .	

Delivering education in the academic year 2020-21

- Implementing safe, effective and efficient arrangements and the promotion of health and well-being (including safeguarding), including:
 - providing induction for staff, learners and parents, guardians and carers about learning and teaching and associated arrangements in the new learning environment;
 - protecting the physical health and promoting the mental and emotional health and well-being (including safeguarding) of learners and staff;
 - acknowledging the resilience of learners and staff;
 - managing the attendance of learners and staff, building confidence and community through opportunities for social interactions; and
 - keeping risk-assessments under continuous review in light of changing circumstances and any revised Public Health Agency guidance.

- Maintaining (or redressing) educational standards, providing continuity of learning and ensuring appropriate assessment, by (as applicable):
 - baselining to support individuals whose learning has accelerated, as well as to redress potential gaps in knowledge, skills and understanding, including the essential skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT (digital skills)⁷;
 - adapting and planning the curriculum delivery within the minimum entitlement of the six areas of the pre-school curriculum/statutory curriculum to meet the progression and assessment needs of the learners;
 - providing intervention and support⁸ to ensure learners make progress in all aspects of their learning and development;
 - ensuring the delivery of vital services to vulnerable learners, including special educational needs services; and
 - supporting and enabling learners to develop the key wider skills, dispositions and personal capabilities to cope with the new learning and living environments.
- Planning for blended and remote learning approaches as contingency arrangements, including:
 - developing inclusive, effective approaches to learning, teaching and assessment, with a particular focus on blended learning and remote learning;
 - developing approaches to delivering consistent and good quality learning to the more vulnerable learners who experience barriers to engagement in blended and remote learning;
 - providing an ongoing programme of well-targeted capacity building for teaching and support staff, particularly in planning, preparing and delivering effective blended and remote learning;
 - providing familiarisation sessions for learners and parents, guardians and carers about whatever essential digital tools are in use;
 - providing induction sessions for learners and parents, guardians and carers about commitments and expectations for engagement and participation in learning remotely, including online;
 - recognising ‘digital strain’ and providing support to learners with poor or no access to equipment and connectivity; and
 - sustaining engagement and motivation of learning over a period of time.

⁷ Within pre-school, this applies to the six areas of learning in the pre-school curriculum.

⁸ [Oral statement to the ad hoc committee on the COVID-19 response by Peter Weir MLA, Minister of Education – Thursday 25 June 2020](#): I will also bring forward a project called ‘Engage’ to provide literacy and numeracy support; mental health interventions; and the widening of nurture support for the 2020/21 academic year in socially deprived areas.

- Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the action planning, at all levels, with key review milestones and success indicators, including the impact of:
 - the range of learning, teaching, training and assessment strategies, including those for blended and remote learning, in promoting successful progression in learning, for all learners; and
 - the adaptation of learning resources, including physical spaces to support the continuity of learning.

Conclusion

As the situation in regard to the COVID-19 pandemic continues to evolve, as noted by the DE in [Guidance for schools on supporting remote learning to provide educational continuity](#), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development has stressed that the success of all learners during this period, and particularly those from disadvantaged groups, is linked to maintaining a close working relationship with their teachers.

School leaders, in consultation with their management groups/boards of governors, know the context and unique circumstances of their setting or school, and are best placed to make the detailed decisions required when it comes to the safety of their setting/school and how they can deliver best the curriculum to their children and young people.

When schools re-open to all children and young people, the ETI will assist by identifying and sharing the more effective practices and promoting professional co-operation and collaboration leading to improvement.⁹

⁹ [Update for schools regarding inspection during recovery period: 03 June 2020.](#)