

# A Thematic Report on Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) Centres' Delivery, Monitoring and Evaluation of Remote Learning

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## Introduction

On 6 January 2021, the Education Minister announced that, while all mainstream education providers would continue to provide remote learning to their pupils, Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) centres would remain open to provide face-to-face learning. This decision appropriately recognised the complexity of pupil need and the importance of maintaining relationships with those who have become disengaged with education.

In capturing centre leaders' self-evaluation of new and emerging effective practice in remote learning as well as identifying challenges, this report aims to highlight emerging effective practice and promote future opportunities for digital delivery. The findings arise from a [questionnaire](#) distributed to EOTAS centres in the week beginning 25 January 2021, with 31 respondents<sup>1</sup> (84% of centres). District Inspectors also facilitated online or phone discussions with 14 centre leaders focused on the delivery, monitoring and evaluation of remote learning, safeguarding, wellbeing and staff professional learning (SPL).

## Delivery of remote learning

Just over half of the responses to the [questionnaire](#) indicated that between 50% to 90% of pupils accessed remote learning.<sup>2</sup> A minority of responses (19%) reported that between 50 to 90% of pupils accessed the online provision of their referring school on the day respondents completed the questionnaire.

Following the evaluation of their pupils' experiences of the first lockdown, in the more effective practice, staff prepared them in anticipation of another lockdown by ensuring: pupils' passwords were correct for the centre and shared with parents/carers; they had appropriate access to devices and resources; and they knew how to navigate online platforms. Decluttering platforms and streamlining resources helped staff to focus on the quality of learning not on the quantity of resources.

Importantly, the Device Scheme<sup>3</sup> had helped to address the lack of pupil devices in the first lockdown. By 1st March 2021, EOTAS centres had received 319 devices, 224 BT vouchers and 18 MiFi units; 228 devices were given to year 12 pupils. This has been a positive development and only a small number of challenges remain, for example, Key Stage (KS) 3 pupils who are waiting on devices as the scheme is rolled out further, variability with pupil connectivity and the need to provide hard copy learning resources if there is no home printer.

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<sup>1</sup> One centre provided two responses by managers of different key stages.

<sup>2</sup> A minority of centres (13%) indicated almost all of their pupils accessed remote learning; a minority of centres (19%) indicated most of their pupils accessed remote learning and a minority of centres (19%) indicated that the majority of pupils accessed remote learning.

<sup>3</sup> On 21 May 2020, the Minister for Education announced plans to lend digital devices to disadvantaged pupils who may not have access to devices at home. Criteria for the distribution of devices via the Education Authority was agreed. On 8 July 2020, the Minister further announced a free wi-fi scheme to support disadvantaged pupils.

Responses from the [questionnaire](#) indicated that nearly all centre staff used online platforms (94%) as well as hard copy resources (97%). Most (84%) provided independent learning activities and the majority (71%) provided live sessions. Over half of centre staff (55%) enabled pupils to learn in pairs or groups and only a minority (16%) used pre-recorded videos.

Centre leaders reported a range of examples of remote learning that worked well when pupils:

- engaged in individualised online work, supported by a staff member including a classroom assistant;
- planned with staff each morning: learning activities for the day and associated success criteria; agreed times for live sessions and breaks, to download and upload work and celebrate their achievements daily;
- responded well to learning online matched to their interests, for example, personal stories, hobbies, pets, music, films and news events;
- engaged in live sessions (which was their preferred approach) which enabled them to interact with staff;
- interacted and encouraged each other through the chat function and emoji reactions;
- shared news through weekly virtual circle time and posted photographs online;
- benefited from saving their learning online; and
- developed their information, communication and technology (ICT) skills.

#### **Proactive planning for, and delivery of, blended learning through collegial SPL**

**Challenge:** Staff identified that their pupils with complex social, emotional and behavioural needs would only engage in remote learning if they were ready, confident and felt safe. Staff prioritised their professional learning to provide dynamic, differentiated remote learning.

**Response:** Staff planned strategically from September 2020 for the possibility of another lockdown. Collegially, they identified priorities for SPL and practised their skills, trialling live lessons with each other after attending virtual courses to improve their practice.

Since September 2020, all pupils had access to a laptop and used Google classrooms. From January 2021, the centre provided blended learning with in-centre sessions; remote learning; and hard copy packs. Staff emphasised enjoyment of learning as they supported each pupil to meet their targets on individual plans. Pupils engaged in live lessons with access to videos, external links, visual notes and charts. They consolidated their learning through completing multiple choice questions, short paragraph responses and timed tasks. Most pupils attended the centre for practical art sessions and pupils could access a pre-recorded art session, remotely. The centre's youth worker, who had trained as a counsellor and therapist, provided Relationships and Sexuality Education through Zoom in which the pupils engaged well.

**Impact:** Pupils gained confidence and made good progress in their blended learning experiences resulting in high levels of attendance. Staff benefited from engaging in professional learning together to ensure their SPL led to improving the quality of pupils' remote learning.

## Feedback to pupils learning remotely

Centre leaders reported these examples of feedback that worked well, when staff:

- gave verbal feedback to pupils on their work in live lessons to clarify ways to improve and to provide them with opportunities to ask questions to help their understanding;
- used individualised online marking tools and programmes with instant feedback and formative comments on how to improve;
- emailed feedback to pupils about their learning, progress and personal development;
- annotated uploaded work and hard copies highlighting strengths and ways to improve further;
- provided individualised mentoring sessions with pupils to give feedback on their progress to inform the pupils' targets for improvement;
- gained regular feedback from pupils on their learning experiences to inform and improve learning;
- communicated weekly with parents/carers on pupil progress and level of engagement and offered support, guidance and advice, if required; and
- celebrated pupils' progress through rewards and personalised certificates.

## Emotional health and wellbeing through remote learning

For pupils engaged in remote learning, examples of how centre staff prioritised the pupils' wellbeing included:

- starting the day with motivational emails from staff to promote a positive mind-set;
- talking to their pupils calmly and positively ensuring each pupil felt valued, appreciated and accepted;

- supporting pupils to reflect on how their emotions directed their feelings, attention, thoughts and behaviour and how to self-regulate using strategies such as breathing techniques, meditation and relaxation exercises;
- encouraging pupils to show affection and kindness to others or pets to release endorphins to help their bodies feel more peaceful;
- discussing their personal targets online or by phone calls with staff encouraging the pupils to discuss with them solutions to their issues and challenges;
- encouraging pupils to reflect on issues or concerns with their link teacher who knows them well;
- delivering nurture programmes remotely, such as remote breakfasts and personal development mentoring;
- enjoying fun Zoom sessions with peers using song or dance and engaging in timed physical activities;
- having the opportunity to access counselling services<sup>4</sup> through online sessions or by phone;
- suggesting pupils choose a calm space at home or outside, using colourful fabrics, posters, candles or music to enhance a sense of wellbeing; and
- providing wellbeing packs with personal development strategies and resources such as: food items, music playlists, stress-relieving balls, physical exercises and games to calm emotions and increase concentration.

## Staff wellbeing

Appreciating additional pressures on staff working with pupils with complex needs both in centres and remotely, leaders reported the following strategies that worked well to promote staff wellbeing. They:

- communicated regularly with all staff, balancing professional discourse with personal support, calm reassurance, humour and a sense of togetherness;
- shared online resources and signposted workshops for staff, for example, online yoga sessions, fitness classes and mindfulness videos;
- emphasised staff wellbeing as a standing item on weekly meetings; staff achievements and SPL were celebrated;

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<sup>4</sup> For pupils already accessing counselling support through centres and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service prior to lockdown, the transition to online counselling has been easier. It is more difficult for pupils who are accessing counselling for the first time to engage online without the necessary building of trust and relationship when a pupil engages for the first time with a counsellor.

- spoke with staff individually on a regular basis regarding their wellbeing and provided advice, guidance and practical support such as adapting timetables;
- promoted self-care through active breaks, collegial planning, resource banks; and
- inspired positive wellbeing through language focused on the dynamic of change on new ways of learning and strengthening relationships rather than dwelling on loss.

## Safeguarding of remote learning

A majority of centres (68%) have a remote learning policy in place. Most (84%) have protocols for the safe use of technology in remote learning; and most (90%) communicate expectations around remote learning to pupils (90%), and almost all to parents/carers (94%) and staff (94%). Examples of protocols included: appropriate use of cameras and microphones; at least two staff present in live lessons; and written advice to parents/carers on the appropriate use of social media. Centre leaders stated that their staff are aware of the increased safeguarding risks for vulnerable pupils, who during Covid-19 do not have their usual structures and routines. They also emphasised that parents /carers appreciated phone calls from staff explaining ways to safeguard their young people remotely. One centre leader reported that by presenting information visually through leaflets or videos and writing safeguarding policies from a pupil's perspective helped pupils and parents/carers understand better the safeguarding processes. For centres who celebrated Safer Internet Day, leaders reported that pupils know how to keep safe online, manage social media risks and use ICT safely.

## Monitoring and evaluation of remote learning

Most centre leaders report that remote learning enabled opportunities for collaborative monitoring and evaluation by staff. They report the following examples whereby staff effectively:

- worked in pairs and while one taught the live lesson, the other monitored and tracked the social, emotional and behavioural needs of pupils to support their engagement;
- reviewed the quality of the online learning experience for pupils to: select resources more carefully tailored to their needs and interests; refine the pace; provide more opportunities for social interaction; allocate breaks in live lessons for pupils to complete work individually; and use chat function and 'raising hands' more to ensure they all were included and participated in live lessons;
- evaluated strategies that worked well to enable pupils to overcome barriers to progress in their learning;

- shared effective support strategies with other staff and raised concerns if additional support was required;
- collated and analysed data more easily through the use of improved access to digital devices; and
- monitored and evaluated pupils' learning to inform planning and priorities for curriculum development.

## Barriers to remote learning

Centre leaders all reported that face-to-face learning and teaching remains the most effective way to provide the intensive support and nurturing relationships required by pupils attending EOTAS provision. They stated that learning remotely limits social interaction. Pupils were less likely to discuss fully their learning in live discussions or ask questions. They disengaged when platforms did not work and re-engagement was slow and in some instances they would not engage online. Furthermore, remote learning has impacted on the pupils' ability to engage fully in experiences of learning together across their whole curriculum, particularly practical activities, such as cookery, physical exercise and educational visits. In particular, KS4 pupils' vocational experiences have been disrupted. Centre leaders reflected that there were less opportunities to discuss fully difficult issues with pupils and to embed the full range of therapeutic strategies to support pupils.

Across centres, pupil engagement was tracked and staff flagged persistent disengagement in order to intervene early. When pupils who were not attending the centre during the second lockdown did not re-engage with their remote learning, staff phoned parents/carers to address any barriers to learning. Staff visited pupils to discuss their learning experiences and agreed approaches to overcome any barriers. Importantly, staff met the pupils' individual needs and circumstances flexibly, through facilitating a blended approach to learning, whereby the pupils attended the centre for a day or days and learned remotely for the remainder or visited the pupils with hard copy packs. Centre leaders reported that they tracked the learning missed by those pupils who did not engage to inform the targeted support provided to them on their return to the centre.

### **A centre's planning for blended learning focused on individualised support for pupils**

**Challenge:** In January 2021, at the beginning of the second lockdown, parents/carers were initially reluctant to send their children to the centre. Gradually the number of pupils attending increased and the centre attendance figures for March indicate that just over two-fifths of the pupils were attending the centre full-time, a small number were engaging with remote learning only and just over two-fifths were adopting a blended approach to their learning.



**Response:** A weekly timetable was tailored to the individual preferences of pupils and parents/carers. Individual timetables focused on English, maths, ICT and youth work, with a staff rota to ensure all pupils could access the curriculum offer. Nurture group work was delivered in the centre each Wednesday and could be accessed remotely. Pupils engaged in a Prince's Trust community project through group work activities in centre. Adhering to strict Covid-19 safety measures, pupils made and delivered bread to elderly residents. All pupils had remote access to the Careers Service and all parents/carers engaged in a careers information day, a significant improvement from prior low attendance rates. A small number of pupils who did not engage remotely or attend the centre had work packs delivered and collected.

**Impact:** Through this blended approach pupils made progress as difficulties with online learning were addressed through support in centre. There are some challenges which remain; many of the staff in the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and Social Services are working from home which impacts on the timeliness of support; pupil access to remote learning from their referring schools is limited or non-existent and the meeting of their social and emotional needs remotely is more difficult. The centre's highly individualised approach to supporting pupils and parents/carers increased engagement and participation compared to the first lockdown.

## Staff professional learning (SPL)

Almost all centres (94%) provided in-house SPL and most centres (81%) accessed the Education Authority's (EA) SPL. A significant minority accessed SPL from other providers (45%) which included health agencies and universities. All centre leaders accessed a number of support documents and publications from the Department of Education; a majority accessed those from EA; and a significant minority from ETI and CCEA.

Online courses, webinars and video-based short courses were easily accessible by staff, saving time and travel. Centre leaders appreciated the additional laptops provided through the Device Scheme. They valued remote SPL on mindfulness, safeguarding, risk assessment, attachment theory, nurture training, the impact of trauma and the Calm Plan<sup>5</sup> to promote pupils' wellbeing. Following EA training on Google Classrooms, Collaborate Ultra and Microsoft Teams, staff used in-centre sessions to pilot their skills, learn from each other and critique the effectiveness of the online learning activities to meet pupils' complex needs. As reflective practitioners, the staff evaluated their teaching remotely to consider what they would do differently to provide consistent quality learning experiences for pupils.

While online SPL has benefits, centre leaders reported that they missed the opportunities that face-to-face SPL provides for them to engage in informal discussions with other practitioners. They highlighted ongoing SPL is needed for them and their staff to enhance their ICT skills further.

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<sup>5</sup> The Calm Plan is training provided by EA to support pupils and staff with self-awareness and self-regulation in de-escalating responses to stress.

Online SPL has value in going forward. It has the potential to enable EOTAS staff to work further as a professional learning community, effecting structural change to transform the sector in improving pupils' outcomes. Sharing pupil information, effective practice, and strategies to prevent pupils from disengaging from education between referring schools and EOTAS centres is mutually beneficial. It is important that all staff measure the impact of their SPL on the pupils' outcomes to inform planning for improvement.

## Conclusion

Significantly, EOTAS centres remaining open during this reporting period of January to April 2021 has been crucial in enabling staff to support pupils' learning and wellbeing. For those pupils learning remotely centre leaders report the following challenges: the curtailment of the breadth of the curriculum experience, particularly with practical and vocational aspects and the full experiential benefits of therapeutic interventions; when pupils disengage their re-engagement is slow and complex; reluctance of pupils to engage first time with counselling services online; meeting the demands of KS4 courses online with pupils who require intensive support; and geographical variation in connectivity.

Emerging examples of effective practice in remote learning identified by centre leaders offer opportunities in going forward. Staff can build on the increased confidence of pupils in using their ICT skills to navigate online platforms. Opportunities for remote practice-led SPL will help to transform it in centres and across the EOTAS sector. Online meetings offer reduced travel time and multi-agency support to meet the complex needs of the pupils. Greater consistency in pupils' access to their referring school's online provision can support their re-integration to mainstream schools. Improving communication with parents/carers is helping staff to provide more targeted support to addressing pupils' barriers to learning.

## Appendix A: Case Studies

These case studies exemplify ways centres continue to respond creatively to meeting the needs of pupils face to face even during the challenges of a pandemic. One example shows how staff seek the pupils' views to help to shape, refine and improve provision. The other focuses on effective partnership working between a school and centre to meet a child's complex needs.

### **Pupil-led evaluation of learning**

**Challenge:** Staff maintained face-to-face engagement with pupils as the best way to meet the needs of vulnerable pupils for whom anxiety impacts on their social, emotional and behavioural development.

**Response:** Since September 2020, the centre's pupil forum provided opportunities for pupils to discuss and plan programmes of interest to help progress their learning and to meet their personal and social needs. The forum meets weekly; pupils and staff review together the week ahead, enabling pupils to celebrate success, raise issues and to have their views and opinions listened to, and actioned.

**Impact:** Pupils provide feedback on the effectiveness of how they are learning and the suitability of resources provided. The forum is centred on the pupils' needs and they work collaboratively with the staff, making suggestions to support their academic progress and their personal and social needs. In addition, the pupils have the centre's arrangements for the Covid-19 pandemic as a standing agenda item at their forum meetings. Through the forum, they can raise concerns and make suggestions for improvements; a process that reassures them of their safety and security in their learning environment. The pupils have an active role in determining and meeting their needs and give feedback to staff to inform the centre's planning for improvement.

### **Meeting a pupil's complex needs through effective partnership working between centre and school**

**Challenge:** A child attending a centre had a complex profile of need involving extreme challenging behaviour. The child's therapeutic programme in the centre, with intense positive behaviour strategies led to sufficient progress to enable transition to a Behaviour Support Unit (BSU) in a Primary School in January 2021. The planned transition, however, could not take place as the BSU in the primary school was not operating during lockdown.

**Response:** The centre and school's rapid response focused on "bringing support to the child" and staff showed compassion, creativity and determination to make this work. Leadership on both sides liaised purposefully with relevant staff, agencies and the child, to provide a personalised Covid-19-safe classroom. To ensure consistency in staffing, an experienced temporary teacher who had worked both in the centre and the primary school, was appointed to work with the child with the support of a classroom assistant. The child benefited from positive and nurturing relationships with staff and the caring response of the receiving school.

**Impact:** Centre staff prioritised the child's favourite ICT activities and games into their daily support programme to ensure positive engagement in learning activities from which the staff could develop new challenges. The centre staff and school leaders liaised effectively to enhance support for the child through sharing information and expertise. The child made steady progress with their learning and excellent progress in their behaviour management. The centre staff monitored closely all aspects of the child's wellbeing to inform next steps when schools re-opened.

## Appendix B: Reporting terms used by the Education and Training Inspectorate

### Quantitative terms

In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most	-	75% - 90%
A majority	-	50% - 74%
A significant minority	-	30% - 49%
A minority	-	10% - 29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

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