

Establishing a baseline for home and digital learning during lockdown in Portsmouth

Report from survey conducted 15-29 June by Jo Peach, Alison Bradley, Jess Paul, Sarah Hilditch and Debbie Anderson

Background

1. Introduction

The survey was conducted between 15 and 29 June 2020 to try to establish what schools were offering in the way of home learning, what was going well and where the problems or barriers might be and to try to understand schools' experience of using digital technology to support home learning.

Interviews were carried out with all the LA schools and MATs leads or their Portsmouth representatives, special schools, the UTC and FE colleges. Only two schools (one the only Portsmouth member of a MAT) were not represented in the survey.

The overarching questions explored with headteachers were:

- Context - what proportion of your pupils are still at home and of those what proportion are classed as vulnerable and/or disadvantaged?
- What is your home learning offer, what are the principles behind it and how well do parents and pupils engage?
- Curriculum - thinking about what you have not been able to cover - how have you adapted the curriculum this term and what are you thinking of doing for autumn and the 2020/21 school year?
- Have you used digital technology to support home learning?
 - If 'yes', what and why and how well is it going/what have been the significant lessons learned or pitfalls? Would you be prepared to share your experiences with other schools?
 - If 'no' - what are the barriers or concerns that stop you? Do you have plans to in future?
- Have your staff had any CPD on how to plan for home learning and/or on how to plan and deliver digital learning?
 - If 'yes' - what were the main elements of that training?
 - If 'no' - would it be helpful?

2. Context

During 15-29 June 2020, interviews were carried out with all except 2 schools and colleges in Portsmouth including all special schools and FE colleges about home and digital learning. For schools the interviews took place with the Headteacher and sometimes another member of staff such as the person

responsible for teaching and learning. For academies, the interviews took place with a representative of the MAT and/or the Portsmouth schools within the MAT.

These two weeks followed the wider opening of many primary schools and the wider opening of secondary schools happened during this time. What was clear was that all **schools and colleges were working extremely hard to ensure that as many pupils as possible could come into school and that they were targeting the children with SEN/D, those who were vulnerable and those who were disadvantaged.**

The LA collected data from schools which showed that, by June 18th, **about 82% of all pupils were not in school but most of those with EHCPs were in school unless there was a medical reason not to.** Whilst schools with the support of LA Link Co-ordinators have been tracking and monitoring vulnerable learners and encouraging learners to come to school, it is clear that significant numbers have continued to stay at home and that this group has the largest proportion of pupils who are difficult to engage with home learning.

Findings

3. Home learning offer

Schools and colleges reported being at very different stages with their home learning offer before lockdown and every school, MAT and college had built on and increased their home learning offer during lockdown, however, some had dramatically increased what they were offering and some had bought in entirely new systems; invariably these were digital. Some schools and colleges were better placed to provide home learning from the start of lockdown, digital or not, for a variety of reasons including how much home and digital learning they offered prior to lockdown and how much expertise there was in school.

The quantity of home learning offer varied enormously between settings. Some schools, where home learning had not been a big feature of their work prior to lockdown, or where there were concerns about putting too much pressure on parents or parents' ability to support home learning, offered suggestions about tasks that pupils could complete but these were all voluntary. Others offered a suggested timetable (usually by number of hours a day/week) with associated tasks related to subject areas and pupils were expected to complete and send in work. At the other end of the spectrum, which was much more prevalent in secondary and FE, students were expected to log on and do lessons at certain times of the day as if they were in school. Most secondary and all FE colleges had offered live lessons for at least English and Maths and the UTC and FE colleges had done this across the full complement of subjects.

A majority of schools had increased their use of (and expertise in using) software that allowed communication and interactions between pupil, parent and teachers. Most often at primary this was software such as SeeSaw, PurpleMash, Tapestry or Padlet which allow staff to upload work so that pupils and parents could then upload completed work and receive comments or

feedback. In almost all cases, schools were already using this software but had significantly expanded its use. At secondary and FE, schools and colleges were mostly using Google Classroom or MS Teams; many had invested in this well before lockdown and some had been using it for several years.

In a relatively **few cases in infant or primary schools, all home learning was paper based**, although even this required access to a device to download worksheets. Some schools noted that access to a printer was a barrier for many of their pupils so they offered to print packs of worksheets for parents to collect. Parents were expected to pick up printed packs each week and, sometimes, to bring completed work back in or send it in via email or upload to a Google Drive or similar cloud storage facility. The rationale for using paper-based resources was mostly that it allowed equal access for all, even those with poor access to digital devices or internet and also that it did not encourage screen time for very young children. A handful of schools had not wanted to go down the digital road. In almost every school with primary-aged pupils, work was offered as printed packs for those parents who requested it but in general, this was for a small percentage of pupils. In the vast majority of cases, home learning required some form of digital technology even if only to be able to read and download worksheets or send emails.

The engagement with home learning by pupils and parents varied enormously. Some schools carefully monitored engagement, following up where pupils had not engaged with phone calls and even visits from social workers where there was a particular issue or worry. The level of engagement was, perhaps unsurprisingly, closely linked to pupils' age. The majority of secondary schools reported encouraging all pupils to complete home learning tasks and contacted the parents where this was not the case. **Most FE colleges and secondary schools reported that the majority of pupils had engaged with work set**, although this did vary by age even within schools. Most Year 11 pupils were less engaged and most Year 10 were quite engaged, especially where they also had some in-school work. Some secondary and FE made participation compulsory but this was possible as access to devices had been sorted before or during lockdown and learning this way was already a regular feature of normal work. Schools also reported a need to ensure that pupils knew how to learn independently, including techniques for revision and what to do if they did not understand something. Schools and colleges who had done this in advance of lockdown because they were already offering remote learning were at a distinct advantage here.

In primary schools, there had been a noticeable fall off in engagement after May half term. **For primary aged children and some special schools, the level of engagement partly depended on the age of the pupils and how much of the work required parental support.** Some primaries were trying to encourage engagement by the use of rewards, some made it clear that there was an expectation that all work would be completed and this was checked up on and followed up by a call from the teacher or tutor, some made it clear that this would help them to prepare for their next year (e.g. moving from Year 3 to 4 or a bigger transition involving a change of school such as Year 2 to 3 or Year 6 to 7). Some

primary schools hadn't thought about monitoring the engagement of their pupils in home learning and were going to do this as a next step.

The **requirement for parental involvement**, especially infant and some of the special schools, meant that home learning in some schools and settings was optional. These schools did not feel they could realistically impose a requirement on adults to supervise and lead home learning. Nevertheless, **almost all schools reported a big increase in contact with parents/carers** (often by phone calls at least weekly to every child's parent or carer but also widespread use of social media especially Facebook) and surveys often showed very high satisfaction levels with what was being offered and with ways to support their children with both behavioural and educational issues. Schools often took this opportunity to reinforce online safety messages with parents and pupils. In some cases, parents were delighted to be given help in understanding how to teach things such as phonics and some aspects of maths. **In many cases, schools thought that the legacy of lockdown should be about how to work with parents more closely and support them with home learning.**

4. Curriculum

Almost all schools focussed the content of their home learning offer firstly on English and Maths and almost all said that the learning was **linked to 'normal' curriculum using normal sequencing of learning** but the majority said that **work was consolidation rather than new work**. Over time, this had developed in some schools into new learning. The most problematic areas for new learning were subjects which required a practical element, especially some of the DT subjects.

Almost all secondary offered the **full range of subjects**; primaries often suggested activities for subjects other than English and Maths with some using a topic- or project-based approach, in part so that children of different ages in a family could work together. Most schools reported using **a range of software or websites** for subject specific help such as Oak Academy (all subjects), and for primary Bug club (reading), White Rose and Maths Rockstars (maths), Education City (range of subjects) and Twinkl (range of subjects). For secondary, software or websites mentioned by more than one school included Hegarty Maths and Seneca Learning. In addition, some schools mentioned using services such as the offer from the music service who had adapted their offer to be able to provide remote learning during lockdown. Some schools signalled these resources on their websites and some carefully selected elements of these resources to complement the work being set.

In a few schools, there were **activities to help with personal, social and emotional development**. Some schools had helped to **recreate the whole school community virtually** through things like on-line assemblies, form quizzes, whole school musical events and even a virtual sports day. Schools had also worked hard to provide support for pupils moving to another year through virtual tours and 'meet your new teacher' sessions online.

In most cases, **teachers were planning the work that was given to pupils.** Sometimes this was the class teacher or the subject specialist or sometimes it was delegated to staff who were having to work from home, for example those who were shielding. A few MATs planned the content of lessons centrally so teachers were only responsible for adapting these materials for their own pupils. In a few cases, schools were using high quality video clips from subject specialists to introduce new concepts or topics and this was noted as being particularly beneficial where schools lacked a specialist, such as primary science.

The **work was sometimes adapted** by class teachers **for pupils with different needs** but this was more often done by the SENCO. Some schools were providing open ended tasks as a way of overcoming the need for teachers to differentiate the work. Work was less likely to have been adapted for pupils with other needs such as EAL but a few schools had used the services of EMAS to provide translations and to suggest first language websites.

Assessment and feedback were very variable. In most cases, if pupils sent in pictures of their work these were posted somewhere on the school website for others to see but detailed individual feedback was an area that was developing in most schools, even in those where work was regularly being sent in. Most teachers acknowledged receipt of work but dealing with any misconceptions or misunderstandings was not generally reported as a strength.

Schools' **capacity to continue offering this level of home learning was nearing its peak** as more children were in school or college; many settings did not have the staff to plan home learning and also offer in school work. This was a particular issue for very small schools or those with lots of staff off sick or with other family commitments. In some secondary schools and one primary, live lessons were seen as a way to reduce the need to offer both home and in-school learning at the same time. Some Headteachers, especially those from small primary schools, were particularly worried about the impact on teachers' workload of introducing home and digital learning at the same time as offering lessons in schools.

Oversight of the quality of provision of home learning is in its infancy. There were some examples of this happening in FE and secondary, mostly by SLT watching lessons either live or recorded to see if there were any general lessons to be learnt. In a relatively few cases, governors had been involved in overseeing the home learning offer and its impact.

In terms of planning for Sept 2020 and beyond, some schools were pushing ahead with a blended learning offer (remote and in-school learning) as they could see that this may well be a necessity if further spikes in infections arose. In most schools, the curriculum for home learning had been adapted to offer those elements which can most easily be done independently and this plan would continue for Autumn 2020. Some schools reported that they would spend some time in early Autumn finding ways to establish what pupils had actually learnt and remembered and how to accelerate learning and plug gaps. From September, many schools were not planning to fill every gap as the learning loss

was too great, instead they were looking at deciding which elements were the most important as a basis for future learning and covering those aspects in depth.

5. Digital

Much of the access to devices and internet is variable and lack of access to a suitable device appears to affect disadvantaged pupils the most. Some schools and colleges had already tackled the issue and all pupils already had access to a device and internet where needed. The most successful way of offering this was reported to be a subscription purchase scheme which cost parents about £10 a month and covered breakages. At end of pupils' time in school, the device belonged to them. This was much more prevalent in secondary than primary. There was also a growing discrepancy between pupils of secondary age and those of primary having access to devices. In many cases, families did not have access to multiple devices other than smartphones. On the whole, in families where there were not enough devices, older children were given priority, leaving primary children with less access.

6. CPD

Since lockdown, **most schools have offered CPD on effective use of software** and most staff have accessed this training which has often been led by other staff in school with expertise rather than being led by SLT.

The software training has mostly been around **software which helps with communication and interaction**, with frequent mentions of software such as MS Teams, GoogleMeet or Zoom for secondaries and other software such as SeeSaw, PurpleMash, Tapestry and Padlet for primary. The focus of most of the CPD has been on how to improve communication between parents, pupils and staff, including feedback on work.

There was relatively **little mention of CPD for packages which are subject specific** (such as those mentioned above) or how to integrate these to support key elements of learning. There was no mention of whether schools had analysed how effective any of the subject specific software was although several were measuring engagement in terms of how much work was done. Software which gave immediate feedback to pupils and also had an algorithm which adapted the exercises depending on how well pupils had done them, such as Hegarty Maths and DuoLingo, were seen as very useful. Very few schools felt they were in a position to be able to evaluate the effectiveness of such packages effectively and quickly.

Almost all schools had run sessions on online safety and had reinforced advice to parents and pupils about online safety. Many had updated their policies and risk assessments about online safety but recognised that this was on-going and needed frequent revisiting.

Some schools have begun to think about further CPD to support digital learning and about a digital strategy in their school improvement plan.

Schools suggested that they might be interested in joining EdTech group to help move forward but most wanted more information. It was clear that there would need to be a varied offer of support for schools which would build on their current expertise and not a 'one size fits all' approach. **Most schools did not want to lose the important things they had learnt about home learning even when pupils were back full time.** They noted that it would still be useful to keep the improved communication with parents using interactive software. They also saw that home learning could be used to increase participation with revision sessions and materials, as an extension to the in-school offer in terms of catch up or interventions and for days when schools were closed such as snow days or future lockdowns. Some schools wanted to increase the support they gave pupils to help them learn independently such as strategies to pace themselves and revisiting things that they had found difficult.

Summary, recommendations and next steps

7. Summary of areas of strength

- All schools/colleges have improved and increased their home learning offer since lockdown,
- All schools had built up better relationships with parents who were more involved and understood more about what their children were learning.

8. Summary of areas to develop

- Assessment and feedback were areas that many schools and college were looking to develop
- Work on overseeing the quantity and quality of home learning was mentioned as a next step by many schools/colleges
- Equitable access to devices and broadband was seen as vital

9. Recommendations and next steps

As has been said in HT meetings, this is the time we have to move from childcare back into education. We mustn't lose the positives of lockdown - notably, the improved communication with parents about learning - and we must capitalise on the steps forward with using digital technology and take full advantage of the opportunities it offers to enhance and improve learning going forward, as well as offering some future proofing against another lockdown or similar.

There appear to be two natural groups of schools emerging in the short term - those who are well on their way with digital learning and could be used as a digital pioneer or strategy group to drive the agenda forward in the city; and those interested but still at an early point and needing support, possibly from an external organisation such as Ed Tech.

PCC, MATs and schools need to work together to find solutions to enable all pupils to have access to suitable devices (a laptop or tablet, not smartphone) and broadband. Technical support and support for hardware needs to be aligned with this.

Any centrally provided CPD needs to incorporate how to adapt the curriculum next year (taking account of anticipated Government guidelines) and support those pupils who have lost the most learning during lockdown, those with additional needs including (but not exclusively), those who are disadvantaged, those who have SEN/D and those with EAL.

Support for ITT and Early Career teachers to enable them to understand how to protect learning and how to use remote and digital learning effectively.

The digital pioneer or strategy group needs to develop and provide clear guidance and support for senior leader colleagues on strands such as:

- ensuring that remote learning complements in-school learning including how to measure the impact of remote learning and ensuring the oversight of the quality of the home learning offer
- sharing good practice to address areas such as assessment and feedback, helping pupils to learn how to work at home effectively
- using technology to encourage and support even stronger parental engagement
- provision of on-going online safety/safeguarding support and training
- effective evaluation of software, especially that which is subject based, and CPD in how to use it to improve learning
- ensuring that workload and teacher well-being are carefully managed

It would be helpful to set up an external evaluation study in parallel with moving forward on digital learning to establish its success, based on what it intends to achieve. This needs to focus in the very short term on engagement but move rapidly into the medium to longer term on impact on learning, especially for those who have lost the most.