



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Guide for the Evaluation of Remote Teaching and Learning

Inspectorate
Department of Education
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Introduction

The public health restrictions which resulted in the closure of schools in March 2020 highlighted the absolute necessity for schools to be agile in providing for continuity of teaching and learning in the future. As a contingency measure for the possibility of any recurrence of partial or full closure of schools, the Department provided two guidance documents, agreed with the education partners, to enable primary schools, post-primary schools, special schools and centres for education to mediate the curriculum in a remote learning environment to all pupils/students. Those guidance materials were issued to schools and centres for education as they were published and are available at:

[Guidance on Remote Learning in a COVID-19: Context: September –December 2020 \(For primary schools and special schools\)](#)

[Guidance on Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning in a COVID-19 Context \(For post-primary schools and centres for education\)](#)

These documents are complemented by [Circular 0074/2020](#) which required all schools to put in place appropriate contingency measures to ensure that they are prepared to continue to support teaching and learning in the event of a partial or full closure of schools. They are also complemented by guidance documents on supporting pupils/students at risk of educational disadvantage and guidance documents on supporting pupils/students with special educational needs. These documents are available at [www.gov.ie-continuity_of_schooling- pupils/students with special educational needs](http://www.gov.ie-continuity_of_schooling-pupils/students_with_special_educational_needs).

Context for evaluating remote teaching and learning

The approaches described in this *Guide for the Evaluation of Remote Teaching and Learning* (ERTAL) will be used to evaluate and report on the provision of remote teaching and learning in three contexts:

- When schools are providing remote teaching and learning for all students when students may not attend school due to health restrictions
- When schools are providing remote teaching and learning for particular cohorts of students who are unable to attend school in person due to health restrictions
- When schools are providing remote teaching and learning for other contingency reasons

Rationale for evaluating remote teaching and learning

When pupils and students learn in a range of contexts – onsite in schools and remotely at home, it is important that we do everything to ensure that teaching and learning are as effective as possible, whether pupils/students are attending school or learning remotely.

The Inspectorate has well-established practices for the evaluation of learning and teaching through onsite inspection activities in schools and through surveys of and meetings with pupils/students and parents. Similarly, many schools have become skilled in self-evaluating how they provide for their pupils/students during face-to-face classes in school.

The nature of teaching and learning has adapted and changed in significant ways in the recent past. One of the most striking elements of that change is how schools have planned for and become more adept at using technologies and digital learning experiences and devices to plan for and mediate the curriculum in both day-to-day on-site and remote learning contingency contexts.

National and international research during the school closure period last year has highlighted how children and young people are impacted differently when it is necessary for them to learn in a distance learning context. In particular, the research has indicated that school closures can have a more significant impact on particular cohorts of children and young adults, including children from low-income families; immigrant children, refugee children, children from ethnic minority groups and children from the Travelling Community and those with special educational needs. School closures can also have a considerable impact on all children's sense of wellbeing, their connection with school and their feelings of self-worth. The lack of social contact can be particularly impactful for pupils/students with SEN or those at risk of disadvantage. This poses challenges for schools and for the Inspectorate as to how best to monitor, evaluate and support teaching and learning in a distance learning environment and how to ensure that all children and young adults are enabled to progress and flourish in their overall learning and development in such contexts.

Underpinning the development of a model of remote evaluation is a commitment to ensuring that the learning and wellbeing of all children and young people, especially those with special educational needs and those at risk of educational disadvantage and/or early school leaving, are supported where the curriculum is mediated in a remote environment.

Quality assuring and advising on a school's provision for remote teaching and learning, therefore, can support schools in meeting the social and emotional needs of their learners and can also provide an assurance that schools are meeting these important needs.

Working cooperatively with school communities

The Inspectorate is committed to working collaboratively with schools and education stakeholders more broadly in developing and co-constructing its approaches to evaluation and inspection. It acknowledges that schools are insightful in helping design good evaluation approaches. When questions and challenges about high quality teaching and learning are shared with schools, they invariably help develop better approaches to evaluating practice. Engaging in a collaborative approach to model development also deepens inspectors' understanding of what they are evaluating and how their work is perceived.

Therefore, in developing this model, the Department's Inspectorate has worked collaboratively with schools to develop grounded and practical ways of evaluating the quality of remote education provision. The Inspectorate engaged in two research phases with school communities and trialed the model over two further phases as it sought to understand the experiences of schools in providing remote teaching and learning.

At the heart of this cooperative approach is a bringing together by the Inspectorate of the perspectives of principals, teachers, parents, children and young adults to inform judgements about quality. This, in addition to inspectors' observation of a sample of

remote learning activities and inspectors' professional dialogue with teachers and school leaders, enables the quality of remote education provision to be assessed, exemplars of good practice to be disseminated, and the quality of both Inspectorate evaluations and schools' own self-evaluations to be enriched.

Aims of the model

The aims of this model of evaluation are to:

- Support continuity in teaching and learning for pupils/students in primary schools, post-primary schools, special schools and centres for education
- Promote and maintain public confidence in the education system during periods of full or partial school closure
- Enhance the Inspectorate's advisory and evaluative engagement with schools during full or partial school closures
- Further enable the collection, on a national basis, of school-specific data regarding how schools are engaging with children and young people to support them in their learning
- Provide greater support for school improvement in providing for remote teaching and learning by enabling the provision of customised, context-sensitive advice to schools which will complement and support school self-evaluation
- Provide context-driven and real-time advisory support for schools grappling with remote learning
- Support positive innovation and change in how the curriculum is mediated in remote contexts.

The evaluation framework

The evaluation framework is designed to address the following key question:

- How effective is the school's provision for remote teaching and learning?

The framework is based on *Looking at Our School* and is sufficiently agile to accommodate the varying contexts of remote teaching and learning in schools. It can be used in both remote provision contexts and in contexts where provision for teaching and learning contains a blend of onsite and remote provision. It has been informed by the Inspectorate's engagement with schools as it developed its approaches for evaluating remote teaching and learning.

The framework is as follows:

Domain	Standard	Effective practice in remote teaching and learning:
Learner outcomes	Pupils/students enjoy their learning, are motivated to learn and expect to achieve as learners	Pupils/students are motivated to participate in remote learning activities and enjoy their learning. This sense of enjoyment, engagement and motivation contributes to a positive sense of well-being and achievement among learners.
Learner experiences	Pupils/students engage purposefully in meaningful learning activities	<p>Pupils/students are interested in the learning activities that are provided for them and they show an understanding of the purpose and the intended outcomes of the tasks.</p> <p>All pupils/students, including the most vulnerable, have opportunities to work independently and collaboratively on these tasks and show high levels of interest in them.</p>
Teachers' individual practice	The teacher selects and uses teaching approaches appropriate to the learning objective and to the pupils'/students' learning needs.	<p>Teachers purposefully select teaching approaches and learning tasks that are appropriate to the remote learning environment and to the needs of the pupils/students.</p> <p>Teachers use a judicious blend of direct teaching, collaborative tasks and independent learning activities which are carefully designed to engage learners and progress learning.</p> <p>Teachers regularly provide pupils/students with constructive feedback on their work and communicate with parents/guardians.</p>
Teachers' collective practice	Teachers work together to devise learning opportunities across and beyond the curriculum	Teachers have regular opportunities to work together to collaboratively plan learning activities for all pupils/students.
Leading learning and teaching	School leaders foster a commitment to inclusion, equality of opportunity and the holistic development of each pupil/student.	<p>School leaders ensure that there is regular engagement between pupils/students and their teachers, including regular engagement between special education teachers and pupils/students on their caseloads.</p> <p>School leaders actively promote an inclusive culture and ensures that the school has a particular regard for its most vulnerable learners during periods of remote teaching and learning.</p> <p>School leaders lead specific whole-school strategies designed to promote learner well-being and establishing a sense of individual and collective connectedness with the school community.</p>

The inspection activities – ERTAL inspection model

FIVE DAYS IN ADVANCE	Notification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Notify the school by phone and forward a copy of the External Guide five working days in advance of the inspection
BEFORE THE EVALUATION	Inspectorate Activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contact the school Outline the engagements to be held during the inspection visit Request <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child Safeguarding Statement Acceptable Use Policy The school's plan to support remote teaching and learning (if available) Arrangements/Timetable for remote teaching and learning Forward <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Survey links and instructions School contact form Student assent forms Parental consent forms
	School Activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete school contact form and return to inspector Distribute survey links to parents, pupils/students and teachers Make the necessary practical arrangements for the inspection activity set out below
DURING THE EVALUATION	Inspectorate Activity	<p>Review:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child Safeguarding Statement The school's plan to support remote teaching and learning (if available) Arrangements/Timetable for remote teaching and learning Survey data A range of teaching, learning and assessment resources
		<p>Engage with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Principal / Senior Management Team Teaching group Individual teachers Pupils/Students (focus group) Parents (focus group)
		<p>Observe:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching / Learning and assessment activities <p>Child Protection Checks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct modified level one child protection checks <p>Feedback:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide feedback to principal at the end of the visit
AFTER THE EVALUATION	Inspectorate Activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preparation of draft report Forward survey data to school Processing of report to Factual Verification and School Response stages Publication of report on the Department of Education's website
	School Activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respond to report as appropriate at Factual Verification and School Response Stages

Child protection checks

The following two child protection checks are conducted during all ERTAL inspections:

1. The Child Safeguarding Statement has been ratified by the board and includes an annual review and a risk assessment.
2. All teachers visited reported that they have read the Child Safeguarding Statement and that they are aware of their responsibilities as mandated persons.

Use of data

All data gathered as part of the ERTAL evaluation is processed in accordance with the Department of Education's Data Protection Policy which can be accessed under on the DE website at <https://www.education.ie/en/the-department/data-protection/>.

For further details on how the Department of Education processes personal data, please visit <https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation-information/data-protection/#transparency>.

Conclusion

This evaluation model for remote teaching and learning and the approaches described in this Guide have been developed in accordance with Section 13(8) of the Education Act 1998. The model and approaches will be systematically reviewed by the Inspectorate following a period of implementation.