

Key findings and implications

1. Teaching quality is more important than how lessons are delivered

Pupils can learn through remote teaching.

Ensuring the elements of effective teaching are present – for example clear explanations, scaffolding and feedback – is more important than how or when they are provided. There was no clear difference between teaching in real time (“synchronous teaching”) and alternatives (“asynchronous teaching”).

For example, teachers might explain a new idea live or in a pre-recorded video. But what matters most is whether the explanation builds clearly on pupils’ prior learning or how pupils’ understanding is subsequently assessed.

We will be experimenting with a mix of both synchronous and asynchronous teaching, utilising the Oak National materials where appropriate and staff-created videos where we feel a more bespoke approach is better. Use of recordings has the benefit of allowing students to replay if they are uncertain and also allows a little more flexibility in timing for those households with limited IT, therefore we will err more to asynchronous

2. Ensuring access to technology is key, particularly for disadvantaged pupils

Almost all remote learning uses digital technology, typically requiring access to both computers and the internet.

Many reviews identify lack of technology as a barrier to successful remote instruction. It is important that support is provided to ensure that disadvantaged pupils – who are more likely to face these barriers – have access to technology.

In addition to providing access to technology, ensuring that teachers and pupils are provided with support and guidance to use specific platforms is essential, particularly if new forms of technology are being implemented.

We have worked to ensure that all households have some access to technology and appropriate internet access.

3. Peer interactions can provide motivation and improve learning outcomes

Multiple reviews highlight the importance of peer interaction during remote learning, as a way to motivate pupils and improve outcomes.

Across the studies reviewed, a range of strategies to support peer interaction were explored, including peer marking and feedback, sharing models of good work, and opportunities for live discussions of content.

The value of collaborative approaches was emphasised in many reviews, although notably many studies involved older learners. Different approaches to peer interaction are likely to be better suited to different age groups.

The bi-weekly tutor sessions and small group sessions online should allow for peer interaction. We will consider in the second phase how we might use student-initiated small group work to develop this further.

4. Supporting pupils to work independently can improve learning outcomes

Pupils learning at home will often need to work independently. Multiple reviews identify the value of strategies that help pupils work independently with success.

For example, prompting pupils to reflect on their work or to consider the strategies they will use if they get stuck have been highlighted as valuable.

Wider evidence related to metacognition and self-regulation suggests that disadvantaged pupils are likely to particularly benefit from explicit support to help them work independently, for example, by providing checklists or daily plans.

We have aimed for 50/50 of independent work and supported/online work. Much of our classroom teaching allows students time to do concentrated deep work and we don't want to sacrifice that during lockdown by running too many 'live' aspects without giving students the opportunity to consolidate and apply their learning – early trials of live Zoom lessons in schools highlighted there was a tendency for too much teacher talk, information overload and passive student engagement – allowing room for independent tasks avoids this. We acknowledge that not all learning can happen in front of a screen and we want students to move away from screens for a decent proportion of the day.

5. Different approaches to remote learning suit different tasks and types of content

Approaches to remote learning vary widely and have different strengths and weaknesses. Teachers should be supported to consider which approaches are best suited to the content they are teaching and the age of their pupils.

For example, games for learning were found to have a high impact on vocabulary learning in foreign languages, but there is less evidence related to their use in other subjects.

Likewise, using technology to support retrieval practice and self-quizzing can help pupils retain key ideas and knowledge, but is not a replacement for other forms of assessment.

Our curriculum leads have been encouraged to match their approach to remote learning according to their subjects and specific topics. We have deliberately avoided a clear 'whole school approach' which would reduce variety and mean that some departments were having to teach aspects of their subject in ways which were sub-optimal. We believe that variety of learning experiences and approaches is beneficial for learning and for students' experience.