Cyngor **Abertawe**
Swansea Council

Report of the Interim Director of Education

Education and Skills Policy Development Committee – 9 December 2020

Continuity of Learning

Purpose:	An overview of continuity of learning, including blended learning, with a particular emphasis on access to digital devices/connectivity, different approaches utilised (with best practice), professional learning to practitioners and capturing learners' views.
Policy Framework:	Continuity of Learning
Consultation:	Access to Services, Finance & Legal.
Recommendation(s):	It is recommended that:
1)	this report be received by the committee as an overview of continuity of learning, including blended learning, with a particular emphasis on access to digital devices/connectivity, different approaches utilised (with best practice), professional learning to practitioners and capturing learners' views.
Report Author:	Rob Davies
Finance Officer:	Chris Davies
Legal Officer:	Stephanie Williams
Access to Services Officer:	Rhian Millar

1.   Introduction

1.1   In March 2020, when schools went into lockdown they had to deliver pupils' learning remotely. As the lockdown set in, terms such as distance learning, remote learning, blended learning, synchronous, asynchronous and continuity of learning became ubiquitous.

1.2   In response to the lockdown, officers put together a Continuity of Learning plan. Ten main areas, or objectives, were identified to support schools and officers with the developing situation. The objectives relevant to this report include:

- Support for the digitally disadvantaged families
- Support for distance and blended learning across schools
- Approaches to mitigate against gaps widening between groups of pupils
- To provide high-quality CPD resources and opportunities for schools

2.   Main Body of Report

Digital devices

2.1   During the lockdown, a digital divide emerged between pupils who could access online learning remotely and those who could not. To maintain the continuity of learning for pupils without access to digital devices, many schools initially deployed paper-pack resources. However, despite the paper-pack being a useful resource, it could not be a long-term solution on its own. Subsequently, the Welsh Government realised it would need to provide funding to local authorities for additional digital equipment for schools. By June, using the Welsh Government's funding to purchase the equipment, 450 MiFi dongles and 700 devices were provided, via schools, to digitally disadvantaged families.

2.2   During the return to school, the pressures on digital devices have largely reduced as the majority of pupils have returned to face-to-face lessons. Our recent parental survey indicates over 70% of pupils have remained in school this term. However, when asked to self-isolate at home, difficulties remain with pupils needing to share devices with other siblings or parents, and unreliable internet connectivity. The survey of parents indicates that 92% of families have reliable connectivity and 80% believe they have a suitable device for home learning. The main issue is the need to share devices with the family at home.

2.3   The Directorate keeps a small central resource of around 100 Chromebooks that are deployed on an as-needed basis to support schools when pupils need to self-isolate at short notice. In addition, schools have worked hard to support families where there have been technical issues, such as how to support their children to access work through different platforms. Further, to mitigate the sharing-a-device problem, many schools have opted to deliver in asynchronous ways – recorded lessons and work sent through a virtual learning environment – which allows pupils to engage with learning at a time convenient to the home. Also, as part of the blended offer, schools still make good use of paper-pack resources. For example, pupils watch videos and receive related notes through a VLE but complete written work in exercise books or paper-packs. Pupils send photographs of their written work for assessment and feedback.   The importance of pupils continuing to write

on paper is something that schools have highlighted through our review work.

2.4 In addition to the Directorate's small central resources, schools are increasing the number of digital devices by purchasing equipment using the Welsh Government's Hwb Infrastructure Grant. This grant is timely and allows schools to provide necessary equipment for staff and pupils. Typically, schools are buying visualisers and graphics tablets for staff, to assist with digital modelling and demonstrations, and Chromebooks for pupils. Officers prioritise schools with lower levels of devices for deliveries.

Over 9,000 devices were ordered including:
- 800 laptops/PCs were delivered to school before the summer holidays
- 940 Apple devices were delivered to schools in September
- 600 laptops/PCs were delivered w/b 16th November
- 900 Chromebooks were delivered w/b 30th November

2.5 Overall, with increased devices, the majority of lessons delivered through face-to-face teaching and schools deploying appropriate blended-learning approaches for pupils learning at home, the difficulties around home learning have lessened. However, challenges remain, in particular with how well parents and carers at home can support their children to learn well as highlighted by a parental quote from our recent survey:

"there is a huge expectation on parents to upload work, take photos and share completed work on a platform that is seen by others. Not every family has the resource or knowledge to do this."

A side effect of the lockdown is that there has been an increase in the families wishing to Elective Home Educate (EHE). This is largely due to parents being highly anxious about the virus. Typical situations include families where there are medical concerns with the pupil or another family member. This term there has been an increase of 90 pupils since the start of this making a total of 236 pupils who are now EHE.

Blended learning
2.6 After the Directorate's Continuity of Learning plan was established, distance/remote learning guidance was provided to schools. Subsequently, with the prospect of schools returning to a partial opening in the summer, this was updated as blended-learning guidance.

2.7 Blended learning is not a new pedagogy. It is just a different means of delivering teaching and learning. The underpinning pedagogical approaches remain the same. This is an important point. High-quality learning, regardless of the means of delivery, consists of:
- Building on prior knowledge, skills and experiences
- Providing clear instructions and explanations
- Modelling approaches and scaffolding work

- Choosing activities and resources that develop continuity and progression in learning, and provide appropriate practise and challenge
- Providing opportunities for assessment and feedback to strengthen learning

Swansea's blended-learning strategy is founded on these pedagogical pillars, which are also supported by findings from research organisations such as the Education Endowment Foundation.

2.8   In terms of blended learning, schools deploy a wide range of approaches to suit the needs of their pupils. Some schools focus on asynchronous approaches to mitigate potential issues with access to equipment at home. Some schools have adopted synchronous approaches to encourage greater structure and engagement for pupils while at home. Live lessons can be recorded so that pupils can view at a later point if needed. Some have adopted adopting a hybrid of asynchronous and synchronous approaches. Nearly all schools indicate that they use paper-pack resources to support other approaches or as an alternative when digital means are not possible.

2.9   The necessity to deliver learning remotely has meant that teachers have learnt new ways to support learning. For example, recorded lessons and related resources can be accessed remotely after lessons have been delivered. These are made available to help pupils revisit and refresh previously taught work, or to support pupils who have missed lessons. In addition, schools have developed online assessment techniques that can quickly provide efficient feedback to teachers and children. Live sessions have proved effective in engaging and supporting children's wellbeing, particularly some of our most vulnerable. Live sessions and a range of home-support resources are used to engage parents and to support them with helping their children to learn at home. Further areas to be explored include, looking at collaborative blended learning between schools, potentially in the post-16 sector.

2.10   The main challenges faced have centred on the upskilling of staff and pupils to use digital platforms and software efficiently and effectively. Also, the associated workload around creating and designing resources is significant.

2.11   Schools and teachers have responded to these challenges incredibly well. Using our guidance, leaders have adopted strong, evidenced-based approaches to their planning. Many have used the Education Endowment Foundation's (EEF) Tiered Approach as a framework for their work along with our blended learning guidance. Primarily it is important to maximise high-quality teaching for all. To do this, INSET and professional learning have focussed on the science of learning (Headteacher Cross Phase, Feb 2020), high-quality instruction, scaffolding, metacognitive strategies, high-quality assessment, flexible grouping and digital skills development.

2.12 Officers have supported schools where needed, for example, by running webinars for all to access, including governors, or by providing bespoke support to individual schools. Moreover, our secondary and primary networks have been used well to exchange knowledge and share best practice.

2.13 Teachers in schools have supported each other exceptionally well during this period. For example, teachers have shared good practice by running twilight sessions on live-lesson walkthroughs, pop-up workshops with Microsoft Quizzes and drop-in digital surgeries in the staff room. Again, our networks, including the virtual school website, have been powerful vehicles for sharing and developing good practice.
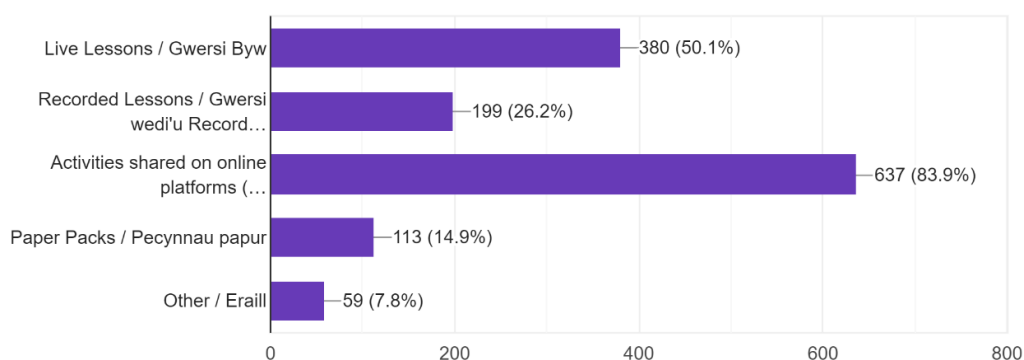
Listening to stakeholders

2.14 Importantly, schools have used staff, parental and pupil surveys well to design, improve and refine their provision. For example, pupil-survey information has indicated that staff were generally sending too much work home when pupils were self-isolating. Following this feedback, teachers have responded by being more measured with what they send. Another example is where a school decided not to deploy live sessions as around 1 in 5 pupils had reported that they needed to share devices at home.

2.15 Our parental survey indicates that the proportion of live sessions has increased significantly since the summer term. Work sent through virtual learning platforms is the most used method.

What type of activities has the school provided? / Pa fath o weithgareddau y mae'r ysgol wedi'u darparu?

759 responses

Activity	Count
Live Lessons / Gwersi Byw	380 (50.1%)
Recorded Lessons / Gwersi wedi'u Record…	199 (26.2%)
Activities shared on online platforms (…	637 (83.9%)
Paper Packs / Pecynnau papur	113 (14.9%)
Other / Eraill	59 (7.8%)

Feedback from parents indicates that schools have made big strides in improving their remote-learning provision. In the survey, a parent commented:

"Vast improvement with the approach to learning over the firebreak lockdown than in the spring. The mix of live-lessons and loaded materials following the timetable was so much

*better structured for learning than the previous random
uploads of work."*

2.16 Overall, whilst challenging and certainly not perfect, blended learning has allowed teachers and pupils, including parents, to develop some strong strategies to support learning. Officers look forward to building on these moving forward.

Professional learning

2.17 Changes to how training is delivered have emerged through the pandemic. New approaches include:
- sessions run virtually through teams
- sessions run by webinars (similar to a broadcast)
- sessions recorded and pre-recorded to allow staff to engage at a time most convenient to them.
- Swansea Virtual school website hosted CPD webinars and examples of good practice for teachers from Swansea and further afield.

These practices have not been used to any significant degree before the pandemic.

2.18 The training has focused on:
- using digital platforms (e.g. how to use - the technical side of things)
- effective teaching and learning through blended/remote ways
- general effective teaching and learning, assessment & curriculum design
- sharing best practice
- wellbeing support

Virtual network meetings have been used substantially, for example, to support planning for the return to school in the autumn, blended learning approaches and Year 6 into Year 7 transition etc.

2.19 Despite the many benefits, virtual sessions/seminars can suffer from a lack of interactivity. Tasks activities are more difficult to manage. Also, as a trainer, it is harder to monitor how a group is responding to the session. For example, when delegates have their cameras off, or can't be viewed, there is no guarantee that they engaging in the session. Furthermore, producing pre-recorded sessions is workload heavy and requires appropriate editing software, recording kit, as well as training for officers.

A blend of face-to-face, virtual and recording training sessions is probably the most appropriate way forward.

Recruit, recover, raise standards: the accelerating learning programme

2.20 The Welsh Government's grant for supporting pupils most affected by the lockdown is modest but welcome. Primary schools have received grants between £2.2k–£27k, while for secondary schools the figure ranges between £16k–£134k. Note: there were uplifts based on deprivation and the Welsh language and schools with sixth forms received an additional sum. Schools have responded quickly to deploy the grant and are supporting pupils with the greatest need by recruiting additional human resource. Examples include:

- Temporary employment of an experienced teacher to run catch-up sessions with identified pupils requiring support
- Two additional part-time teacher assistants recruited to release classroom teachers to support pupils with literacy and numeracy catch-up
- Additional 10 hrs teacher-assistant support for specific groups of learners, identified by assessments
- Buy in cover to release teaching staff to work with pupils who have fallen behind
- Fund one-to-one and small-group tuition for exam-year groups and vulnerable learners for four evenings a week after school
- Employment of a maths teacher and part-time science and English staff

The disruption to learning is still unfolding, and it will take a long time to assess fully. At this stage, it is too early to measure any impact of this grant.

3. Financial Implications

3.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report.

4. Legal Implications

4.1 There are no legal implications associated with this report.

Background Papers: None

Appendices: None