

## **Live lessons are not the gold standard:**

### **Ofsted busts remote learning myths**

Ofsted has moved to dispel a number of “myths” about remote education, including that live lessons are the “gold standard” and that the best forms of remote learning are digital.

During the first national lockdown, there was a presumption in many circles, including in the national media and among some parents, that live, online teaching should be the expectation.

This myth has persisted, often leading to parents putting pressure on schools to provide live teaching throughout the school day. However, the early evidence has shown that in fact it is the quality of teaching and feedback, rather than how it is delivered, that is important (see later). Ofsted has now added its weight to the debate by publishing guidance for schools and parents to dispel common myths about remote education. These myths include that:

Remote education is fundamentally different to other forms of teaching and learning. Remote education is a different curriculum or offer to the content that would be delivered normally. The best forms of remote education are digital. The best way to deliver remote education is always through live lessons. The most important thing is pupils’ engagement.

The advice has been written by the head of Ofsted’s research team, Professor Daniel Muijs, and draws on evidence gathered during the inspectorate’s autumn visits to schools and other sources.

Live lessons aren’t always best

Ofsted’s guidance offers seven pieces of advice, not least that “live lessons are not always best”.

The advice suggests using different approaches to suit different types of content, including

considering “flipped learning” models where new content is taught through an asynchronous recorded lesson and then practice, tutoring and feedback are done synchronously.

It states: “Some think that a live lesson is the ‘gold standard’ of remote education. This isn’t necessarily the case. Live lessons have a lot of advantages. They can make curriculum alignment easier, and can keep pupils’ attention, not least as the teacher has more control over the learning environment. But live lessons are not always more effective than asynchronous approaches.

“There are some specific difficulties in doing live lessons. It can be hard to build in interaction and flexibility. This means that giving feedback can actually be less effective than when we use recorded lesson segments followed by interactive chats, or tasks and feedback.

“Using recorded lessons produced externally can allow you to easily draw on high-quality lessons taught by expert subject teachers. The challenge here can be to make sure they are integrated with the curriculum.

“Because evidence suggests that concentration online is shorter than the length of a typical lesson, filming a classroom lesson may be ineffective.”

The medium matters (a bit)

Another of the seven pieces of guidance reminds us that “quality of teaching is far more important than how lessons are delivered”. However, it adds: “There is some evidence that the medium does matter, especially in digital remote education. Pupils tend to spend longer accessing a remote lesson when they are using a laptop than when using a phone (tablets are in between).

“This means that we need to think carefully about whether pupils have access to the right kind of device when we’re using digital remote education. If they don’t, and we can’t provide enough devices, it might be better to consider non-digital approaches as well.

“When using digital remote education, we often rely on internet access. Again, we need to consider whether pupils have this and what we can provide if they don’t.

“It is also worth considering where to host content. In the battle for attention against the internet, we need to consider whether we avoid hosting video lessons on certain platforms like YouTube, for example, because of their advertising algorithms distracting pupils.”

Five further pieces of advice

**Remote education is a way of delivering the curriculum:** Remote education is not the same as digital education. Sometimes, it may be more effective to deliver remote education through worksheets or a textbook. However, when using textbooks or worksheets it is still important to make sure that teachers can provide feedback and assess learning.

**Keep it simple:** Everything we know about cognitive science and learning still applies. We don’t have to make huge changes to the way we teach. Remote education often benefits from a straightforward and easy-to-use interface. More important is attention to the key elements of effective teaching. As it is harder for pupils to concentrate when being taught remotely, it is often a good idea to divide content into smaller chunks. Short presentations or modelling of new content can be followed by exercises or retrieval practice.

**When adapting the curriculum, focus on the basics:** We will often need to adapt our subject curriculum when moving to remote education, for example because some topics are hard to teach remotely. When we do this, we need to focus on the basics. Beware of offering too much new subject matter at once. Consider the most important knowledge or concepts pupils need to know. Focus on those. Consider what alternatives exist for traditional practical activities. What can be done at home, or using simulations, for example? Worked examples and modelling can work very well.

**Feedback, retrieval practice and assessment are more important than ever:** It can be harder to deliver immediate feedback to pupils remotely than in the classroom, but teachers have found some clever ways to do this. This immediate feedback can be given through: chatroom discussions, one-to-one interaction tools, interactive touch-screen questioning in live recorded lessons, and adaptive learning software. Peer interactions can provide motivation and improve learning outcomes. It's therefore worth considering enabling these through, for example, chat groups or video-linking functions. They will also help pupils maintain their social skills.

**Engagement matters, but is only the start:** There is only so much a teacher can do to engage pupils remotely. We therefore need to make sure that efforts to engage don't distract us from teaching the curriculum. We also need to check whether pupils have actually learned the content we want them to through assessment. Engagement increases when pupils feel part of the school community. Whole-school digital assemblies and feedback, for example through newsletters to pupils and parents, can help them feel part of the community even when learning remotely.

Previous research -

Many of these points have been echoed in previous research on remote education published during the first national lockdown.

A research review by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) in April last year (<https://cm.findlay.co.uk/news/effective-remote-learning-education-endowment-foundation-coronavirus-covid-19-schools-teaching-home-lockdown/>) found that quality of teaching, facilitating peer interaction, and supporting pupils to work independently were key to effective remote learning. It added that quality of teaching is much more important than how lessons are delivered.

Meanwhile, a report from the NFER in June found that, in terms of teaching and learning approaches (<https://cm.findlay.co.uk/news/most-effective-remote-learning-approaches-lockdown-coronavirus-nfer-schools/>), schools delivering content to pupils via "online conversations" saw higher engagement, especially among poorer pupils. Also effective was setting activities involving consolidating previous learning or revising.

(<https://www.sec-ed.co.uk/news/most-effective-remote-learning-approaches-lockdown-coronavirus-nfer-schools/>)

A welcome intervention -

Ofsted's myth-buster and guidance has been welcomed by the Association of School and College Leaders. General secretary Geoff Barton said: "We're pleased to see Ofsted dispelling common myths about remote education, particularly the notion that live lessons are a gold standard. This idea seems to have caught hold in some circles and has created an expectation that schools should be providing an endless stream of live lessons.

"However, while live lessons can work very well, they are only one form of remote education and other approaches can also be highly effective. Schools have done a great deal of work in

developing their remote education offer over the course of this crisis and have very high-quality provision in place.”

*Ofsted: Guidance: What’s working well in remote education, January 2021:*

([http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/whats-working-well-in-remote-](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/whats-working-well-in-remote-education)

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