DISTANCE LEARNING
Is this the new normal?

The Authoritative Guide
for Junior Schools

Includes Learning Continuity checklist
See page 19

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Introduction

How can junior schools best support young learners?

The impact of covid-19 has driven schools all around the world to move to a new way of teaching. This has been no mean feat, with schools having to consider new tools, policies, and teaching practices.

We’ve heard some fantastic stories, and it’s been amazing to see the quick turnaround to make distance learning work. Not to mention how parents have risen to the challenge of homeschooling.

However the transition for junior schools has been more challenging. Younger learners require more support and can find digital learning trickier to manage - especially those who can’t yet read fluently!

Our recent survey showed that one of the biggest challenges facing junior schools since the start of the lockdown period was keeping in contact with pupils for 40% of schools, closely followed by effective parental engagement for 32%.

It has long been recognised that strong parental support is important in ensuring young learners don’t fall behind, even more so in the current climate. Furthermore, many people are predicting more of a blended approach to teaching and learning in the next academic year; one where schools will have to manage pupils both virtually and in the classroom.

In this ebook we share best practices for supporting effective home learning and 4 key areas school leaders need to consider to provide an innovative digital learning approach for children in EYFS and Key Stages 1 and 2.

Be sure to check out our learning continuity checklist on page 19.
1. PREPARE

How can you prepare for distance learning?

In our survey on distance learning readiness, results showed that 33% of schools were still at the preparation phase (April 2020). This phase includes the review of a school’s online learning tools as well as content for their digital learning program.

Learning is less about location and in recent years there has been a lot of talk of edtech driving this shift. Pupils are now able to access learning content from home as easily as in class.

Make all your resources easy to access

When providing digital learning, teachers and pupils can often face problems and frustration searching for multiple files. This includes too many open tabs, or remembering multiple logins for a variety of platforms. Try to find a solution which has a simple navigation bar, uses graphics for icons and that brings all your resources into one place.

Preparation, sharing & assessment in place

Preparation phase: 33.0%
Sharing phase: 10.0%
Assessing phase: 29.0%

Content creation

Finding content to share is as easy as a Google search. BBC Bitesize, ActiveLearn Primary, Twinkl, Youtube — you name it. Digital textbooks are on the rise as well. Whether your teachers have got time or need something at the last minute, there are a variety of options.

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Content creation is not just for professionals anymore either. Think of vast online libraries like Khan Academy. Tools like digital whiteboards and screen sharing technology have expanded the pool of content creators.

Prepared content

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These platforms allow schools to bring everything into one place, making it simple for both teachers and pupils to access resources and collaborate with each other. Benefits include messages not getting lost in an inbox along with increased security and data management.

In the face of school closures, junior schools are making use of all kinds of content. Our recent survey showed that 43% of schools didn’t feel prepared to share resources online. Of those who felt prepared, a **staggering 77%** were using a Learning Management System as their preferred method of sharing. These include Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams and Firefly.

How would you share learning resources with pupils?

- **Printed pack**: 4.09%
- **School website**: 12.0%
- **Email**: 7.0%
- **LMS**: 77.0%

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**Provide a blend of activities and reduce screentime**

Pupils will be spending a lot of time at home and will get bored easily. Try to think about a range of digital assets to use such as videos, worksheets, and quizzes. You will also want to think about how to limit screentime, for example through the use of audiobooks or asking pupils to write pieces of work in an exercise book, which could be shared as a picture file.
Getting support from parents

The best solutions for junior schools make it easy for parents to be part of the learning conversation, strengthening the partnership between school and home. When considering different options, take a look at ones which share resources not only with pupils and teachers, but also with parents who will become your teaching assistants during school closures.

Combining learning content with video-conferencing

Beyond using an LMS platform, the other tool which many schools have opted for is video conferencing. Learning is an inherently social process; it’s all well and good to distribute perfectly pitched and curated content, but it soon hits a wall without some dialogue and interaction.

For younger learners it might be difficult to run live online lessons. Many junior schools have opted for short 30 - 40 min pre-recorded sessions. A little work with Google Hangouts could allow a school to run check-in sessions, whilst Zoom and Microsoft Team Meetings are also popular tools. Tools like Flipgrid, Padlet or Firefly Forums can also facilitate online interactions.

With the right tools, you can manage the kind of interaction you want. Even better if you can centralise it, like many schools do through Firefly, you can provide a multi-dimensional video.

Develop clear policies and guidelines

Make sure policies are clear for both pupils and teachers to help maintain safeguarding. Often schools have very clear policies within the school setting, but at this time, they will need to prepare policies which have been adapted for distance learning. Also don’t forget to ensure these documents can be easily found.

What about managing both in class and virtual students?

By setting up a camera, microphone and interactive whiteboard in the classroom, teachers are better able to manage pupils based virtually and in-class. It means they can live stream what’s going on in the classroom as well as what’s displayed on the interactive whiteboard using a video-conferencing platform. Even better using platforms such as MozaBook, teachers can display both the slides and live streaming of remote students to in-class pupils. This helps the class to feel better connected.

Another more cost-effective option, and potentially easier to set-up would be to use video-conferencing tools to share the teacher’s screen with both the classroom and remote students. This also means that the teacher has less technology to worry about!
3. Assess

How can you assess pupils’ progress?

Our recent survey on distance learning preparedness, indicated that 67% of schools currently don’t feel ready to assess work online. If given a choice, the preference for assessing work was by using an LMS for 56% of schools.

Not possible

Email submissions

LMS

How would you assess pupils’ progress?

Providing evidence-based activities

In the event of an extended school closure, assessment and feedback becomes an essential aspect of home learning. When setting up tasks digitally have a think about what it is you want the pupils to create. How do you want them to submit it? As a photo or a video? Take a picture of a printed handout? Or are they going to complete a quiz?

Giving quality feedback

Your pupils might also appreciate the added touch of audio or video feedback. Many junior schools have found this invaluable because lots of the younger learners can’t read fluently, and what they’re missing in isolation is hearing the teacher’s voice. Some are even using voice response features so that children can reply to their teachers.

Think about assessment authenticity

We don’t want pupils to simply pull answers from google or textbooks. So think about the types of assessments your school will provide. For example, you could try to use a combination of quizzes, video or audio submissions, photos of handwritten work or even screen captures of online projects.
Manage the workload

Teaching online is hard. There is a lot of work that goes into preparing it. Think about how your teachers can easily share it through an LMS platform, and find tools which speak to each other so that gathering assessment data is simple.

If you would like some more guidance, we have lots of carefully curated Firefly blogs produced by our learning experts. These provide lots of advice and tips for remote learning and learning continuity.

You need simplicity for tracking purposes

Teachers can’t be managing multiple assessments methods through a variety of platforms as it will quickly become difficult to track grades for multiple classes. Find ways of bringing all the results together in one place.

Tracking progress

What is going to fit your school’s needs? For many schools, it tends to come down to the flexibility of feedback and collection of data. For example in Firefly, teachers are able to provide grades and feedback on each piece of work which then gets collated automatically into a digital markbook for each pupil.
4. Engage

How will you be getting parents involved?

Since the unexpected school closures, the needs of parents have evolved beyond simply wanting to know how their child is progressing. They are also fulfilling the role of teacher or teaching assistant, which is why it is even more important than ever for schools to be in close contact with parents and families.

When speaking to schools, our survey showed that 45% of schools kept in contact with parents mainly over email, closely followed by an LMS or MIS for 36% of schools.

**Provide visibility of work to parents**

During school closures, in addition to generic school information, updates and policies, parents will also be particularly interested in the work pupils are doing and the resources they are using.

**Ensure regular comms don’t become a burden**

Schools need to ensure that regular communication does not become a burden for everyone involved; teachers should not be spending inordinate amounts of time emailing updates to the families of their pupils, and of course parents do not want to be ‘spammed’ with emails from school.
Improving parental engagement

Generally, parents want to know:

- What is my child doing?
- How is my child doing?
- What do I need to do?

If schools can ensure parents get this information regularly, then parents will become more engaged and empowered to support their child’s learning. To make a real difference, these communications need to be easy to access, relevant to each family and crucially timely – so that parents can act upon the information before it is too late.

Help parents feel reassured

All of this information can be easily shared through an LMS platform and help parents feel reassured. For example, schools can send out updates and announcements in the form of newsletters and blogs, as well as provide access to pupil timetables and learning resources, making it easier for parents to manage their child’s day.

Avoid flooding parents with lots of emails

During this time most people are already being bombarded with all sorts of information and emails. Try to limit your emails to very important updates and be aware that the more emails your school sends, the more responses teachers are likely to receive, which could become difficult for them to manage.

Engage

Share learning support materials

As well as providing access to the child’s learning resources, it can also be helpful to share learning support materials. For many parents, this will be the first time they will be assisting with homeschooling and may require some advice as well as a refreshment of key topics. The Firefly Parent app is particularly well placed for this.
Conclusion

A fully-formed learning strategy has to consider all of these questions. It’s as much about providing opportunities to interact and to assess pupils’ learning journeys while keeping parents engaged, as it is about simply providing learning resources.

All of the tools we’ve mentioned above embed directly into Firefly. Through its platform for supporting parent engagement and sustaining learning continuity, Firefly saves your teachers time, while creating a centralised space for pupils and parents to access content and keep them involved in the learning conversation.

Your checklist for learning continuity

We know that this sudden transition to online learning is not easy. Based on our experience of working with hundreds of schools around the world, we have put together this handy checklist. It will help you consider how to get the most from your distance learning strategy and tools.

Prepare
- Consider easy access to resources
- Plan for a blend of online and offline activities
- Reduce the workload by using prepared content
- Use edtech tools to create interactive activities

Share
- Combine learning content with video conferencing
- Develop clear policies and guidelines
- Centralise all your tools and resources
- Ensure pupils and teachers can collaborate

Assess
- Create evidence-based activities
- Find a simple way to collate all your assessment data
- Consider audio and feedback tools
- Think about assessment authenticity

Engage
- Provide visibility of tasks to parents
- Avoid flooding parents with lots of emails
- Share learning support materials
- Give parents access to pupil progress data
Firefly has been an absolutely godsend to us and in view of the possibility of school closure, it is one of the remote systems we will use to update pupils and set work! Firefly has been a lifesaver with very positive feedback from parents with regards to remote learning but we couldn’t have achieved what we have in the short space of time without the backup from your team. An average of 97% of pupils logging on to our various systems each day this week. Amazing engagement and all thanks to Firefly. We couldn’t have done it without you!

The firefly cloud platform really takes the system, and its complete integration to the next level. We utilise verbal feedback frequently so that conversations in class are captured for the parents to listen to and support when they review tasks with their children.

Introducing Firefly Young Learner

Firefly Young Learner is purpose-built for junior schools like yours. Bring all your tools into one seamless environment to manage home learning, track progress and engage parents in one comprehensive, affordable platform.

Teachers save time and simplify home learning
- Collaborate and share resources
- Track the progress of every pupil
- Support each child’s learning at home and in the classroom

Pupils stay connected with their teachers and classmates
- Help pupils stay focused on their learning with resources in one
- Simple to use & child-friendly platform
- Designed for and adaptable to all age groups

Parents are part of the learning journey
- Share resources and upcoming tasks
- Send latest news and announcements for school events
- Celebrate every child’s achievements

School Leaders inspire the wider school community
- Provide effective, ongoing communications
- Ensure continuity of learning through an adaptable platform designed for younger families.

If you would like to find out more visit: www.fireflylearning.com/firefly-for-younger-learners

Why schools love Firefly for distance learning?

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Phil Nelkin
Queen’s College

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David Smith
Doha College

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Richard Kirby
All Hallows Prep School

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Christian Bishop
Wellington College International School
The platform for parent engagement & learning continuity

Find out more
fireflylearning.com