



Knocknacarra Educate Together
National School

Distance Learning Policy

This policy has been created to provide guidance for distance learning in the event of sustained school or class closures.

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Introductory Statement:

The primary objective of Knocknacarra Educate Together NS is to provide a well-rounded, holistic education in a safe environment. In exceptional circumstances and based on the advice of public health authorities, all school children or children from designated classes may be asked not to attend school. The first such sustained occasion occurred on 12th March 2020. Without significant warning and time to prepare, measures were put in place to continue the learning process, and staff members, children, parents and Board members are to be commended for their cooperation to achieve this goal. A particularly important part of this process was ongoing consultation with all stakeholders which led to modifications in practice and procedure.

While the school building has now re-opened for in-person learning, the potential for closures remains a possibility in the near and long-term future. Therefore, this policy sets out clear guidance, based on previous experiences as well as what has been determined to be good practice in this area. It reflects practices outlined in [Guidance on Continuity of Schooling for Primary Schools](#) and other associated documents. It is also based on feedback received in the two parent surveys that were distributed during and after closure as well as teacher feedback.

Rationale:

This policy seeks to provide clarity to all parties regarding the school's approach to distance learning, ensuring a consistent approach that also provides for flexibility regarding different circumstances. The policy seeks to provide a framework outlining the expectations for staff members, pupils and parents when distance learning is taking place. Having this policy in place will ensure a smooth transition in the event that a group of children are asked for public health reasons not to attend school.

It is acknowledged that different family circumstances may influence a child's ability to engage with distance learning activities. Parents are encouraged to contact teachers via email to express concerns or seek additional support.

Other key policies to read in conjunction with this policy include the Code of Behaviour and Anti-bullying Policy, the Data Protection Policy and the Child Safeguarding Statement, all of which apply to distance learning activities.

Distance Learning Terms:

In order to properly understand the school's approach to distance learning, some key terms need to be defined.

An ***online learning platform*** is a virtual learning environment that enables interaction between staff members and children and their parents. These interfaces allow teachers to create and assign tasks, upload videos and provide feedback. Children, with the assistance of parents as required, can communicate with teachers by seeking clarification, submitting tasks and receiving feedback. The two platforms used in the school are *Seesaw* and *Google Classroom*, which are described in detail later in this policy.

Synchronous learning is a form of distance learning using online platforms in real-time. Pupils and teachers log on to the platform at the same time and engage through the platform in a live, interactive manner. **Asynchronous learning** uses online platforms but does not require all pupils and the teacher to be logged in simultaneously. Instead, videos and audio recordings are created by the teacher in advance, and pupils can view or hear them at a time that suits them.

Expectations

Distance learning attempts to continue the pace of learning and support the emotional well-being of children even when in-person learning in the school building is not possible. While distance learning can never replace the learning experiences that occur in-person and among peers, with good planning and support from all parties it can be an interim solution to promote continuity in learning.

School closures are stressful for everyone with many parents (including teachers) struggling with childcare and work arrangements. Teachers will do their best to be supportive and helpful to the families in their class. Communication and patience are key to making distance learning successful.

The amount of time children will engage in learning activities will vary depending on age, most likely 2-5 hours per school day. It is acknowledged that a range of circumstances may influence a child's participation, and the school will seek to support all families in engaging in learning to the best of their ability and capacity.

Project work and tasks that are particularly suited for home learning are recommended. As an Educate Together school, special attention will be given to support social and emotional learning as well as integrating Learn Together objectives in tasks. Time for mindfulness, self-reflection and supporting positive relationships are important for helping children navigate changes in routine and time away from classmates and teachers.

On a weekly basis, teachers will send out learning plans to parents during closures. Communication with parents will be through Aladdin and emails. In addition, details about the tasks and learning activities will be available via the online learning platforms described below. On occasion, teachers may phone or email parents to check on progress and provide support. Equally, children and parents are encouraged to reach out to teachers for assistance and guidance. Teachers will reply as soon as is practical and within the same day if a message is received during school hours.

Online Learning Platforms:

Two different online learning platforms are in use in the school. For children from Junior Infants to 3rd Class, they will use Seesaw. For children from 4th Class and up, they will use Google Classroom. Both platforms will be used for various purposes throughout the year, even when in-person learning is possible, to support home learning. Before children can begin to use these platforms, they must grant permission via the Aladdin Connect website. During closures, tasks and assignments will be posted on a weekly basis on Sunday evening prior to the start of a new week.

Seesaw:

Seesaw is an online learning platform that acts as a digital portfolio. Teachers can create their own tasks or access a bank of appropriate activities. Teachers and pupils can communicate through voice and video messages. Seesaw requires a secure login. More on Seesaw's Privacy Policy can be read [here](#).

Google Classroom:

Google Classroom is an online learning platform that is part of the GSuite for Education. Teachers can create their own tasks and share links using tools such as Google Forms and Google Docs. Teachers and pupils can communicate using public and private messages. Google Classroom requires a secure login. Children already use this log-in for Khan Academy and saving documents to their Google Drive at school. Questions around Google Classroom Privacy and Security are answered [here](#). Parents who are signed up to a classroom will receive email notifications once a new assignment is posted up. These notifications can be turned off by clicking on the three bars in the left hand corner, (beside the class name) by turning off email notifications in Settings.

Asynchronous Learning Tools:

Acknowledging the challenges that synchronous learning activities may present families (consistent access to technology devices, the various work and school responsibilities of other family members and the desire to limit screen time), the majority of learning activities will be asynchronous.

A number of online tools may be used by teachers, in addition to the two platforms above, to provide asynchronous learning opportunities. These include Loom, YouTube (with all videos unlisted), Google Forms, ScreenCast-o-Matic, Padlet, Epic!, Xtra Maths, Khan Academy, Kahoot, schoolbook publishers' websites, virtual tours and other resources designed for distance learning. During times of closure, teacher videos and audio recordings provide a sense of familiarity to children. Teachers will upload a daily video or audio recording outlining work for the day and sharing some work samples, ideas or news. Teachers will also create instructional videos that will explain new ideas or concepts.

Importantly, most asynchronous learning activities should not be limited to online learning. In fact, the tasks set will actively seek to provide time for learning that does not involve a screen. The use of schoolbooks and copies, whenever possible, in a manner that is familiar to children will be pursued. Hands-on learning activities are also recommended. Daily personal reading is essential. Active learning that promotes fitness is also important.

In addition to the regular learning plan crafted by teachers, children are encouraged to use the activities on the school's website for distance learning. These may be expanded in the event of further closures.

Synchronous Learning:

While the majority of learning activities will be asynchronous, the value of synchronous learning for continuing to develop the sense of community of the classroom as well as the chance for real-time, meaningful interaction is acknowledged as an important learning approach. Therefore, at least once a week, a synchronous learning activity will take place. The platform for these sessions will be Google

Meets because of its security features and compatibility with Google Classroom. These synchronous activities may be whole-class or done in small groups. These sessions may involve discussion, games, sharing of projects and demonstrations. The following guidelines for these activities will be in place:

- Invitations, with links, will be sent to parents via email or shared using the online learning platforms. These links should never be shared or posted publicly.
- Everyone should arrive on time.
- Participants should mute themselves at the beginning of the meeting and whenever it isn't their turn to speak.
- It is optional for children to turn on their camera.
- The Code of Behaviour (including the Anti-bullying Policy) applies to all online interactions.
- It may be helpful to use earphones to prevent feedback.
- Children should try to find an environment that doesn't have noise disturbances.
- The teacher will always be the last person to leave the Meet.
- Parents are not required to sit with children for the entire Meet, depending on a child's age and independence level.
- The recording option is disabled. Children and parents may not record or photograph the Meet.
- Only those recognised as members of the class will be admitted to the Meet.
- While not required, it may be advisable to have a second staff member, such as the principal or support teacher, present to help manage the Meet.

Use of School Resources:

Children will be given, whenever possible, their own textbooks, copybooks and other resources for use during distance learning. In addition, parents may borrow a device (a laptop or tablet) to support distance learning as explained in the Acceptable Usage Policy.

Children with Special Needs:

If a child is receiving additional supports in school and has a support teacher and/or special needs assistant with whom they interact regularly, that support teacher and/or special needs assistant will work with the class teacher and parents in order to develop a framework to continue further supports during closure. Adjustments to the class learning programme may be arranged to ensure positive engagement and success. Support will include at least one synchronous session per week, whenever possible and agreeable to parents, to help children make progress with the learning plan as well as support IEP goals.

Supporting Children during Absences

If parents choose not to send children to school for any reason, the staff will work with them as best as possible to help keep children up to speed with classwork if they are well enough to continue their work. However, if school is open for in-person teaching then teachers will not be in a position to provide the virtual learning environment as outlined above. An exception to this are children who are deemed to be in a very high risk category and must remain home. Staff members will contact parents and actively support learning in this situation using the guidelines identified in this policy.

Roles and Responsibilities:

In order to support effective distance learning, every member of the school community has a role to play, as described below.

Individual	Responsibility
Board of Management:	Drafting and review of this policy in consultation with other stakeholders
Principal:	Implementation of this policy, technology support, organising whole-school video messages and activities, supporting teachers with synchronous learning sessions
Class teachers:	Preparing learning plans, organising asynchronous and synchronous learning experiences, responding to queries, providing feedback
Support teachers:	Providing targeted support to individual children, supporting the implementation of learning plans
Administrative personnel:	Assisting with communication between home and school
Pupils:	Completing tasks to the best of their ability, engaging with online learning platforms in a manner that is respectful
Parents:	Supporting the learning experience of children, communicating with staff members as required

Monitoring, Reviewing and Evaluating the Policy:

The implementation of the policy shall be monitored by the principal and the Board of Management. The policy should be reviewed and evaluated at least every three years and as necessary and no later than 2023.

Ratification:

This revised policy was ratified by the Board of Management on the date below.

Paul Adams, chairperson

Date of ratification: 30/09/2020