



# **Covid-19 guide for primary schools**



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# Coronavirus: a closure checklist for school leaders

## Hilary Goldsmith and colleagues have put together a closure checklist for school leaders

By Hilary Goldsmith

With schools across the UK in partial or total closure for what could be weeks or months, many headteachers are facing the hugely complex task of shutting up parts of their school sites for an undefined period of time.

For most heads, their only experience of school closure will be occasional snow days – even in the long summer holiday break, no school is ever truly closed.

### Advice for coronavirus school closures

The checklist below has been prepared by a number of highly experienced school business leaders, who have contributed ideas and suggestions from their own business continuity plans and professional knowledge, which we hope will support headteachers and other senior leaders, in lieu of any central guidance.

#### Staffing

- Ensure that the school holds current contact details for all staff.
- Notify staff of the correct way to report sickness absence – even when schools are closed, employers retain a duty of care to monitor sickness and wellbeing of staff.
- Circulate details of any staff wellbeing, support, counselling or advice sources that are available.
- Contact new appointments to reassure them of their position.
- Identify any casual or hourly paid staff who may be at financial risk. Communicate directly with them to offer support and advice.
- Consider how best to redeploy staff who are no longer able to carry out their normal duties. Can they support other core functions?
- Ensure staff have access to suitable IT equipment to work from home where necessary.
- Make yourself aware of those with additional carer responsibilities who may be unavailable to work.

#### Communication

- Keep communication lines open. Give regular updates to keep stakeholders informed and involved.
- Ensure that sufficient staff are able to update the school website and text messaging services, should key IT and comms staff become unwell.
- Ask senior and middle managers to check in with their teams regularly to monitor wellbeing, workload and general family situation.

#### GDPR

- Make staff aware of data protection guidance on home working and the use of student personal data outside of the normal school environment.
- Reiterate those areas of your staff conduct policy that might apply to online activity through chatroom and webcam media.
- Change passwords regularly, particularly if staff are working from home on devices shared by family members.

## **Safeguarding**

- Identify the children and families who might be most at risk during the upcoming weeks and arrange a system of regular contact with them. Advise them of the channels that are open to them to seek support when needed.
- Ensure that any children in school during school closure are subject to the same safeguarding processes as if school were fully operational.
- Consider the additional likelihood of online vulnerability for students who are at home. Reissue online safety guidance.
- Ask teaching staff who are delivering online learning to be extra vigilant for signs of cyberbullying.
- Give students a process by which to report concerns and seek guidance.

## **Premises**

- In the event of total closure, turn off water stop cocks including to outdoor water supplies.
- Ensure hot water systems are operational, timers might need to be adjusted and reduced.
- Empty all refuse, fridges, food stocks, lockers.
- Ensure pest control points are full.
- Make a visual check of all internal and external areas. If possible take photo evidence in case of vandalism or property damage.
- Return medical supplies to children who store them in school.
- Reset any automatic gate timings to be set to permanently shut and make sure proximity grids are disconnected.
- Prepare heating to be shut down, notwithstanding frost protection.
- Secure gates with heavy-duty security padlocks and chains where available.
- Suspend waste collections after last lift.
- Suspend postal deliveries and collections or redirect as appropriate.
- Ensure access for external contractors to ensure that all statutory safety tests can continue (legionella, etc).
- Check keyholder data is accurate and alert security services to changes in school timings and activity.

## **Administration and finance**

- Ensure that you have sufficient admin staffing in order to operate whatever free school meal process is put in place.
- If possible, ensure that telephone and email messages are picked up and replied to.
- Contact your bank to alert them to unusual patterns of spending.
- Consider a temporary amendment to your bank mandate if your usual cheque signatories will be unavailable.
- Increase credit/charge card limits to cover emergency purchasing and payments.
- Cancel all lettings.
- Check the school calendar to ensure that all external visitors and speakers are aware of the school closure. Cancel all planned events.

## **Governance and compliance**

- Advise governors of any unusual activity and seek pre-authorization for headteacher actions which may be necessary outside of normal school operating practices.
- Ensure the chair of governors is fully informed of key, critical decisions and operate the chair actions policy where needed.
- Suspend/postpone governing body meetings if necessary.
- Check renewal/due dates of statutory compliance processes (insurance, licensing, year-end returns, contract renewals, etc) to ensure these aren't missed.
- Keep insurance policies to hand along with contact details, should an event occur.
- Notify insurers of any changes to usual school activity. Don't assume they'll be aware – as the policyholder you're obliged to notify.

**This list is not exhaustive by any means, and there will doubtless be many other tasks to be completed which are specific to your school context.**

*Hilary Goldsmith is a school business manager in the south of England.*

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*This guide was originally published on the Tes website. For the latest news and advice during school closures visit [tes.com/news](https://www.tes.com/news).*

# Coronavirus: 5 lessons from a school in lockdown

**St Louis School in Milan prepared well for being closed owing to Coronavirus, but principal Jennie Devine explains these five things still took her by surprise**

*By Jennie Devine*

As the threat of coronavirus spreads and governments are beginning to take more drastic action, virtual schools and online learning are becoming more widespread.

Here in Italy, we are in our third week of school closures and we have gone through a very steep learning curve.

Some of the challenges posed by creating an e-school are apparent, but there were a few unexpected things through this process.

## **1. Willingness of staff**

Even self-proclaimed technophobes have risen to the challenge of online provision. We'd expected much more resistance to the adoption of new teaching methods, but with support communities, training, and mentoring, all of the staff are on board, albeit after a few challenging days.

Learning communities also help teachers find solutions and share best practice.

## **2. Reality of the home situation**

When creating our online provision, we'd thoroughly considered the logistics of online learning in terms of access, instructions, timetables and curriculum. We'd also created built-in moments to support students.

However, we didn't build in any emotional support for parents.

Our parents have been incredibly grateful for the online school and the sense of normality it provides. But in retrospect, explicitly acknowledging parental stresses and offering more support to them would have made the school/home link even stronger.

## **3. Complete overhaul of planning**

The first instinct when putting up content is to keep the curriculum going completely, just slightly adapting lesson plans.

However, for our early years and primary sections, we have had to reduce the amount of work as students were taking twice as long to complete tasks.

This has meant totally new approaches to planning and content to ensure that we deliver objectives in a timely manner, while also seeking to reduce screen time.

We have had to bear in mind that students may not have certain tools or supplies with them.

Though this approach to planning has been time-consuming, it has led to dynamic lessons and creative problem-solving by staff.

#### **4. Need for time management and limitations for staff**

During the first four days of online learning, teachers were extremely responsive and felt that every comment or query had to be dealt with immediately as they were committed to making the online learning a success.

However, this led staff to feel exhausted after being chained to the computer for several hours a day. This was before content creation and lesson planning.

Once this became clear, expectations for responding to work and supporting students were firmly in place – when teachers would be online, in what time frame they should respond to comments, when marking and feedback should be returned.

Setting these expectations for teachers made clear that we're not offering a 24/7 service; school days and times need to be respected.

It also helps create a culture in the school. If a few teachers are responding immediately to comments, it sets an expectation for all staff to do the same – it's unsustainable.

#### **5. Importance of face-to-face contact**

Students have really embraced the online learning environment and lessons, but one thing that is really helping them maintain a sense of normality is seeing their teachers and their friends in conference calls.

It can be challenging to manage students in a video call, but it helps reduce the isolation and reminds students that we are still part of the same community. As a teacher, it's also invaluable because otherwise we're losing contact with what makes our job enjoyable in the first place – our students.

As staff members, the shared spaces in a video conference make everyone feel less alone. Some staff have instigated virtual coffee breaks together to help stave off feelings of isolation.

The past few weeks have not been simple. However, it has been interesting in the best sense of the word. We've updated our practice, shaken up our lessons, refined our curriculum and learned a huge amount in the last few weeks. No doubt we'll continue to improve over the next few weeks. What an adventure!

*Jennie Devine is Principal of St Louis International School in Milan, Italy*

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# Coronavirus: How to create home-learning booklets

**If online learning isn't viable while your school is closed, here's how to create learning booklets**

*By Grainne Hallahan*

While the coronavirus outbreak has shut schools, how can teachers best provide learning material at home for pupils in primary? And how can we provide learning material for secondary pupils who don't have internet access?

The answer will probably be booklet-shaped.

But how do you put an accessible, stress-free, effective booklet together? We asked teachers who've been preparing booklets for their thoughts.

## Coronavirus: home-learning materials

### 1. Sort the equipment

Do your students have colouring pencils? Paper and pencils? A pencil sharpener and rubber?

Making sure they have the basics required to complete the booklet is essential.

That will likely include paper.

"We will be sending home an exercise book, and in the lower years a handwriting book. This means the parents will not have to worry about paper," says Laura Herbert, a primary school leader in Colchester.

Not only that, but schools should also check what technology they have if they're going to include any activities that require listening or watching something online, says Herbert.

### 2. Give them reading

Ruth Luzmore, headteacher of St Mary Magdalene Academy in North London, has made sure that all her students have library books at home with them. She thinks it's really important for schools to utilise the resources they have on-site that can go home with their students.

Setting reading as a task is something that is easy for most students to do, and an easy one for parents to supervise.

Richard Peterson, a school leader in a primary school in Ribble Valley in Lancashire, says regular reading is essential.

"Just get them to read appropriate books! It's retrieval practice of the knowledge of blending," he says.

### 3. Focus content on recaps

The amount of support your children will have at home is going to vary massively. Even your previous experience of the sort of help they're given by their parents and carers for their homework won't necessarily match with the level of help they'll be given for this work.

Peterson says the solution is to recap.

“In the short- to medium-term, home learning has to focus on what the children have learned already and help them ‘not forget it’. In other words, retrieval practice,” he says. “So at primary, that’s focusing on maths and English.”

As an example, Peterson suggests teachers set activities that will secure their knowledge of number, calculation and fractions. “I would set tasks that will help students recall the number bonds and times tables primarily,” he says.

Without the teacher there to clarify their instructions, students may struggle to work out what is required of them in a task. Whatever activity you’re setting, use examples (and non-examples!) to help students see exactly what it is they have to do.

#### **4. Think about a (flexible) timetable**

When Herbert compiled her booklets, she tried to consider how the time could be scheduled in chunks at home.

“We are sending home a mixture of maths, English, phonics and science. These range from larger projects, such as writing a story, to retrieval practice of previously studied material,” she explains.

Should it all be sitting down and writing?

No, says Herbert. They’ve also included other activities to keep students active, and looking after their mental wellbeing. “We’ve made sure there are also activities such as PE, mindfulness, art and DT. These will be fun activities but also educational,” she says.

#### **5. Make communication easy**

Some parents will be worried about how they’re going to support their child for a multitude of reasons: they’re unsure of the content themselves, they’ll be time-poor with their own work to do or they’re going to have many children at home that will need their help.

One thing that can help reassure them is knowing how to contact the school if they need support.

“We have communicated to parents that if a child requires support with a piece of work, or the adult is unclear on what needs to be done, they can contact us via an email address, which has been set up for each class,” says Herbert. These emails will be responded to between 9am and 3pm.

And the school has also made it clear the work the students will be doing will be looked at by teachers. “If parents would like us to mark the work they can send it over email [by photographing it on their phones], and we have also said that we would love to see some of the work they have completed when they return,” she says.

#### **6. Differentiate the booklets**

Just like the work teachers provide in class, the booklets you send home don’t have to be identical. It’s a good idea to use the information from recent data drops and parents’ evenings to personalise the pack for your students.

“We used our information from a recent parents’ evening to design the booklets. It helped us to decide what the children needed extra support with, and which parents have and don’t have the resources available for this,” explains Herbert.

This is particularly helpful for students who will be working on their phonics and blending skills. “We will send home individual precision teaching exercises based on the last assessment for the children to practise the sounds they find most tricky,” she says.

## 7. Reuse

Now is the time to dig through your cupboards and find any resources that have already been photocopied that can be sent home now. Collect everything together and then see what you can make with what you've got before you start photocopying anything new.

Also, lots of companies are making their resources free at the moment. There is a list at [swingeducation.com/resources/education-companies-offering-free-subscriptions-and-content-online](https://www.swingeducation.com/resources/education-companies-offering-free-subscriptions-and-content-online), and you can use these to compile booklets for your students.

## 8. Give parents a bit of freedom

It's a good idea to encourage parents to feel as if they can take the opportunity to do something different with their children, says Peterson.

"I have an eight-year-old," Peterson explains. "And I know this is a great opportunity for me to help my child to develop an interest or a talent."

It might also help to point them towards websites where you can do [virtual tours of museums \(hellogiggles.com/news/museums-with-virtual-tours\)](https://www.hellogiggles.com/news/museums-with-virtual-tours), or drawing tutorials on YouTube, and simply encourage parents to use their own personal hobbies to help teach their children something new.

## What if the situation continues?

"If we are looking at a longer period of school closure than just a few weeks, then schools will have to rethink their approach," says Peterson. "If we're in a situation where schools will be shut for four months, then I'd expect there would be a shift to planning well-developed home-learning experiences via online platforms."

In that scenario, teachers might be considering setting their work over platforms like Google Classroom.

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# 8 tips for setting up lessons via video

## Avoid distractions, lock the door and six other things to consider if coronavirus forces you to deliver lessons online

By Dan Worth

With your school closed, are you having to quickly get up to speed with the dos and don'ts of video-conferencing etiquette?

If it's not something you've done regularly, it can feel daunting, but there are some quick and easy ways to ensure that you have as good a video-conferencing set-up as possible, whatever your location, and avoid any potentially embarrassing moments.

One thing that should underpin all the below is to ensure that you're fully aware of your school's safeguarding policy around whether or not you can appear on camera to pupils, or if you should just be a "voice" being delivered to them via the video-conferencing software you're using.

### Coronavirus: how to deliver lessons via video

#### 1. Have a clear background free from distractions

When setting up your home video-conferencing location make sure there's nothing in the background that will be either distracting or potentially embarrassing.

For example, it may be tempting to set yourself up in front of your bookcase to show your erudite ways – but then you risk children turning their necks 90 degrees to try and read the titles, especially any that can be seen as rude or risqué.

Ideally, you want a plain, distraction-free background that allows you and your lesson to take centre stage.

Remember, too, you might have to move throughout the day – maybe as sunlight comes through a window in the afternoon – so think whether there's more than one location you can use to avoid having to move mid-lesson.

#### 2. Make sure the camera angle is straight and stable

Make sure your laptop or webcam is stable and pointing straight ahead to avoid any strange angles that make you look like you're peering up or down.

You also want to avoid the issue of the camera shaking around to avoid distracting your students or making them nauseous.

Don't be too close to the camera either – it will not only look a bit unnerving but you may also end up muffling the audio if you're too close to the microphone on your device.

#### 3. Use headphones and a microphone

Ideally, use headphones so you can hear clearly any questions that children ask, while a microphone will ensure your audio is as clean and clear as possible.

This doesn't mean you need pricey kit. Plenty of headphones with built-in microphones are available for around £15 and above. Even a basic pair of iPhone headphones with a built-in microphone will do the job.

If you don't have access to this, it's not the end of the world as most laptops' in-built components are reasonably high-spec, but the dedicated kit will help you to bring everything up a notch.

#### **4. Make sure you won't be interrupted**

Make sure anyone you live with is aware that you may be hosting teaching lessons from home so distractions can be avoided.

Anything from a housemate walking past in a dressing gown to a well-meaning partner offering a cup of tea will cause distractions and giggling – and probably continue as a source of teasing for months or years to come.

Ideally, have a room you can lock, or put something outside making it clear you can't be disturbed. You don't want to end up as a YouTube sensation after all.

#### **5. Be aware you are visible at all times**

It sounds obvious but a video call is not a phone call. As such, you can't roll your eyes, yawn or generally look bored – because everyone can see you all the time. You'd be surprised how easy it is to forget this, especially if someone else is talking. This may be more of an issue if you're chatting with colleagues or hearing an SLT briefing given via video conference.

Even if it feels unnatural at first, maintain your natural teacher demeanour while you're on a video call to help children feel that they're in as normal a learning environment as possible.

#### **6. Resources are ready to be shared when required**

If you have resources you want to share with students during a video lesson make sure you know where they are on your desktop, they have clear file names and ideally are already uploaded to the relevant resource hub before you start.

The last thing you want is to be hunting around your downloads folder or browser tabs while students watch on.

#### **7. Make sure your wi-fi connection is good enough**

Ideally make sure your wi-fi connection is up to scratch before you try hosting a video call lesson. Use speedtest.net to see what sort of download and upload speeds you can get.

Once you're up and running with a video lesson, try to make sure no other heavy internet use takes place such as downloading or streaming.

If you do have a poor wi-fi connection, you may struggle to host a call so it's worth considering if there are other locations you could use. If there are none, this is something you should raise with your school.

Hopefully, though, with the UK average download speed at 54Mbps and upload at 7.2Mbps, the vast majority of teachers – and pupils – will be able to video-conference without issue.

#### **8. Prepare for the unexpected**

Video conferencing can cause all manner of weird and wonderful things to happen. A student may fall off their chair, someone's mum may burst in singing while a child is asking a question, or you may yourself be distracted by someone ringing your front door bell.

As long as you focus on what you can control, any unexpected moments can generally be ignored or playfully dismissed, allowing learning to continue as best as possible.

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# School closures: a guide to the tech to help you cope

## A round-up of the key technology-related information that schools and teachers will need during closures

By Dan Worth

With the disruption that the coronavirus pandemic is causing, using the right technology tools and services is vital to keep things operating as close as possible to normal.

Below is a round-up of some of the key things teachers should be aware of around video conferencing technologies, Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams and much more that may now be central to daily operations.

### 11 tips for using Google Classroom

#### 1. What's the lingo?

**Google Classroom** – This is where you put your announcements, lesson material and assignments. Files, videos, images and links can all be uploaded here. You can also mark work and have control over whether students have permission to comment or post.

**Google Classroom Stream** – Just like a chatroom, Google Stream allows students to post comments and ask questions.

**Google Docs** – A bit like an online word document, Google Docs allows you to create a file to be shared with others.

**Google Hangout** – An online chat facility where you can speak with or without video over the internet connection.

#### 2. Where do I find everything?

Luckily, there are plenty of videos online to assist you in setting up Google Classroom.

The videos at [teachercenter.withgoogle.com/first-day-trainings/welcome-to-classroom](https://teachercenter.withgoogle.com/first-day-trainings/welcome-to-classroom) will talk you through the step-by-step process of setting up your classroom.

#### 3. Set up all teachers with class registers and data

It's a good idea for school leaders to set up every teacher for Google Classroom using SIMs, says Freya Odell, a teacher of English at St George's International School in Rome.

#### 4. Offer training and planning time

"As soon as we knew the schools would close, we had in-person training on using Google Classroom," says Odell.

All teachers received a day of CPD on the different programmes, and then one-to-one support was provided for any teachers who needed specific help with setting up their classes.

The following day, lessons began.

"This gave everyone a bit of breathing space, and meant we weren't all panicking about getting lessons ready straight away," she says.

## **5. Check your servers**

Anything you're running from your school servers might require larger capacity than normal – make sure you've checked with your IT team that what your planning won't overload the system.

## **6. Don't over-complicate it**

Jennie Devine, principal at St Louis International School Milan, which has been closed for three weeks, suggests less is more when teaching remotely.

"On our first few days we tried to put up videos, quizzes, worksheets, etc – students found it tricky to navigate and they weren't sure what order to do things in," she explains. "We now try to aim for a lesson video (maybe two parts) and any other materials or quizzes attached to the lessons."

## **7. Create a routine**

Devine and Odell agree: you need to have a system and stick to it.

Odell suggests organising one folder per day per class.

She begins each lesson with a Google Hangout in the classroom area, and then students can ask questions on the Classroom Stream (see terminology in point 1).

Students can complete their work and post it in the Classroom.

"We can easily track who has and hasn't done their work this way," says Odell.

Devine adds that clear rules help to avoid repeated questions clogging up your notifications.

"You need to establish certain norms and behaviours. Comments should be regarding the work only, and they also have to read the previous comments before asking a question," she says.

## **8. Take control with your settings**

If you're not careful, you can be crushed by the notifications – sort out your settings so you're not being spammed with notifications every time someone comments on a document.

You also need to be able to switch off when you're off – be strict with your working hours and don't let the laptop rule your life.

Too much screen time is not good for your mental health, so set an out of office message on when you need to step away from the computer.

## **9. Be clear and realistic in your instructions**

Not all students will have printers or paper materials at home, says Devine, so ensure your tasks can all be done without printing off any extras.

"I keep the tasks very straightforward," adds Odell. "If students feel their tech abilities aren't up to being able to edit the documents, then they use Google Docs and just share the link. I can comment directly onto their document when I feedback."

If you don't think that would work for you, another system you might want to try is setting up a separate assignment in Classroom for handing work in.

"I have personally found that having a daily assignment called "ATTACH work here" works well for my students," says Devine. "Students can upload all of their tasks in one go, and I can see who has completed work."

"Otherwise, students start attaching work to video lessons and it can be confusing if there is more than one video."

## **10. No faces in videos**

All students should know to close their cameras when using Google Hangout with their teachers, says Odell. This should be communicated from the start, and all students should know to not show their faces when talking to teachers.

## **11. Share your logins**

As per safeguarding guidelines, IT staff and leaders should share teachers' logins, and no chats should be done on teachers' private logins. Leaders should be regularly checking the content of messages.

Teachers should communicate with students only via the school-sanctioned channels, and students should also be told how to expect communications to arrive from their teachers, and to report any communication other than the sanctioned one to the safeguarding lead.

## **How to deliver lessons via video**

Teachers need to get up to speed with the dos and don'ts of video-conferencing etiquette. If it's not something you've done regularly, it can feel a touch daunting but there are some quick and easy ways to ensure that you have as good a video-conferencing set-up as possible, whatever your location, and avoid any potentially embarrassing moments.

One thing that should underpin all the below is to ensure that you are fully aware of your school's safeguarding policy around whether or not you can appear on camera to pupils, or should just be a "voice" being delivered to them via the video-conferencing software you are using. As noted above, children should definitely not appear on camera.

### **1. Have a clear background free from distractions**

When setting up your home video-conferencing location, make sure there is nothing in the background that will be either distracting or potentially embarrassing.

For example, it may be tempting to set yourself up in front of your bookcase to show your erudite ways – but then you risk children turning their necks 90 degrees to try and read the titles, especially any that can be seen as rude or risqué.

Ideally, you want a plain, distraction-free background that allows you and your lesson to take centre stage.

Remember, too, that you may have to move throughout the day – maybe as sunlight comes through a window in the afternoon – so think about alternative locations you can use to avoid having to move mid-lesson.

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As long as you focus on what you can control, any unexpected moments can generally be ignored or playfully dismissed, allowing learning to continue as best as possible.

### What other tools can you use?

There are hundreds of ed-tech resources that offer all manner of teaching benefits. Most teachers will be aware of some of the big hitters, such as Microsoft Teams or Google Classrooms. Indeed, [a teacher in Hong Kong, Luis Moreno, has written for Tes](#) about how these tools can be easily used for remote learning.

"For example, [Google Meet](#) can be used to check attendance, while Google Classroom lets you upload resources and set deadlines, allows students to turn in work they have done and, importantly, lets you mark it and send back the corrections," he says.

In fact, both Microsoft and Google have been touting the availability of their teaching tools, including boosting services for educators during the crisis, particularly video conferencing tools.

For example, Google has said its [G Suite for Education](#) platform will offer its advanced Hangouts Meet video conferencing tools to all users of the platform for free until 1 July.

This includes the ability to host calls with up to 250 participants, live stream to up to 100,000 viewers, and record meetings and save them for future reference.

[Microsoft Teams](#) platform is [already free for educational settings](#), offering video meetings for up to 250 participants and live events for up to 10,000, recording and screen sharing, along with chat and collaboration.

Meanwhile, other platforms, such as [BlueJeans](#), [Zoom](#) and [LogMeIn](#), are also available, with the latter offering free access to some of its services to educational institutions for up to three months.

Schools also need to consider purchasing VPN access for staff so they can access school systems securely from any location, while mobile broadband modems – that turn mobile data signals into a wi-fi hotspot to allow teachers to get online – may also be useful to provide a connectivity backup.

Furthermore, specific education-related technologies, such as [Class Dojo](#), [Bug Club](#) and [Purple Mash](#), could also prove key to providing simple, web-based access for pupils to obtain learning resources.

The issue again, though, is how ready pupils and teachers are to use these tools confidently, especially if they're turning to them in a time of upheaval, as Baddeley notes,

"Now is not the time to be attempting to learn a whole new complex online learning platform. If your students receive a pack of well-thought-out resources via email, that is much better than both you, them and their parents attempting to muddle through the unfamiliar," he says.

## Benefits and risks of free technology

It's clear that edtech companies see the school closures as a chance to showcase what they can do for schools, with the **British Educational Suppliers Association (Besa)** saying it is working to get more free trial systems added to its website for teachers to use if they wish.

"Given the increasing number of coronavirus cases in the UK, we are working rapidly with Besa's 400-plus educational suppliers to adapt our existing free educational trials portal **LendED.co.uk**," Besa said, adding that it will "incorporate an easy-to-use database of curriculum and remote-access education resources that schools, colleges and parents can access online and in downloadable formats..."

This may well prove useful, but Lopez says schools shouldn't rush to use it just because it's free now, but instead be mindful of issues it could cause, too.

"As generous as these are, they may not be sustainable, as the company will have their own quarantines to deal with and staffing may not keep up with the free supply of a platform not usually geared up to being free," she says.

"If you do want to take up one of the offers, check if you need to sync to your management information system etc as the set up alone could prove difficult."

## Be aware that students may not all have technology access

It's easy to overlook this but the reality is many students may not have internet access at home, or suitable devices for remote learning.

Data from the Office of National Statistics says seven per cent of homes have no internet connection. If even a fraction of these households include children, that's a lot of pupils unable to access remote learning through digital channels.

And what about access to a suitable place to learn? The English Housing Survey revealed last year that more than 300,000 households were squeezed into too few rooms. How do the children in these homes "go to school" at home when they don't have the devices, connections or space?

This is where packs that can be sent home will be crucial – from providing books from libraries to be read, to setting revision on pre-existing topics to strengthen learning, to instructions around new topics that need to be understood and how to learn and build this knowledge.

*This guide was originally published on the Tes website. For the latest news and advice during school closures visit [tes.com/news](https://www.tes.com/news).*

# Coronavirus: 11 tips for using Google Classroom

**Many of the international schools that have closed due to Coronavirus have opted to use Google Classroom to teach remotely. Here they give their top tips.**

*By Grainne Hallahan*

With schools closed as part of COVID-19 prevention measures, you might be in search of free online technology for remote learning. One of the options is Google Classroom, which has proved popular with schools that have already been closed for some time.

We asked some teachers already using the platform for their top tips.

## 11 tips for using Google Classroom

### 1. What's the lingo?

**Google Classroom** – This is where you put your announcements, lesson material and assignments. Files, videos, images and links can all be uploaded here. You can also mark work and have control over whether students have permission to comment or post.

**Google Classroom Stream** – Just like a chatroom, Google Stream allows students to post comments and ask questions.

**Google Docs** – A bit like an online word document, Google Docs allows you to create a file to be shared with others.

**Google Hangout** – An online chat facility where you can speak with or without video over the internet connection.

### 2. Where do I find everything?

Luckily, there are plenty of videos online to assist you in setting up Google Classroom. The videos at [teachercenter.withgoogle.com/first-day-trainings/welcome-to-classroom](https://teachercenter.withgoogle.com/first-day-trainings/welcome-to-classroom) will talk you through the process step-by-step.

### 3. Set up all teachers with class registers and data

It's a good idea for school leaders to set up every teacher for Google Classroom using SIMs, says Freya Odell, a teacher of English at St George's International School in Rome.

### 4. Offer training and planning time

"As soon as we knew the schools would close, we had in-person training on using Google Classroom," says Odell. All teachers received a day of CPD on the different programmes, and then one-to-one support was provided for any teachers who needed specific help with setting up their classes.

The following day, lessons began. "This gave everyone a bit of breathing space, and meant we weren't all panicking about getting lessons ready straight away," she says.

### 5. Check your servers

Anything you're running from your school servers might require larger capacity than normal – make sure you've checked with your IT team that what your planning won't overload the system.

## **6. Don't over-complicate it**

Jennie Devine, principal at St Louis International School Milan, suggests less is more when teaching remotely.

"On our first few days we tried to put up videos, quizzes, worksheets, etc – students found it tricky to navigate and they weren't sure what order to do things in," she explains. "We now try to aim for a lesson video (maybe two parts) and any other materials or quizzes attached to the lessons."

## **7. Create a routine**

Devine and Odell agree: you need to have a system and stick to it. Odell suggests organising one folder per day per class.

She begins each lesson with a Google Hangout in the classroom area, and then students can ask questions on the Classroom Stream. Students can complete their work and post it in the Classroom. "We can easily track who has and hasn't done their work this way," says Odell.

Devine adds that clear rules help to avoid repeated questions clogging up your notifications. "You need to establish certain norms and behaviours. Comments should be regarding the work only, and they also have to read the previous comments before asking a question," she says.

## **8. Take control with your settings**

If you're not careful, you can be crushed by the notifications – sort out your settings so you're not being spammed with notifications every time someone comments on a document.

You also need to be able to switch off when you're off – be strict with your working hours and don't let the laptop rule your life.

Too much screen time is not good for your mental health, so set an out of office message when you need to step away from the computer.

## **9. Be clear and realistic in your instructions**

Not all students will have printers or paper materials at home, says Devine, so ensure your tasks can all be done without printing off any extras.

"I keep the tasks very straightforward," adds Odell. "If students feel their tech abilities aren't up to being able to edit the documents, then they use Google Docs and just share the link. I can comment directly onto their document when I feedback."

If you don't think that would work for you, another system you might want to try is setting up a separate assignment in Classroom for handing work in.

"I have personally found that having a daily assignment called "ATTACH work here" works well for my students," says Devine. "Students can upload all of their tasks in one go, and I can see who has completed work. Otherwise, students start attaching work to video lessons and it can be confusing if there is more than one video."

## **10. No faces in videos**

All students should know to close their cameras when using Google Hangout with their teachers, says Odell. This should be communicated from the start, and all students should know to not show their faces when talking to teachers.

## **11. Share your logins**

As per safeguarding guidelines, IT staff and leaders should share teachers' logins, and no chats should be done on teachers' private logins. Leaders should be regularly checking the content of messages.

Teachers should communicate with students only via the school-sanctioned channels, and students should also be told how to expect communications to arrive from their teachers, and to report any communication other than the sanctioned one to the safeguarding lead.

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# Coronavirus closures: 9 key safeguarding areas

## For children now unable to attend school, there are some key safeguarding areas we need to consider

By Ceri Stokes

While the most vulnerable children will be in school, that doesn't mean safeguarding concerns can be focused solely on those children.

Here designated safeguarding lead Ceri Stokes outlines nine key areas for consideration.

### Coronavirus school closures: safeguarding

#### 1. E-safety policies

Remind students of your school's e-safety policy. Give your tutors clear guidance to talk through the rules, the expectations and what school will actually do about it if students transgress these rules.

A student may not have looked at these rules in months although the recent Safer Internet Day should have helped to jog a few of their memories. Does your school policy mention children at home during school hours? Most will state that schools will take e-safety concerns very seriously.

Some may even state that "on receiving a report of cyber bullying either in or outside of school, the school will...xxxx" – but is that really what happens?

#### 2. Parental involvement

Communication with the parents is also key. We must remind the parents to keep an eye on their filters and talk to their children about what they are looking at or who they are talking to, especially as isolation isn't good for anyone's mental health.

There is a great online helpdesk community that parents can access which can give guidance about a variety of issues. Websites such as this can be helpful and I will be encouraging parents to read up as much as possible.

#### 3. Sexting concerns

Approximately 220 cases of sexting or youth-produced sexual images involving under-14s were investigated by the police last year, which must mean that teachers and schools have helped students with a lot more cases.

Given that young people are at home, potentially unsupervised, for many more hours in the day, we have to be aware of this issue.

I'm also slightly concerned that some students may send me images that they have seen as they have often tried to show me images on their phone. These concerns need to be shared as a safeguarding team.

#### 4. Online bullying

Apparently last year 43 per cent of students were bullied online. This is bound to increase while schools are closed and everyone is isolated. So how can we sort out these issues when a student isn't even in school?

Normally if a child brings an online bullying issue into school we have to investigate as stated by the Keeping Children Safe in Education guidance, with government policy stating:

“All forms of bullying (including cyberbullying) should be handled as a community issue for the whole school.”

But under these circumstances, how can this be done? Will you be bouncing back concerns to parents? Do your parents know this and have they the expertise to deal with it? After all, anyone who has ever investigated an online bullying issue knows it isn't as simple as just looking at one screenshot, or even one social media platform.

Do the students know how they report their concerns remotely? Is this different to how they would normally make a referral? The safeguarding team need a clear strategy on how they investigate and how much they can feasibly do.

And what can the actual consequences be? Virtual detentions? This is the key point that schools need to consider. How can this really be enforced? Will schools have to follow the issue up, once students return?

I can't see a clear direction, especially as it's likely that schools will be closed for a long period of time, but thinking about safeguarding now may mean it doesn't get forgotten in the chaos of everything else.

Directing parents to sites like Our Helplines or pupils to Childline may be a way that schools can support, but as with a lot of issues at the moment, we can only wait and see how schools and children cope with the isolation.

## **5. Ensure we have structured work set daily**

We need to ensure that work is accessible for all students, even those without appropriate IT. Work can be used as a distraction or escape if they're stuck in their room.

## **6. Keep in contact**

Safeguarding teams need to agree a rota of contact with students of concern, which should mean students contacting them, and them contacting students. Students can also be given support contact details like Childline and the Samaritans.

## **7. Staff training**

Staff still need to think about safeguarding even if they are only contacting students via emails, but clear guidance needs to be given by the safeguarding team on what staff do with any concerns. Online referral systems like CPOMS and MyConcern come into their element with situations like these.

## **8. Be mindful of data protection**

Safeguarding teams need to make sure that they have access to students' information and the contact details of outside agencies, when they are not in schools. Data protection, though, needs to be considered. If we're expecting the safeguarding team to phone from home, how are we protecting their number and reimbursing them?

## **9. Keep communication lines open between staff**

Safeguarding teams need to make sure that they're still communicating and sharing with each other and their line managers. Isolation can make matters worse for staff and for the child and is not good safeguarding practice.

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# Coronavirus closures: How to support children in EYFS

**For most children in EYFS, provision will be closed. Julian Grenier sets out how to support pupils and their parents**

*By Julian Grenier*

What can school leaders and early years leads put in place quickly, now that all schools in England are closed?

I hope this brief summary of our action plan at Sheringham Nursery School and Children's Centre will provide some useful ideas to take away and build on.

As a team, we understand the significant difficulties many parents might face. That's why we're always ready to offer help as quickly as we can. This can prevent little issues from blowing up into big problems. But we know that things may rapidly become much more difficult for some families.

## Coronavirus closures: supporting vulnerable families

Research suggests\* that when parents are under significant stress, incidents of child abuse rise. Children under five are more vulnerable to child abuse than any other age group in the school system. Children with special educational needs and disabilities are also more vulnerable to abuse, according to a review of the research\*\* by the NSPCC.

We're responsible for a large number of under-fives. Many of them have complex special needs and disabilities. So we have to consider safeguarding risks. We're focusing on how we can help families to manage circumstances that may become very difficult. This is about supporting, not blaming.

## Assisting in home-schooling

At a more mundane level, some parents may find it difficult to keep their children positively occupied. Many families live in overcrowded accommodation. Many won't have a lot of money to spend.

To get our messages out, we've created **WhatsApp broadcast groups** for different cohorts of children. Broadcast groups are a useful feature of WhatsApp. All the replies go to the sender, not to everyone on the list. We've followed our GDPR policy when setting up these groups.

### Here's what we're doing for all children:

- We'll broadcast a daily message to parents. This will include ideas for playing and keeping children positively occupied. Messages will always include a focus on outdoor play and fresh air.
- We'll share links to the **Hungry Little Minds ([hungrylittleminds.campaign.gov.uk](https://hungrylittleminds.campaign.gov.uk))** resources from the Department for Education. These resources support playing and learning at home.
- We'll also share links to **LoveMyBooks ([lovemybooks.co.uk](https://lovemybooks.co.uk))**, a terrific website, which gives lots of ideas around sharing books at home and having fun together.
- We've signed parents up to the **EasyPeasy** App, which sends out regular messages with great ideas for playing with your child.
- It's likely that children will be online a lot more, so we will be reminding parents about **keeping their child safe when using a phone, tablet or computer ([nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/parental-controls](https://nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/parental-controls))**.
- It's possible that some parents will be very stretched. They may wonder about whether they can leave young children at home with older siblings. So we'll share the NSPCC's useful advice on **staying home alone ([nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/in-the-home/home-alone](https://nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/in-the-home/home-alone))**.
- We'll also regularly share other links to help parents access support and help with parenting, including **free and confidential live chat with parenting staff from Action for Children ([action-for-children.herokuapp.com](https://action-for-children.herokuapp.com))**.

As well as giving parents ideas, we hope that these regular messages will help families to feel less isolated. We want to keep everyone playing, talking, sharing books and learning throughout our closure.

## Protecting vulnerable children

This is our plan to help some of our most vulnerable children access provision.

### Here are some of the key steps we are taking for children with a complex special educational need and/or disability:

- Our Sendco will be broadcasting a daily message to “touch base”. She will share general advice: eg, how to keep children communicating using their [Core Board \(aacommentary.net/2017/11/start-with-a-little-or-a-lot-introducing-core-boards\)](https://aacommentary.net/2017/11/start-with-a-little-or-a-lot-introducing-core-boards).
- Our Sendco will also touch base regularly by phone with each family to check how they are and to offer advice.
- Most families have accessed Disability Living Allowance. They’ve used this funding to buy specialist play equipment. Where this has not happened yet, our Sendco has created emergency resource packs to lend out.
- We’ve put together a list of useful contacts for parents who have a child with SEND. For example, a parent might be at the end of their tether at midnight because their child won’t sleep and is highly distressed. They can check the list and contact a 24-hour helpline or another source of support, like the [helpline from Mencap for parents of children with a learning disability \(mencap.org.uk/advice-and-support/our-services/learning-disability-helpline\)](https://mencap.org.uk/advice-and-support/our-services/learning-disability-helpline).

Some families have a social worker because their child needs protection, or is a child in need. We also have many families who have an Early Help Record – that’s the way we work in collaboration with families to help them through a difficult patch.

### For those families:

- The children’s centre family support worker will contact them daily to “check in”.
- Family support workers will share specific advice on how to manage parenting difficulties. They’ll base their advice on “tipsheets” from the evidence-based [Triple P \(triplep.uk.net\)](https://triplep.uk.net) (Positive Parenting Programme).

Our safeguarding team will meet online every day. Staff will have a clear briefing about how to pick up and pass on safeguarding concerns. We’ll also share information with all parents about what they should do if they’re worried a child is being harmed. Parents may have concerns about a child in their neighbourhood and not know who they can turn to.

## Keeping in contact

Overall, our commitment during closure is to stay in touch with everyone, every day.

We'll take care to keep in touch with parents who may face significant difficulties during this time. We'll be working with the rest of the team in Newham to provide speedy help for any family that has run out of money or food. We'll work tirelessly to prevent families from destitution.

We're fortunate that many parents have strong links with friends and relatives in our community. We've worked closely with many isolated parents, so now they know at least one or two other people who live locally. Families are incredibly resilient. We are confident that our community will pull together and get through this difficult time. We'll be here for them, every day, when the school is closed for children.

## Learning points

Finally, could there be anything positive about this challenge? We hope so. We're expecting to learn more about the impact of WhatsApp, EasyPeasy and other online resources for families. The Education Endowment Foundation's excellent guidance report, *Working with Parents to Support Children's Learning\**, comments that:

■ ■ *parents' interest and involvement in their children's learning is consistently associated with positive outcomes for children of all age groups but it can be challenging for schools to influence this effectively. The evidence for what schools can do to effectively engage parents in a way that improves children's learning outcomes is limited.*

We plan to use this time well, to find out more about supporting parenting and supporting home learning. We'll be interested to see what works – and what doesn't.

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# Coronavirus closures: How to support pupils in primary

**With schools closed because of coronavirus, continuing primary education will be tricky – but this guide can help**

*By Grainne Hallahan*

For those primary-aged children not in the parent key worker or vulnerable categories, schools are now closed. In order to continue their education, schools will have to find a way to assist their learning at home.

Some schools are providing links or resources via their website. For some, this will be workable. But due to the age of primary children and the potential that many will not have internet access at home, or will have older siblings working on the home's only device, we focus here on printed booklets that schools may provide. These can be organised as a pack to send out weekly.

## How to continue primary teaching during coronavirus closures

We spoke to primary schools about how they are planning this work. Here is their guide:

### 1. Sort the equipment

Do your students have colouring pencils? Paper and pencils? A pencil sharpener and rubber?

If your students are going to be working at home, then making sure they have the basics required to complete the booklet is essential.

That will likely include paper.

"We will be sending home an exercise book, and in the lower years a handwriting book. This means the parents will not have to worry about paper," says Laura Herbert, a primary school leader in Colchester.

Not only that, but schools should also check what technology they have if they're going to include any activities that require listening or watching something online, says Herbert.

### 2. Give pupils reading

Ruth Luzmore, headteacher of St Mary Magdalene Academy in North London, has made sure that all her students have library books at home with them.

She thinks it's really important for schools to utilise the resources they have on-site that can go home with their students.

Setting reading as a task is something that is easy for most students to do, and an easy one for parents to supervise.

Richard Peterson, a school leader in a primary school in the Ribble Valley in Lancashire, says regular reading is essential.

"Just get them to read appropriate books! It's retrieval practice of the knowledge of blending," he says.

### **3. Focus content on recaps**

The amount of support your children will have at home is going to vary massively. Even your previous experience of the sort of help they're given by their parents and carers for their homework won't necessarily match with the level of help they'll be given for this work.

Peterson says the solution is to recap.

"In the short- to medium-term, home learning has to focus on what the children have learned already and help them to 'not forget it'. In other words, retrieval practice," he says. "So at primary, that's focusing on maths and English."

As an example, Peterson suggests teachers set activities that will secure pupils' knowledge of number, calculation and fractions.

"I would set tasks that will help students recall the number bonds and times tables primarily," he says.

Without the teacher there to clarify their instructions, pupils may struggle to work out what is required of them in a task.

Whatever activity you're setting, use examples (and non-examples) to help students to see exactly what it is they have to do.

### **4. Think about a (flexible) timetable**

When Herbert compiled her booklets, she tried to consider how the time could be scheduled in chunks at home.

"We are sending home a mixture of maths, English, phonics and science. These range from larger projects, such as writing a story, to retrieval practice of previously studied material," she explains.

Should it all be sitting down and writing?

No, says Herbert. They've also included activities to keep students active, and looking after their mental wellbeing.

"We've made sure there are also activities such as PE, mindfulness, art and DT. These will be fun activities but also educational," she says.

### **5. Make communication easy**

Some parents will be worried about how they're going to support their child for a multitude of reasons: they're unsure of the content themselves, they'll be time-poor with their own work to do or they're going to have many children at home who will need their help.

One thing that can help reassure them is knowing how to contact the school if they need support.

"We have communicated to parents that if a child requires support with a piece of work, or the adult is unclear on what needs to be done, they can contact us via an email address, which has been set up for each class," says Herbert.

These emails will be responded to between 9am and 3pm, explains Herbert.

And the school has also made it clear that the work the pupils will be doing will be looked at by teachers.

"If parents would like us to mark the work they can send it over email [by photographing it on their phones], and we have also said that we would love to see some of the work they have completed when they return," she says.

## 6. Differentiate the booklets

Just like the work teachers provide in class, the booklets you send home do not have to be identical. It's a good idea to use the information from recent data drops and parents' evenings to personalise the packs for your pupils.

"We used our information from a recent parents' evening to design the booklets. It helped us to decide what the children needed extra support with, and which parents have and don't have the resources available for this," explains Herbert.

This is particularly helpful for students who will be working on their phonics and blending skills.

"We will send home individual precision-teaching exercises based on the last assessment for the children to practise the sounds they find most tricky," she says.

## 7. Reuse

Now is the time to dig through your cupboards and find any resources that have already been photocopied that can be sent home.

Collect everything together and then see what you can make with what you've got before you start photocopying anything new.

Also, lots of companies are making their resources free at the moment. [There is a list at \[swingeducation.com/resources/education-companies-offering-free-subscriptions-and-content-online\]\(https://www.swingeducation.com/resources/education-companies-offering-free-subscriptions-and-content-online\)](https://www.swingeducation.com/resources/education-companies-offering-free-subscriptions-and-content-online), and you can use these resources to compile booklets for your students.

## 8. Give parents a bit of freedom

It's a good idea to encourage parents to feel as if they can take the opportunity to do something different with their children, says Peterson.

"I have an eight-year-old," Peterson explains. "And I know this is a great opportunity for me to help my child to develop an interest or a talent."

It might also help to point them towards websites where you can do [virtual tours of museums](#) (see [hellogiggles.com/news/museums-with-virtual-tours](https://hellogiggles.com/news/museums-with-virtual-tours)), or drawing tutorials on YouTube, and simply encourage parents to use their own personal hobbies to help teach their children something new.

What if the situation continues?

If we're looking at a longer period of school closure than just a few weeks, then schools will have to rethink their approach, says Peterson.

"If we're in a situation where schools will be shut for four months, then I'd expect there would be a shift to planning well-developed home-learning experiences via online platforms," Peterson explains.

In that scenario, teachers might consider setting their work over platforms like [Google Classroom](#). Some primaries are already opting to put resources on their websites for other schools to download.

Using tech may create issues, however. For example, World Health Organisation guidance says those aged three to four should only spend a maximum of an hour at a time in front of a screen, while most parents and teachers will not want pupils staring at a screen for an entire school day.

All in all, as one international school headteacher whose school has been closed for four weeks notes, it may well be the case that primary teachers have to accept the reality that teaching a normal day is just not possible in a remote learning situation.

"For our early years and primary sections, we have had to reduce the amount of work as students were taking twice as long to complete tasks," she says.

"This has meant totally new approaches to planning and content to ensure that we deliver objectives in a timely manner."

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# Coronavirus: 4 tips to support SEND students remotely

**Remote schooling will be tough for all pupils, but those with additional needs may be particularly hit. Gemma Corby offers her advice**

*By Gemma Corby*

Supporting students remotely is a challenge, one that many teachers have not experienced before, at least not on the current scale.

It's likely to be a difficult time for all students, but what about those young people with additional needs? While those with an education, health and care plan will still have provision in school, according to the guidance announced, what about those without?

Here are five top tips that will help all students, but particularly those with SEND.

## **1. Be specific**

Instructions must be as detailed as possible. It's easy to assume that students can infer your meaning, but that's not always the case.

If you've ever asked your students to write instructions or scientific methods, as if they're writing them for an alien with no prior knowledge, apply the same thought process here.

Assume nothing; give specific page numbers and include links to websites.

Avoid generalised instructions, for example, "write about a time you felt upset" – some students will need guidance and structure (such as writing frames and sentence starters) – as they will not know where to start, or what it is you're looking for.

You might end up with just a one-sentence response.

## **2. Stay in touch**

Make sure that all students have your school email address. Reassure them that you're happy to help and answer any questions they may have about the work.

Reach out to parents/carers, too. This is likely to be a stressful time for all parents, but for those with a child or children with special needs, it could be even more so. Be on hand to offer advice, or just a listening ear.

Some young people with autism find homework difficult at the best of times. They can be very fixed in their thinking: school is for work and home is for relaxation. This could present parents with an extra challenge.

### **3. Be creative**

There are so many excellent and interactive resources out there – be sure to point your students in their direction.

Make use of video content, whether it's on YouTube, BBC Bitesize or packages such as GCSE Pod.

Give students the opportunity to present their work creatively.

Could they create a short film (using their phones and iMovie or Kinemaster) or an audio recording? Perhaps they could make a card or board game, based on a topic they're learning.

### **4. Recap, revision and recall**

Try creating simple, multiple-choice quizzes that are low stakes, but will help students recall their previous learning.

Many schools buy into packages that include these types of assessments.

There are also free apps and websites (such as Kahoot!) to help you create your own.

These will be particularly useful for students who struggle to retain and recall information.

*Gemma Corby is a former English teacher and SENDco*

*This guide was originally published on the Tes website. For the latest news and advice during school closures visit [tes.com/news](https://www.tes.com/news).*

# 5 wellbeing rules for teachers working from home

**With teachers swapping classrooms for front rooms, Oliver Ireland shares five ways to avoid bad home-working habits**

*By Oliver Ireland*

When I first received the news that schools were going to be closing for two weeks, it seemed almost unbelievable, but with a small frisson of excitement, given the novelty of it all.

However, after two weeks of teaching remotely reality hits. You know every crack of your four walls, your pupils appear to have forgotten every minute of the hours you spent painstakingly training them to use your chosen e-learning platform and non-teaching friends and family ask you: "Are you enjoying your extended holiday?"

Teaching from home poses a wide range of challenges, both logistical and mental, which should not be underestimated.

Cabin fever is a real threat. Loss of routine, lack of direct contact with the students you've invested so much of yourself in, the creeping monotony of another day spent indoors, alongside the multitude of societal pressures; all this builds up to have a real impact.

## Teacher wellbeing amid coronavirus closures

So, let's clear away those cobwebs and break through the drudgery. Here are five rules for teachers working from home that I've adopted to help make my life better and hopefully they can work for you, too.

### 1. Separate work and play

Easier said than done, but possibly the most important one to follow for the sake of your mental health.

If you've been given working hours, or if you've set yourself a working day, stick to it. Make your students and parents aware of when you'll be contactable and work only within those times.

Once you respond to the odd parent out of hours, in the evening or on a weekend, you give all your students and parents permission to expect your response at their convenience.

In education, it's difficult enough to do this under normal circumstances. Without the structure of the normal school day to support your barriers between work and play, the lines will blur very quickly so try and maintain this strict division.

### 2. Get out more – if you can

Having an excuse to stay inside for a day or two may sound fantastic at first, but it gets very old very quickly. With the pressures of the new working environment, it also begins to get harder to motivate yourself to get out.

However, if you can, try and get outside at least once a day during daylight hours. Go to the shops, walk to the park, do some gardening for half an hour, or just sit outside and feel the breeze on your face.

Obviously some of these ideas will depend on what's allowed under the rules being imposed at each phase of the coronavirus outbreak, and the importance of keeping your distance from others must be maintained at all times, but if circumstances allow it then do what you can to see some green spaces.

### **3. Work up a sweat**

We all know that exercise is good for us, yet it rarely sounds like a good idea. With the early mornings, late evenings and sacred weekends of teaching it can be especially hard to find the time and the energy to get physical.

However, if you follow rule number one and get your working hours in order, then use your free time to do some exercise. You could do yoga in the garden, follow an exercise class on YouTube, or go for a run – again, though, ensure you keep away from others you see out by at least two metres.

### **4. Practice social media hygiene**

This is a difficult one to follow. All around us, there is a media furore that verges on hysteria, reporting on the daily implications of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Add to that the Whatsapp and Twitter rumours of travel restrictions, mandatory health checks, flight cancellations, government deliberations – it quickly becomes impossible to keep a clear head. As such, trying to limit social media at this time is vital.

Follow the official channels for news announcements, mute *those* Whatsapp groups (you know the ones) and focus on what you can verify, not what others have heard about from a friend of a friend who *might* be in the know.

### **5. Spread the love**

If you're finding today difficult, then you can be sure that someone you work with is in the same boat. Your frustrations and the pressures that cause them are universal for your colleagues, so don't go it alone.

Check in with your work friends, is there someone who has fallen off the radar over the past couple of days? Reach out, have a phone chat, a video call, organise a remote film night together, play a game over the internet, set each other a challenge to paint something or write a poem.

It's easy to feel like you're alone when teaching remotely, but the truth is we are all in this together, so keep in touch whenever possible.

*Oliver Ireland is assessment coordinator at The New English School, Kuwait*

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# Coronavirus: 5 staff wellbeing tips for closed schools

## Hong Kong-based principal Ben Keeling explains how to make sure that anxiety doesn't spread during Coronavirus-related school closures

*By Ben Keeling*

Following news of a Corona outbreak in Hubei province, classes in Hong Kong were suspended from the start of February as a precautionary measure.

Since then, school teams have worked hard to learn fast, with communities now engaging almost exclusively online.

The immediate risk to health presented by Covid-19 has been extremely well documented, the impact upon wider wellbeing connected to decreased social interaction, far less so.

Fear and anxiety are contagious, so here are some tips on maintaining good wellbeing.

### 1. Empathy is key

With the media circus on full parade, the responses of those around us have often been heightened, shaped exclusively by personal circumstance.

With movement across the region restricted, many parents in Hong Kong face immense personal pressure while they attempt to juggle work and school from home.

This is a particularly intense undertaking here in Hong Kong, where the average size of an apartment is just shy of 650 sq ft.

As teachers, we need to understand these constraints, and be sympathetic and flexible to parent needs.

### 2. Keep communication measured

I was once advised to move more slowly in times of crisis. Steady and conscious movement (both physical and emotional) provides space to engage.

With personal contact highly limited, written messages are easily misconstrued. As such, we have learned to measure our words with care, drawing upon an extended network for guidance.

Those fronting communication will need support. A trusted campus-based response team has served us well, supporting consistency and the conscious generation of calm and positive messages.

### 3. Consider high-risk groups

While the suspension of usual school services will have a considerable impact on every member of your community, some will be disproportionately disadvantaged.

School leaders must consider the unique pressures placed upon key student groups – some will face disruption to their examination schedule, others will miss out on their usual level of academic support. What happens to students identified within your safeguarding register?

Parents and staff will face their own unique set of challenges, too. All will need your time and attention. Early identification will support the prioritisation of care, services and support.

#### 4. Stay connected

While many schools here opted to close their doors for the duration, we have remained open to staff throughout. It was a critical decision but the opportunity to connect regularly with colleagues has proven to be a powerful antidote to rising claustrophobia.

The preparation of online learning materials is immensely time consuming. The application of flexible working routines has been complemented by fixed periods of attendance designed to reconnect and reinvigorate staff teams as they work to perpetually innovate online.

#### 5. Manage digital fatigue

The novelty of online learning will fade fast (it lasted for about three days, here) so pace yourself.

While most schools are likely to subscribe to a digital learning platform of one form or another, very few will have considered the broader functionality required to support a full school day (or week, or term). With a huge variety available, often at negligible cost, prioritise intuitive access and secure control.

Timeline the steady introduction of new initiatives. Not only will this allow you to periodically reinvigorate the experiences of students but to support staff ahead of eventual delivery. Calls for continued innovation are more comfortably moderated when you have ideas in the bank.

Variety has driven greatest success: pre-recorded content is particularly effective for anyone who might benefit from repetition, individual pastoral calls allow us to retain a good measure of wider wellbeing and interactive tasks can support learning-focused connection.

Live broadcast has its place, too, but remains relatively one dimensional – interaction (and inadvertent interruption) is almost impossible to manage.

#### Silver linings

While very few of us would have volunteered for the undertaking, the period of suspension will act, no doubt, to galvanise our community. Conscious and public recognition of the residual advantages will only act to support the journey.

- Invention has been inspired by perceptions of constraint.
- Online engagements have up-skilled all members of the school community.
- Parental feedback has been shaped by an increasingly nuanced understanding of the work undertaken by the academic team.

Challenging times often bring a community together. The period of extended suspension in Hong Kong has been as invigorating as it has been exhausting – when the dust settles, we will emerge stronger and more united. Only the silver linings will remain.

*Ben Keeling is principal at Shrewsbury International School, Hong Kong*

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# Coronavirus: 10 tips for acing a remote job interview

**With the doors closed on schools worldwide, you might have to interview online. Here's how to make it a success.**

*By Mark S Steed*

For international teachers, interviewing on Skype isn't unusual. Your next employer could well be based on the other side of the globe, so wiping the dust off your webcam is almost standard procedure.

But with the breakout of Covid-19 more and more schools have closed their doors. Add to that the travel restrictions that have been introduced, and the chances of your next interview being a virtual one are likely to increase. But that shouldn't be an excuse to let your perfect-candidate credentials slip.

## First impressions still count

Most people make an extra effort with how they dress, fix their hair and do their make-up. We all know that strong posture and making good eye contact are the order of the day; this is accepted wisdom. So why does it all go out of the window when it comes to interviews conducted via Skype?

In the dozen or so interviews that I've conducted in the past fortnight, I've looked up several noses, looked down on bald patches, spoken to cut-off heads and even been introduced to a cat!

Furthermore, it's difficult to make a connection when candidates are constantly checking out how they look on screen, or look as if they're speaking to someone standing over my left shoulder.

But given that Skype interviews are becoming increasingly common, here are a few dos and don'ts.

## Skype interview tips

### 1. Take some time to adjust the height of the camera

Make sure that the screen and camera is at eye level when you're sitting down.

### 2. Practise speaking into the camera

Anyone who has done media training knows that the key to coming across as authentic on camera is to "look through the lens". When I'm doing a Skype interview, I have the camera on a stand just in front of the screen so that when I'm looking at the interviewer's eyes on screen, I'm looking through the camera.

### 3. Don't sit too close to the camera

There's no reason to sit right at your desk, so push back a metre or so. This will reduce the sense of invading each other's space, which will make the whole experience less intense.

### 4. Invest in an extension microphone

USB extension microphones are very cheap to buy, will improve your sound quality and allow you to sit further away from the camera. Just don't forget to test the sound levels.

### 5. Think about what's behind you

A good background can make a positive impression, while a busy or untidy one can be a distraction.

### 6. Avoid backlighting

Trust me, that angelic "halo" can be an off-putting look.

### 7. Never wear a headset

Do I really need to explain why?

### 8. Take time to prepare for the interview

There's an element of ritual about face-to-face interviews that prepares candidates for what's to come (getting dressed; travel to the school; checking in with reception; waiting outside the interview room). Much of this can be lost when you're fitting in a quick interview between lessons or between breakfast and heading to school. To replicate the build-up period, try to arrange your Skype interview at a time when you know you'll have the opportunity to prepare yourself physically and mentally.

### 9. Don't put Post-It notes around the screen

You wouldn't have notes at a face-to-face interview, so why do people think it's acceptable on Skype? It's so obvious and shows a lack of confidence.

### 10. And finally...make sure that you're fully dressed

You never know what might happen during the call. If you have to stand up suddenly for any reason, you don't want to give your interviewer a shock.

*Mark S Steed is CEO of Kellett Hong Kong*

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