The Great School Framework

An experience of setting home learning remotely during Covid-19

Case study – Simon Balle All-through School

www.simonballe.herts.sch.uk

Introduction and context

Almost ten years ago, when the Government withdrew its IT Grants for schools, school leaders at Simon Balle made the bold decision to work with an IT company which devised the school's website to make it a one stop shop for google suite. This not only revolutionised our lives then, but its evolution and subsequent innovations have allowed us, during this extraordinary time, to be able to deliver home learning in a dynamic way.

We have, alongside adopting GSuite, changed our management information systems. Using digital tools has become integral to our everyday work, for staff, students and parents. Thus, six years ago, when budgets still allowed for some flexibility in choice of priorities, the school decided that supplying iPads for every student in KS3 and KS4 would further enable the community to become confident digital learners. Whilst this is no longer possible, we, like many secondary schools, are engaged in a scheme whereby parents can buy a Chromebook at a reasonable price.

Google classrooms, Go4Schools (posting and submitting work and tracking progress) and all aspects of the google suite are part of every student's toolbox. Anticipating the inevitability of a "virtual school" and home-learning situation due to the Covid emergency, in the early spring Heads of Department and Heads of Year planned both work and monitoring systems to ensure that our students were prepared and the curriculum could be delivered. Whilst we explored other platforms and tools, we took the decision to rely and expand on what we were familiar with at this time of change. However, we did agree to introduce "google meets" as a virtual classroom or tutorial space and also "google hangouts" for meetings, ensuring that our e-safety protocols were strongly communicated. Finally, we are now a pilot partner with Hertfordshire Music Service in delivering online music lessons to those students who normally receive instrumental tuition.

It would be naive to suggest that every single family and student is engaging in this digital approach. However, feedback has been incredibly positive and supportive, and we know that we are in a position of strength in these testing times. Once we return to school, we will need to review and evaluate what has worked well, what can be improved upon and, perhaps more importantly, how all of this changes our practice moving forward.

In September 2015, we opened as an all-through school, with our first cohort of Reception children. Our primary colleagues use many of the same platforms as the rest of the school, with age appropriate tools. This then has created both depth and strength in terms of delivery and enabled the primary phase to be in a position of real strength to empower parents and pupils to follow their curriculum online whilst away from school.

The Larch (primary phase)

When it became clear that school closure was inevitable, the primary staff discussed and agreed on principles for how home learning could work for our youngest children. We have summarised these into ten points, each of which was decided based on our beliefs about excellent teaching and learning in more 'normal' times.

1. Children need to **read daily**, at a level which is appropriate for their phonic skills, as well as supporting ever-developing comprehension, inference, and a love of reading. We gave out

every book we own as a primary phase, making complicated calculations about how many we had at each level! As time has gone on, we have supplemented this with e-readers: most importantly www.oxfordowl.co.uk and https://collins.co.uk/pages/big-cat-ebooks We also wrote a guide for parents.

2. Children need a diet of **daily expectations**, which differ according to age. Reception, for example, need fun practice with fine motor; Year 4 need some sort of times tables; Year 1 need phonics etc. Each teacher wrote their daily expectations - with time recommendations - for parents. Everything suggested came with a bank of resources, including those on-line. These were stuck in to an exercise book for every child, so that we would also continue to expect handwritten learning at home.

3. Children, and parents (!), need **routine and structure.** We decided that we wanted to send learning daily, so that we could support the routine and structure - not just set work for a longer period, which could leave too much interpretation about how long to spend on tasks. We are using 'Tapestry' for Reception and 'Go for schools' for Years 1 - 4, publishing the next day's learning the evening before. This, of all of the 10 points, has received excellent feedback from parents!

4. We believe that the **curriculum** needs to continue. Knowing that this period is not just for one or two weeks, mere reinforcement or consolidation of previous learning is not enough. We are therefore following medium term plans as carefully as we can. We are trying, though it is hard, to keep the curriculum broad: and families have responded really well to learning in music, science, art and PRE (philosophy, religion and ethics) - we have been creative with resources found in the home.

5. Children really value **seeing their teachers** (we thought that this would be important for several reasons - contact, wellbeing, help to parents, expectations for children and parents). Therefore each year group has found their own way of making short videos - especially where **new** learning is introduced. Teachers have 'taught' through introducing and modelling learning before setting children off on the tasks already published. For our children in Year 1, this has worked well through You Tube, where parents, if necessary, can play the videos on their phone or any other technology available.

6. **Communication** is being tested in all ways all of the time! We believe that reaching parents in many different ways is the best way of reaching all. We are, therefore, using email (to year groups, to the whole of Larch weekly, to groups where learning is similar, and, most importantly, to individuals); Go for schools; Tapestry; individual phone calls and the shared drive on google (more below). Every member of staff has contributed here - TAs contacting vulnerable children, teachers keeping trackers of their contact with all families in their class, leaders following up where more support is required. This has all been tricky! The record was 16 emails received by a teacher from one parent in one day (though this has all settled down a little now…) - but staff have been committed to keeping this communication open so that we can support and work in true partnership with families.

7. **Marking and feedback** are as important now as ever, and for all of the same reasons as usual. Not least, it values children's learning (and parents' support), as well as providing feedback about strengths in learning and areas to develop. For us, the shared drive on google has been essential for this as the children in Years 3 and 4 already knew how to save work to their individual folders. Where work was handwritten, a photograph could be taken and then this saved to the necessary place. Years 1 and 2 have learned too now. Teachers are working on marking and feedback daily as they work remotely - parents have appreciated this greatly.

8. **High expectations.** We have been unapologetic that our expectations have remained high. This was really important for getting off to a good start with home learning when schools first closed. It was important again following the Easter break. Where children have perhaps given less in a task than they are capable of, a reminder to children and their parents has been received well.

9. **Embracing technology.** We have tried to see this challenging time as providing opportunities. Many children are using technology much more than they normally would. They have learned to email (all children have a school email address), we have encouraged them to practise touch typing (see, for example, https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/topics/zf2f9j6/articles/z3c6tfr), and many children have worked on presentations (great for the wider curriculum), combining images and text, and saving and editing their work on the google drive (see 7 above).

10. **Wellbeing.** This is, of course, top of absolutely everybody's priorities for children and families in their community. We have supported with this through our daily contact and communication. But, as well as this, we have continued to promote our values - and staff have shown great innovation, producing a kindness and happiness calendar, sending letters to residents in local care homesand showing humour in learning!

Two year group examples

Reception

The children in Reception were given a large half lined, half plain workbook with a page of daily expectations and suggested activities stuck into the front. These expectations includes starting the day with a calendar and weather check, just like we do in class. It includes daily maths, counting verbally and writing the numbers to 20 and beyond if possible, looking at more and less, adding, subtracting and matching numerals to amounts. We also ask the children to do daily phonics which includes singing and writing the alphabet, practising our Phase 2 and 3 phonics, using our high frequency words as flash cards and writing sentences. We expect the children to read daily; as well as providing several reading books, we have suggested the children access e-books using websites such as Oxford Owl and Harper Collins Big Cat Readers.

Alongside these daily expectations which can be implemented any way the parents wish, we also upload a daily task to our online learning journal, Tapestry. We use the Early Years ages and stages statements to create an activity that all children are able to complete. One example has been to make a shop at home and explore money, both for coin recognition and adding amounts together. Some parents extended it to the children making price tags, receipts and giving change. Other tasks have been to make a map for their daily walk which the children gave a title to and labelled, and to write a postcard to a friend or family member to show they are thinking of them in these strange times. The children have created a family tree after learning about their own families, and enjoyed experimenting with objects that float and sink. Each time we have suggested ways the children could record, complete and extend their task but it has been wonderful to see how creative the children and their families have been! Once the children have completed their task, the parents upload it to our Tapestry journal where staff can then watch their videos, look at their pictures and comment on their task. This way the staff have been able to send videos and pictures to the children with examples and directions.

Year 4

Stand alone, daily tasks have worked well in Year 4 as the children are clear about the time scale for the completion of tasks, with challenges always available for extension. Themed days have helped us to use fun and humour to engage children. For example, on April Fool's Day, asking pupils to write a newspaper article about Spaghetti Trees (https://youtu.be/tVo_wkxH9dU) or The Tree Octopus (https://zapatopi.net/treeoctopus/), alongside other jokes sent out via video clip. On National Spinach Day, the children wrote recipes fit for Popeye as well as researching nutritional values and creating songs. This has helped us to cover the wider curriculum as well as keeping learning fresh and engaging every day. Our feedback from parents has been very positive.

Alongside a daily English and Maths task, we have added an 'additional task', which has often been linked to one of the foundation subjects, for example researching The Egyptians or mapping the journey of the Easter Bunny across a world map. However, we have also used this task to develop social and creative skills too, such as building a den, helping with a household chore or learning a new skill. These tasks are in addition to our 'daily expectations' which are 30 minutes of reading, spelling, times table practice and some exercise. Every child was given a hard copy of this, stuck in the front of their 'Home Learning' book, and it was also emailed to parents.

As a school, we are fortunate to have the Google system set up; with children able to access their Google Drive through the school website from any device from home. We have encouraged children to independently access daily learning through their shared drive. This has not only supported Computing curriculum areas such as eSafety, but also inspired some to begin touch typing courses over the Easter holidays. We are able to provide quick feedback using the comment/editing and sharing tools, adhering to our marking policy for consistency, as well as to stay in contact with the children via email.

Websites we have found useful for planning accessible learning:
www.daysoftheyear.com This website has lots of days which could be celebrated and used as a theme for learning.

www.nrich.maths.org NRICH is great for accessible Maths problems, with some being interactive and some being practical.

www.whiterosemaths.com/homelearning/year-4 White Rose has been great for 'worksheet' style questions, supported with a lesson powerpoint with a voiceover with each sheet.

www.twinkl.co.uk Twinkl has been great for ideas and has some lovely resources you can use for grammar, spelling and reading comprehensions. (A subscription is needed; however a lot of resources are provided free during this time)

HFL Essential Maths Destination Questions have supported us to be able to add an extra challenge or consolidation question to go with some of our Maths learning.

www.teachactive.org Physical maths and English activities

Other websites we use that could be useful for home learning:

www.theteachertrain.com/mc-grammar MC Grammar's songs have been fantastic to support teaching a new grammar concept. However, the videos could be useful to teach grammar concepts that may not have been taught yet.

[Percy Parker Times Table songs](#) available on Youtube, Apple Music, Spotify or on CD to practise times tables. The songs are catchy and have supported the Year 4s since they were in Year 2 and 3.