



**Tower Hamlets Education Partnership  
IMPROVING SCHOOLS TOGETHER**



**Tower Hamlets Education  
Partnership (THEP)  
Remote Learning Peer Review**

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# Tower Hamlets Education Partnership (THEP)

## Remote Learning Peer Review

### Context

Tower Hamlets Education Partnership (THE Partnership) is a charity which brings school leaders together to promote collaboration, new ideas and sharing knowledge for mutual benefit. THE Partnership works with 100 schools across all phases to drive school improvement and support schools with professional learning. All our work is rooted in our principles to:

- Cultivate trust and collaboration
- Create excitement about teaching, learning and leadership
- Build confidence and capacity in Tower Hamlets in order that it becomes truly schools led

Tower Hamlets has all the challenges of inner-city education, but the levels of child poverty are particularly acute here. Helping meet those challenges are our exceptional schools who deliver fantastic outcomes for their young people.

School leaders in Tower Hamlets have developed a Peer Review model built on the principles of trust, collaboration and school improvement. In response to the changing context this year, this was quickly adapted to focus on remote learning to provide a framework for joint problem solving and collaboration as we tackle this new way of teaching.

We know that there is a significant amount of good and emerging practice in Tower Hamlets' schools and the Remote Learning Peer Review project has allowed us to collaborate and share as we develop our expertise and confidence.

### The Why and the How?

- We wanted to capture the learning from schools' experiences of remote learning in Lockdown 1.0 and in the disrupted Autumn 2020 term
- Through volunteers we created two primary clusters and two secondary clusters
- Each cluster met twice and on each occasion two schools presented their learning followed by questioning from their peers. Schools shared honest, open reflections about what worked and what hindered
- Feedback suggests that the peer review experience, including completing the self-evaluation document, was a useful process in itself. It aided reflection and evaluation within school and between schools
- Schools found peer to peer sharing of expertise and collaboration invaluable and have requested to continue the meetings this term
- We have categorised our findings into the 6Ps (Process; Platform; People; Pedagogy; Problems and Possibilities). We then began to collate emerging questions and future lines of enquiry. These, along with examples from each school, were shared across all schools in the partnership.

# Initial Findings

## Process

- Inevitably, given the suddenness of the original Lockdown in March 2020, there was a broad continuum of starting points. Some schools had already embraced cloud-based solutions and were already using these in parts of the school whilst other schools were starting from scratch.
- The initial response in Spring 2020 could be categorised into three phases:
  - An initial crisis response ('let's just put something in place'). This included packs of resources as well as online content
  - Rapid prototyping ('let's see what works and try new ideas')
  - Review, refinement and reinvention (move from 'what should we be doing' to 'what could we be doing?')
- Things that helped:
  - ✓ Establishing clear principles and non-negotiables as a school ('this is what we want to achieve, therefore, what is the most effective way to do this?')
  - ✓ Setting out clear expectations and decision-making protocols i.e. flow charts to support consistency and to distribute decision making
  - ✓ Decisions underpinned by the school's core values and safeguarding
  - ✓ Using the school's website as the main point of contact to support clarity and consistency of communication

## Platform

- Schools have committed to a platform and are making it work. This seemed to be borne out of previous experience of using it or recommendations from close colleagues rather than a thorough analysis of pros and cons of different platforms. Most commonly used were Google Classrooms and Microsoft Teams
- Most schools are using third-party applications to support teacher resources and the chosen platform. These could be categorised into two categories:
  - Those that were interactive i.e. Timetable Rockstars, PiXL apps, Hegerty Maths
  - Those that were used to support and supplement i.e. Oak Academy
- Similar to the choice of platform, decisions about third-party applications were largely based upon prior experience whilst in other cases it 'solved a problem, quickly' until a more permanent solution could be found
- Schools used data from the platforms intelligently to inform actions for follow up i.e. issues of access, engagement or absenteeism and this was followed up through welfare/ support calls

## People

- Three groups of people were key to making remote learning work: pupils; parents and staff.
- There has been a significant investment in upskilling parents and building confidence – students are sometimes best placed to do some of this work. Schools produced ‘How to...’ guides for parents and used their website to provide guidance material. Schools found dedicated helplines and e-mails to be successful.
- Following Lockdown 1.0, many schools invested energy in building pupil skills and confidence so that they could self-manage their remote learning. This was more challenging for younger pupils.
- As expected, there was a wide continuum of staff expertise and confidence at the start of Lockdown 1.0. Live lesson / recorded content delivery was the biggest source of anxiety for some staff.
- Professional learning and peer to peer support have been essential, particularly bottom-up professional learning through experimentation and sharing. Sometimes this was deliberately managed but more often than not it was organic and based on prior relationships.
- Some schools have deliberately found planning time for teams to prepare, collaborate and evaluate remote learning resources.
- Some schools undertook a staff skill/ confidence audit (‘I can...’ statements). This helped to gauge training needs and confidence of staff so that professional learning could be targeted.
- Increasingly, schools have created a fixed-term, whole-school role for leading the remote learning strategy; this is not necessarily an experienced senior leader but must be someone with ‘permission to lead’. It would seem that this person would need to sit on SLT, at least in the short-term
- The use of / engagement of support staff needed to be planned carefully to ensure that they are given meaningful roles. There is a need to build their confidence and skills. TAs have been used effectively for administrative roles as well as support for teachers during live teaching – ‘managing the zoom room’ and for small group, pre-teaching or 1:1 online support

## Pedagogy

- As we enter Lockdown 3.0, the main focus for the iteration of the remote learning strategy is on pedagogy. If Lockdown 1.0 was about experimenting with access and engagement, the latest Lockdown seems to be more focused on what works and how do we get better at the craft of delivering high-quality remote learning over time
- There has been a definite shift towards live lessons in this latest Lockdown particularly with secondary schools and upper Key Stage 2. That said, it is still a wide continuum with some schools still delivering no live teaching
- In Lockdown 1.0 there was some evidence that engagement actually dropped off when live lessons were offered as parents and pupils wanted greater flexibility of how and when they accessed the learning. Where live lessons were effective, short, sharp input from teachers got the best response

- A combination of analogue and digital learning appears to work best; all schools were very clear that it is *remote learning* and not online learning. Schools have worked hard to ensure strong alignment and coherence between the in-school and remote curriculum
- Getting pupils involved in active and creative challenges to move them away from their screen and seats remains important
- Some teachers engaged in 10 min pre-teaching for smaller groups of pupils to support differentiation
- There were examples of schools very intentionally including 'enrichment' in their remote learning action planning to ensure that this important aspect of education was not neglected

## Problems

- Engagement has been patchy. Upper KS2 and secondary school pupils are more independent and less reliant on parental input; there has been lower engagement with younger pupils
- In an area with high levels of deprivation, access to technology and connectivity has been and remains a significant challenge. Significant investment in technology is required to support disadvantaged communities. Even where households have access, there is unlikely to be enough devices for all children and older siblings have priority
- Some schools have tried to get round this problem by starting lessons for younger children from 7am whilst older children's school days start later. This obviously requires joined-up thinking between primary and secondary colleagues
- Schools have established mechanisms to identify where students do not engage in remote learning or do not complete the work. Some have devised systems to distinguish between work that has simply not been completed and work which has not been completed well enough
- Parental confidence /skills with IT was a limiting factor with engagement. Also, schools needed to be mindful of family well-being and competing pressures
- In Primary schools, writing regressed more during Lockdown 1.0 than maths fluency and reading. Speech and language / fine motor skills were a concern in early KS1 following the first lockdown
- Staff workload is an issue, especially where they are managing vulnerable /key worker children in school as well as trying to upload and assess engagement/ progress with remote learning. Working from home added significant challenges for some staff in terms of isolation; unsuitable work spaces; access to technology and connectivity and balancing multiple roles i.e. parent/ carer and teacher

## Possibilities

- Whilst there have clearly been many challenges, remote learning has accelerated the use of technology in schools and led to creative and positive, unintended consequences.

## Connecting home and school

- Remote learning has connected the classroom and home in a way that hasn't been achieved before. It was described as the '*democratisation of schooling and learning*' – for the first-time parents have the opportunity to really understand what and how their children are learning. They have the opportunity to become partners in the learning process. Another Head said that it was '*demystifying teaching*' – what goes on in the classroom is no longer a secret
- Home-school communication has improved. Some parents have used e-mail for the first time as a result of Lockdown. Helplines in schools have helped as have regular welfare calls
- Engaging parents with learning has led to a more collaborative approach to supporting pupils' learning
- The school has played a central role in developing parents' life skills i.e. use of technology, including e-mail
- Parent consultation meetings have successfully moved online and allow for greater flexibility

## Pedagogy/Learning

- Staff are much more confident in the use of technology to support remote learning. They are experimenting and sharing good practice more widely
- There are opportunities for 'experts' to lead topics across multiple classrooms/ sites i.e., MFL teaching; science leads demonstrating experiments to multiple classes etc.
- Schools have exploited the opportunities to bring visitors into the classroom, virtually i.e., London Zoo and guest speakers. It would seem that there are unlimited possibilities to engage and stretch pupils' learning here
- Some schools have moved all their home-learning online as a result of this experience
- There is an opportunity to create a digital resources/ lesson bank to share within and between schools to support staff workload and collaboration. There is already a huge amount of recorded content and new resources – we now need to create the conditions and networks to share these effectively

## Emerging questions

- What is the longer-term strategy for schools to embrace the opportunities for remote learning post-COVID?
- What are the mechanisms for feedback and evaluation loops in schools and between schools to measure the effectiveness and impact of remote learning strategies?
- How do we measure the impact and value for money of third-party applications across Tower Hamlets and the wider system?
- How do we facilitate increased sharing of practitioner-led learning within and between schools?
- How can we facilitate school-led collaboration through phase and subject clusters?
- How do we measure impact vs output? How do we move beyond compliance to effectiveness?
- What does effective differentiation look like with remote learning and what strategies work?
- How do we begin to create an understanding of what effective remote learning pedagogy looks like and how is that supported through a coherent professional learning strategy?
- How do we maintain the momentum and leverage the long-term benefits of increased home-school partnerships during and beyond this current lockdown?
- How do we develop sophisticated and developmental mechanisms to quality assure remote learning provision?
- To what extent do whole-school approaches and expectations regarding remote learning support high quality learning in different national curriculum subjects?
- To what extent do our experiences call into question the typical structure of the school day (e.g. in secondary schools, 5 x one-hour lessons in different subjects)?

# Appendix 1: A THEP Peer Review Model



## ***‘Strengthening our collective expertise in delivering high quality online learning’***

### **Context**

In Spring and Summer 2020 schools had to react to school lockdown and the continuation of learning for pupils in their schools. Schools across Tower Hamlets responded in a multitude of ways in the best way that they could. This was a time of rapid prototyping and steep learning curves set against a backdrop of supporting vulnerable pupils and families with all the challenges that came with that.

Since September 2020 schools have been impacted in different ways with almost all experiencing some disruption to learning through staff or pupil absence. From October 22<sup>nd</sup> it has become statutory for schools to provide Remote Learning Continuity from the first day of COVID related absence.

There has been a lot of effort and some successes, but it is also true that across Tower Hamlets we may be developing 80+ independent models.

### **Approach and aims**

Using the peer review model, we want to capture what is working particularly well to the benefit of all our schools. There is not an expectation that any one school has got the perfect model or there is even a notion of what that is. We believe that models of good practice will emerge across the cluster We would like to explore how schools are working to overcome the challenges we all face, for example, in overcoming inequities in pupils’ access to IT, variations in teachers’ confidence and expertise, managing teacher workload, and planning for a multitude of scenarios. Our key goals are:

- To strengthen our individual and collective understanding of what different schools are doing to deliver high quality online learning
- To identify and disseminate more widely practice that is proving to be effective
- To identify the challenges that schools continue to face so that we can work together to overcome them

And, through these approaches, be true to our vision of a schools-led system of school improvement

The primary aims of this initiative are to understand the picture across Tower Hamlets and to capture and share learning across the system for the benefit of all schools.

### **The proposed model**

To recruit up to three clusters, each with 5-6 schools, who would meet three times before the Christmas break. We propose that there will be two primary and one secondary cluster in the first instance.

We would envisage that each of these cluster meetings would last 1.5-2hrs and be conducted virtually. On each occasion two schools would present their experiences, learning and plans for addressing the online/ remote learning challenge and then engage in a rigorous discussion with their colleagues around the issues emerging. Each session would be facilitated by a member of the THEP team who would

capture the themes and best practice. Our aim would be to capture this learning from each of the clusters and collate into a report for the benefit of all schools.

The first cluster meeting would meet in the week commencing 16<sup>th</sup> November 2020 with a view that all meetings are completed by the end of the autumn 2 term.

At each cluster meeting two schools will present a 10-15-minute overview of their strategy. Slides would be useful so that these can be circulated within the cluster afterwards but each cluster can decide on the most effective way for their group to work. School 1 will present followed by a 30-minute discussion with colleagues and then school 2 will present followed by another 30-minute discussion. The facilitator will chair the meeting and sum up the key learning points at the end of the session.

THEP will provide a self-evaluation tool for each school in the cluster to complete ahead of the meeting in which they will present. This will be shared between Headteacher colleagues within the cluster but never beyond unless specifically agreed by 'host' school.

## Membership

We are suggesting that the Headteacher attends each meeting but that they might want to bring along a senior member of staff that is leading on the strategy in their school.

## Potential lines of enquiry

- What have you tried?
- What have you learnt from this approach?
- What has worked and how do you know that it has had an impact?
- What haven't you tried and why?
- What hasn't worked and why?
- What has engagement been like and how have you evidenced that?
- What have been the barriers to engagement/ learning and how have you tried to overcome these?
- How has the strategy been differentiated for different scenarios i.e. individuals at home vs bubbles vs whole school closure?
- How is your remote learning strategy being led? Has someone in the school taken on overall responsibility for it or is it a more distributed model? What have you learnt from your approach?
- How has this model been supported through your professional learning model? What have you learnt? What are the ongoing development needs for staff?
- What have you done to support parents and improve engagement? Have you sought feedback from parents about the school's strategy?
- How have you addressed the change to statutory guidance from 22<sup>nd</sup> October? How confident are you in your compliance across all areas of the school?
- How are you quality assuring remote learning or how do you intend to do this going forward?
- How are teachers looking at learning and feedback?
- What has the impact been so far and how do you know?
- How will you evaluate impact in the future?
- Have you collaborated with other schools in developing your strategy?
- What are the next steps and why?

## Appendix 2: A THEP Peer Review Model - Self Evaluation Tool

**‘Strengthening our collective expertise in delivering high quality online learning’**



<p><b>Covid-19 context</b></p>	<p>Schools to populate with information, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of bubble closures since Sep 2020.</li> <li>• Any Covid-related staffing issues</li> <li>• General overview of attendance since September</li> </ul> <p><i>E.g.: So far this year, we have had to send a Year 4 bubble home to self-isolate. We are fully staffed but currently have one member of the admin team, and a TA self-isolating. Four pupils are currently absent because they have pre-existing medical conditions which mean it is not safe for them to be in school.</i></p> <p><i>Overall, attendance has been good this term. It has dipped from the start of term but remains at 92% which is lower than usual but better than we feared.</i></p>
<p><b>Online learning</b></p>	<p>Schools to populate with a <b>brief</b> outline of their journey so far, including by reference to any digital platforms and other resources used.</p> <p><i>E.g.: In March we relied on zoom to deliver online learning but in truth we were not well set up to do this well. We photocopied lots of worksheets which were collected by parents. As we moved into the summer term, we provided training for staff in using google classrooms and also highlighted the wealth of resources available online, including through the National Oak Academy.</i></p> <p><i>Since September, we have focused heavily on online learning in staff training to build teachers’ confidence and expertise in using google classrooms. All staff and pupils now know how to use google classrooms.</i></p>

## Self-evaluation tool<sup>1</sup>

Action	Status – red amber, green	Comments
All governors, trustees and leaders understand the legal obligation to provide immediate remote learning, effective from 22 October 2020		
All curriculum leaders, teachers and support staff understand our remote learning expectations		
A remote learning policy is published on our website, setting out expectations for 1) the school, 2) for parents and 3) for pupils		
There is an action plan to activate immediate remote learning for: Any individual pupil		
Small groups of pupils		
Whole classes, year groups or school		
Plans for online learning ensure that: Pupils will have meaningful and ambitious work each day in a number of different subjects		
A planned and well-sequenced curriculum are taught so that knowledge and skills are built incrementally, with a good level of clarity about what is intended to be taught and practised in each subject		
Pupils receive frequent, clear explanations of new content, delivered by a teacher in the school or through high-quality curriculum resources or videos are provided		
Teachers gauge how well pupils are progressing through the curriculum, using questions and		

other suitable tasks and set a clear expectation on how regularly teachers will check work		
Teachers are able to adjust the pace or difficulty of what is being taught in response to questions or assessments, including, where necessary, revising material or simplifying explanations to ensure pupils' understanding		
A programme will be delivered that is of equivalent length to the core teaching pupils would receive in school, ideally including daily contact with teachers		
Online tools have been selected and staff are trained in their use, and have PD opportunities on remote learning		
Remote learning is built into curriculum planning for all subjects and all year groups		
Remote learning pedagogy is understood by all teachers and is effective		
Safeguarding policies have been updated to reflect any changes		
Support channels are in place for parents, families or pupils who are struggling with remote learning		
Barriers to remote learning have been identified and mitigated for as far as possible		
Attendance processes have been updated to reflect non-attendance / engagement in remote learning		

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from ASCL's guidance on remote learning



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