

Virtual schooling?

How to manage teaching, school life & parent comms



... and be ready to dial up or down as required



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Dealing with uncertainty

It's been uplifting to see what schools like yours have achieved during the recent school closures. However, there's still a long journey ahead of us.

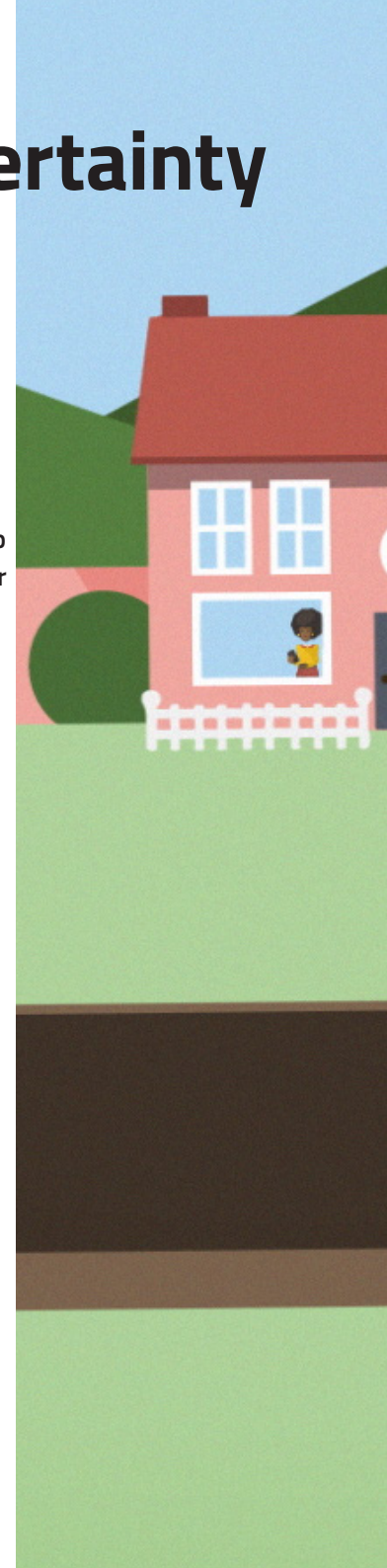
With the possibility of virtual schooling at any time, schools should invest in strategies that can go fully online in a matter of hours. Intentional use of digital tools during hybrid and in-classroom sessions will help staff and students continue the learning quicker if your school has to close suddenly.

In this guide, we've identified some key fundamentals around teaching & parent engagement to keep in mind so you are ready to flex up or down as required. Think of them as your anchoring points that will hold true no matter what phase you're in: back in the classroom, hybrid learning or full virtual schooling.

We've also included practical tips and best practices from leading educational experts to help you across 4 key areas:

- Rethinking teaching & learning
- Engaging parents in the learning conversation
- Celebrating school life
- Tracking & measuring engagement

Happy reading and [let us know what you think!](#) Our team of learning experts is there to help you and do check out our 2 other guides specifically addressing [hybrid learning](#) and [back to the classroom](#).



The fundamentals to remain agile

Getting started

Agree your essential digital tools for teaching and learning. This will help teachers know what to prioritise as they prepare. As the academic year begins, upload basic tasks and resources to ensure students have clear expectations for learning. Bonus: Create a space for teachers to curate and share best practice.

To support schools through the next few months we've suggested some key fundamentals to keep in mind for learning continuity. They can be easily scaled up or down to support whatever phase your school is in. By following these, you'll have the right support for the balancing act ahead of you.

Rethinking teaching & learning

1. Set home learning online
2. Prepare basic class resources online
3. Use software to record short lessons

Curriculum sequence, essential content, assessment methods — nearly all of it seems up for question as most of us prepare for some form of distance or blended learning. The role of digital tools is at the forefront. What tools and routines can you use that won't become obsolete or difficult to maintain as your context shifts?



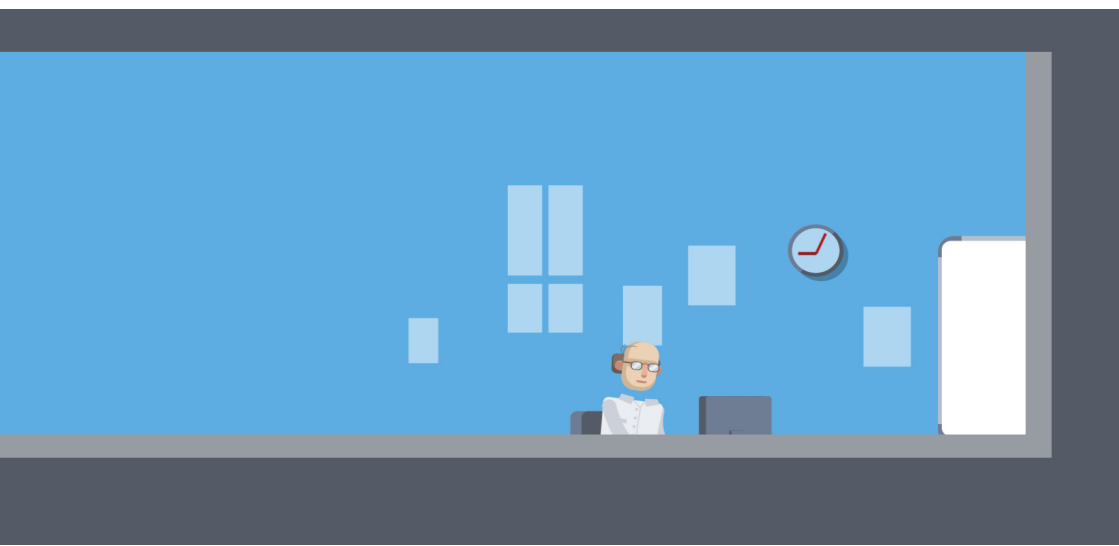
Engaging parents in the learning conversation

1. Give parents a reason to go online
2. Provide online "office" support hours
3. Get started with continuous reporting

The role of parents in learning has fundamentally changed. Parent access to your school's digital platforms is more critical than ever as they meet an expanded set of duties. The key for schools is striking the right balance of on-demand resources and live interaction. How do schools make the necessary information available to parents while saving staff time for the interactions that count? We've got a few ideas in this guide!

Getting started

Record and share a series of short introduction videos to your essential digital platforms. Take a moment to explain how to log in, what parents should expect to find there and who to contact with questions. Parents can then access these videos as and when needed. Just be sure they are in an easily accessible location.



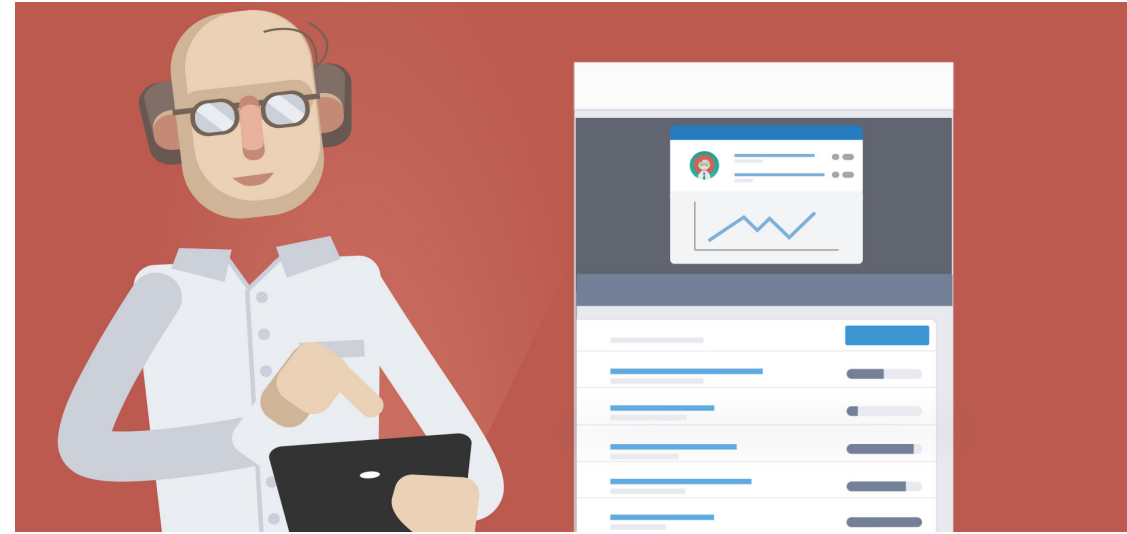
Getting started

Get a team together who will steer and manage the celebration this year! It will be easier to share the responsibility if you can get people from across the school community involved. A broader team will also enrich the ways in which you celebrate school life.

Celebrating school life

1. Curate digital evidence of school life regularly
2. Use eportfolios to share achievements with the whole school community
3. Encourage collaboration through forums

Learning is social. Children of all ages are also at various critical stages in their social development. With elements of distance learning behind and ahead of us, fostering a school community remains one of the trickiest to address. Some in-person community events may be possible during the school year, but we recommend a focus on building a digital community that will serve as a backbone no matter how you're working and learning in the coming months.



Tracking & measuring engagement

1. Use student interviews, surveys & engagement data to check what's working
2. Carry out online surveys with the whole school community
3. Keep an eye on engagement data to check what's working

How will you walk the halls of your school this year? Review marking practices? Monitor student wellbeing? Schools will need evidence gathering methods and metrics that can adapt to the range of in-class and distance learning we're facing in the coming school year. To start, the focus ought to be access to data. School's priorities will quickly shift to questions of engagement with learning resources and then quality in turn.

Getting started

Think about your goals for the coming year and what could be acceptable evidence of success. Then, consider how quantitative data (e.g. numbers of students completing homework on time) can be paired with qualitative data (e.g. a short student interview on homework) to give you a more robust picture.





Rethinking teaching & learning

Nimble is the byword for planning all aspects of school this year. If a school learns at 3:00pm on Tuesday that they must close from Wednesday, nobody should have to lose their evening to contingency planning. With this top of mind, the practices outlined are designed largely as evolutions of the key fundamentals we're recommending.

Best practice: Use of photos & videos for learning assessment

Students are already familiar with how to complete homework online including how to submit work. Teachers can easily modify their homework expectations as needed. A key to this is balancing the ways that students show their learning for assessment purposes. This should include photos and video of physical or verbal work.

Practical Tip

Provide some explicit guidance on how photo and video should be taken. This will save students time trying to get it "just right"; it will also save you looking at a bunch of photos sideways!

Best practice: Consider activities & resources to be completed offline

With a basic structure in place, teachers can easily expand the structure to include daily or weekly lesson materials. Without in-class time, teachers will need to consider ways that resources can be used offline or physically to meet the technology access at home.

Practical Tip

Be sure to understand your students' access to resources for offline learning at home. If it's a critical activity, be sure to give time for families to get the resources as well as some suggestions for alternatives.

Practical Tip

Create a standard format for your recorded lessons. It helps your students know what to expect, a kind of “digital classroom routine”. It also helps you economise on your planning time too.

Practical Tip

If you're new to project based learning, look online! For instance, the Buck Institute for Education, High Tech High and others have loads of resources including prepared projects.

Best practice: Use of recorded videos for lessons

Recorded material can now be posted online as homework or in class resources. The benefit of teacher-recorded material is the level of personalisation that students experience. When increasing the number of these recorded resources, it is key to keep resources short and focused

Best practice: Use of project-based activities

Project based learning that requires students to work in small groups can simultaneously deepen learning and promote student relationships. Looking for opportunities to use interdisciplinary projects also permits flexibility as schools look to manage timetabling. Whether you're having students work on end-of-unit projects or using a full PBL model, the social component of learning can really be valued and leveraged.

Educational experts view...



For our remote learning tasks we used the concept of low floor and high ceiling. All our students would be given the basics of the tasks but also had opportunities to move on as high as they wish to go. In this way the responsibility moves to the learner, freeing them to be more imaginative in the way they approach their work.

Ronan McLaverty-Head, Head of Religion and Philosophy, The King's School

Collaborative learning has been really enhanced through technology, maybe even better than it was when face to face. Using forums in Firefly down as far as Year 2 has been really beneficial.



Simon Luxford-Moore, Head of eLearning, ESMS



During the period of school closure, teachers have discovered more about their students capabilities. More than anything I feel student independence and resilience will become increasingly important to successful teaching and learning, and allow students to be more creative in the ways in which they engage with tasks.

Georgina Bruce, Art Teacher, Balcarras School

Take a closer look



Darren Walker, Head of Digital Learning at Campbell College shares how they used different digital tools used to create activities catered for all learning styles - [read about them here.](#)

Engaging parents in the learning conversation

During a school closure, the needs of parents evolve beyond simply wanting to know how their child is progressing. They are also fulfilling the role of teaching assistant, which is why close contact with families is of great importance.

Best practice: Communicate clear expectations

With parents familiar on how to access digital resources, they will be halfway to supporting their kids at home. To support the expanded use of digital platforms, communicate clear expectations on what parents should expect to find online. Schools should also consider the benefit of sample worked problems, content tutorials aimed at parents, and forums to crowdsource homeschooling help across parents and staff.

Best practice: Expand digital office support hours

Schools (e.g. teachers, SLT, therapists, etc) may consider expanding their “digital office hours” to meet demand. Creating clear expectations for staff and parents will be key to protect teachers’ time while also supporting parents as they scaffold their child’s learning.

Practical Tip

Look to create a uniform policy across your school that aligns to age appropriate expectations and subject needs. This kind of consistency and centralisation is key as parents are managing the transition to full distance learning.

Practical Tip

Consider using some sort of scheduling tool to reduce the administrative burden of scheduling meetings. Paired with a common video conferencing tool, everyone can easily participate in digital office hours.

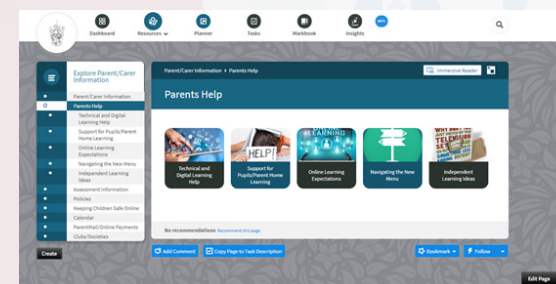
Educational experts view...



During school closures, the role of parents for senior students did not change much. In the junior school, families had to step in more to help younger pupils. We need to ensure junior children have that social interaction in order to support them through their learning.

Simon Luxford-Moore, Head of eLearning, ESMS

Take a closer look



Campbell College used Firefly pages to support parents which, as a result, would positively impact student learning. We interviewed Darren Walker to discover [how they built their parent help section](#).

Celebrating school life

Virtual schooling not only brings a change to a student's schedule but also to their usual support systems and mental wellbeing. Building a sense of community online and finding ways to bring the school experience home is even more important. To address this, we're suggesting ways through which schools can work with families.



Best practice: Developing a stronger sense of community

Similar to digital office hours, schools should consider expanding their offering here. The focus should be on developing a sense of community with everyone in isolation. This might look like form, year group or whole school assemblies that include themes and other fun activities to engage families.

Best practice: Sharing daily life

Beyond engaging students and their families in activities and challenges, schools might also consider promoting top tips, diary vlogs and other personal entries from students and families. "School life" and "home life" aren't that dissimilar in school closure, so this can give students a chance to share a bit of their daily life with the rest of the school or form group. This might be a favourite recipe tutorial, book review or family & friend interviews. The goal is to make the school day more personal.

Practical Tip

Partner with parents if possible. Look for interested parents to adopt particular online activities or year groups. Shared responsibility and a broader pool of ideas will help your school keep up the rhythm.

Practical Tip

Tools like FlipGrid are great for this kind of stuff. With a bit of guidance, parents and students can easily engage and share using their laptop, mobile device or tablet.

Best practice: Recognising achievements

How might you honour and recognise the efforts and achievements of students & staff? This might be a kind of digital “compliment wall” or weekly prize. Whatever the means - the aim is to give everyone a chance to recognise each other’s achievements and contributions to the school community.

Practical Tip

Figure out how you want to gather recommendations as well as regularly share them. An online form could allow you to easily collate submissions.

Take a closer look



Fairfield prep school organised a fantastic virtual sports day that included challenges between the different houses. To promote it they put together a humorous video - Adam Hoult, Head of PE at Fairfield Prep [shares how they organised the event.](#)

Tracking & measuring success

Catching up with students and teachers on the learning experience may be more difficult during a lockdown. On the other hand, the increased use of digital tools can make it easier to gather data and identify what’s working and what needs to improve.

Practical Tip

Ahead of the year, take time to assess the learning set up for each of your students. Surveys can give you one perspective; using a video conference call as a “digital home visit” may allow you to gain another perspective. This data will help you decide what learning support is required at home and how to address gaps.

Best practice: Monitoring parent engagement

Parents play a key role in keeping learning going during school closures. With no in-person interaction, the “how” of learning becomes just as important as the “what”. As a result, schools may want to closely monitor engagement from families in this phase. Key questions will include:

- What is the best way to communicate with families?
- What support materials do they find most interesting?
- Which families are least engaged and may require more support?



Educational experts view...



The importance of data, which shows engagement times and lengths of time, has never been more important nor pertinent. Firefly Insights was incredibly informative in showing when students, staff and parents accessed Firefly. It detailed the peak times each day and allowed us to track trends over several weeks.

As a result, we could schedule live lessons for times which we knew suited our learners better and therefore set aside other times for independent study. All our new content was uploaded on Friday evenings as we knew that families accessed Firefly over the weekend to plan the following week's work to suit their individual needs.

Simon Luxford-Moore, Head of eLearning, ESMS



Parent engagement & Learning continuity platform

Find out more
fireflylearning.com

[@fireflyteam](https://twitter.com/fireflyteam)

Want a free demo of Firefly?
Head straight to fireflylearning.com/try-firefly