



Meeting the challenge of COVID-19

Learning and practice



How City of Aberdeen Council ensured young people had the equipment and connectivity to continue to learn

What was the challenge faced by City of Aberdeen Council?

Even before the lockdown was announced in Scotland, the Virtual School Head Teacher for City of Aberdeen Council recognised, having conducted an earlier survey across schools, that there would be a requirement for digital provision for Looked After Children including the need for connectivity. Chromebooks had already been purchased and were available for distribution. She could see that from information held in the Child's Plan for some children and young people and having spoken to colleagues in social work, that under lockdown, care would need to be taken when thinking about the use of digital devices and online learning. Once it was understood what the new learning environment could look like for the next few weeks, maybe months, ahead, the Virtual School Head Teacher, with the support of social work colleagues surveyed foster carers and parents of children looked after at home to gauge what digital and practical support may be needed to ensure the children and young people could access their learning and parents/carers felt confident to support them.

What change in practice took place?

A digital learning hub for the local authority education area was established to provide guidance for all pupils, parents, and carers on how to engage in online learning and how to set up equipment for face-to-face meetings with teachers and peers. Meanwhile, the Digital Lead Education Officer working closely with the Virtual School Head Teacher also looked specifically at how the service could best support learning for both the educational needs and wellbeing of all care experienced children and young people in schools. The Virtual School helpline was established at the very start of lockdown and provided a point of contact for parents, carers, and professionals to access support which included being able to speak to a central officer who could take them step by step through the process of setting up equipment and getting online. The Virtual School Head Teacher became the key link between families and the Digital Lead Officer. Social work colleagues were also able to submit request forms for digital devices or connectivity for any care experienced child or young person they support. For

this local authority, a number of care experienced children and young people are accommodated and educated outside the city, so it was important for the Virtual School Head Teacher, to make sure that no matter where they were, no matter what school they attended, they could be provided with the equipment to be able to access their learning remotely.

Who was involved in making the change?

Working together, the Digital Lead officer and the Virtual School Head Teacher worked with pupils, teachers, social workers, parents and carers to identify needs and make sure care experienced pupils were not at a disadvantage from their peers due to lack of digital access. Telecoms partners were contacted before lockdown and EE provided all connectivity solutions in the form of dongles and increased data allowance at minimal costs.

What difference did this change make?

It was important that as far as possible in these unprecedented circumstances, that learning and teaching could continue with as little disruption as possible. In Aberdeen, pupils have continued their relationships with their peers and their teachers, both through online learning and through classroom chats. Across the local authority over 92% of all pupils are accessing and engaging in learning every week. Face-to-face contact has been maintained through video calls and a few care experienced young people who had previously been struggling to engage and participate in education, have built stronger relationships with their teachers through this period with online learning now forming part of their plan. At the start of lockdown, not all teachers felt confident with delivering lessons online, however, they have all now fully embraced this, acquiring new skills that will change how teaching is delivered in Aberdeen going forward.

More information

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