

# Monaleen N.S.

## Distance Learning Policy



# **Distance Learning Policy**

## **Rationale**

Monaleen National School recognises the huge challenges faced by pupils, teachers and parents/guardians in continuing an effective education for pupils who can not attend school for health reasons, or when the school needs to close due to unforeseen circumstances such as what occurred in March 2020 with regard to the Covid 19 pandemic. This policy will formalize our school's approach to distance learning should the need arise to move learning online again due to school closure or a class being asked to restrict movements due to a Covid 19 outbreak in the school.

## **AIM**

To ensure that Monaleen NS is ready to move learning online with a smooth and seamless transition, and to maximize outcomes for all pupils should the need arise to close the school during term time.

## **Objectives**

- To formalize which digital platforms will be used by our school
- To ensure that the digital platforms chosen are appropriate for each class stream
- To promote skills and engagement with online learning while the children are in school, in order to facilitate a smoother transition should learning move online
- To maximize learning opportunities online
- To identify the best ratio of guided book learning v online tuition in order to avoid a 'digital divide' between families with lots of access to technology and wifi and families with restricted access
- To identify pupils at risk of falling behind due to 'digital divide'
- To identify and remove, insofar as is practicable, obstacles to engagement with distance learning
- To ensure continued strong communication between staff and between school and home during any school closures or when a class is learning from home
- To ensure compliance with all relevant legislation around GDPR with regard to online learning

## **Relationship to School Ethos**

Monaleen N.S. is an inclusive school committed to the holistic education of all of our pupils. Strong engagement with distance learning is of paramount importance in ensuring positive learning outcomes and experiences for all children in the event of a full or partial school closure, particularly if the closure is over an extended period.

## **Platforms**

Our Digital Learning Team have embedded the use of **Google Classroom** for all children from 1<sup>st</sup> class to 6<sup>th</sup> class in our school. Digital learning targets had been set and achieved across many streams in advance of the lockdown in March 2020, this helped to facilitate an effective transition to online learning when the need arose.

It was agreed amongst the Digital Learning Team and the In-school Management Team that Google Classroom was not an appropriate platform for Junior and Senior Infants, as the digital skills would not have been present to allow the children to participate effectively.

Having reviewed other Digital Learning Platforms, it has been decided that '**See Saw**' will be used as a distance learning tool for Junior Infants to Second Class in the event of a whole or partial school closure. All these streams were trained in how to use the platform in early September, 2020 and will have opportunities to practice using the platform by being timetabled iPad time every fortnight during the first term. The cost of the platform will initially be met by our IT grant, but it will be added to the School Bill for Art and Craft/Photocopying from September 2021 onwards.

Google Classroom continues to be the platform for use by Third class to Sixth class. Feedback from parents and teachers was very positive with regards to the efficacy of this platform during the lockdown period.

A restriction with both platforms is the ease with which new material can be taught. See Saw will allow the effective teaching of many important language and numeracy skills remotely, albeit while never coming close to matching the in-school equivalent. Google Classroom will allow some explanatory teaching, but it will continue to be quite restricted in being an effective tool to teach new concepts to a class group.

It is also a significant disadvantage that we can not guarantee that all children will have equal access to the online material being provided.

Therefore it is important that these systems are not overly relied on, as it creates a digital divide between children and families who do not have access to technology and broadband and the children and families who have ample access. Access can also be an issue for teachers who live in areas with poor broadband connectivity.

Book learning and worksheets will be the foundation of distance learning programmes. The **Aladdin** System will be used to communicate the written and book based homework for all children. It will also document the online work to be completed. This is so that parents/guardians are fully aware of what work the children have been assigned. Teachers will also communicate the work to be done via the learning platforms assigned to the stream, to allow children to access the work assigned without needing access to Aladdin.

**Zoom** will only be used for social interaction in the event of an extended lockdown (more than one month). It will be purely for the purposes of allowing the children to interact and see each other and their teacher. Teachers will run one Zoom (or similar App) session per fortnight in the event of an extended lockdown. This platform has inherent security risks, as there have been instances in other schools of strangers accessing meetings and students engaging in inappropriate behaviour. Supervision can be an issue for parents who are either out at work or busy while working from home, therefore this type of platform will be used very minimally and with maximum security arrangements;

- Invitation to Zoom meeting is shared only through Aladdin with the parents (never shared on any public platform)
- Parents are expressly asked not to share the link to the meeting
- Parents are asked to supervise their children while engaging in Zoom meeting
- Children are asked to have their Video Feed switched on, so that the teacher can ascertain that it is the intended participant who is actually partaking in the meeting
- Parents and pupils are expressly asked not to record the meetings under any circumstances
- An SET will attend the meeting as a co-host in order to avoid a situation where, should the Class Teacher lose a connection to the meeting, that a child automatically becomes the host

## **Pupils at Risk of Falling Behind**

Children with SEN and children who lack access to devices and/or broadband connectivity at home are at heightened risk of falling behind during periods when they need to learn at home.

Families who lack digital devices and/or broadband connectivity need to be supported by having more book work and these families will need to be liaised with by the class teacher by telephone. A weekly call with parents/guardians will take place to support and encourage these child(ren) and keep them engaged with their learning.

Children with SEN will be supported both by the class teacher and by their SEN teacher. The class teacher and the SEN teacher will collaborate to ensure that the child with SEN is not being overwhelmed with work to do from two sources and the appropriate differentiation will be put in place. Some children with SEN may require extra Zoom sessions with their SEN teacher or SNA, particularly in order to facilitate social groups. This will be assessed on a case by case basis.

Children who show low levels of engagement despite having access to technology and broadband connectivity will be reached out to via Aladdin and email to query what the impediment to engagement is and to try to encourage them to re-engage. In the event of the Aladdin and email messages not being replied to, the parents/guardians will be telephoned by the class teacher to query the engagement levels in order to try to remove the impediment to the child's engagement.

## **Development of IT Skills while at school**

Digital Learning has been our target for School Self Evaluation over the past two years. While SSE is suspended in effect until January 2021 at the earliest, we will continue to set goals to upskill the teaching staff and the students in digital literacy and online learning. Teachers from Juniors to 2<sup>nd</sup> have been trained in the use of See Saw and classes from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> are being encouraged to use the school laptops to improve digital literacy skills and engagement with Google Classroom. Opportunities to train teachers will continue to be looked at, while the challenges of being 'Covid-safe' with regard to the sharing of resources will continue to be assessed by the Digital Learning Team (e.g. the purchase of cost effective wipes to clean laptops and iPads after use and the establishment of a quick and effective cleaning procedure which can be executed in each class after use).

## **Strategies to Maximize Distance Learning**

We are highly conscious in Monaleen NS of the 'Digital Divide' that occurs when children are engaged in distance learning. This divide is driven by the following factors;

- Lack of appropriate devices or competition for devices between siblings
- Lack of appropriate Broadband, due to economic reasons or location
- Competition for Broadband bandwidth due to parents/guardians also working from home
- Lack of supervision to ensure children are safe online and using the appropriate Apps, due to parents/guardians being either out at work or also working from home and not in a position to provide the required level of supervision
- Low interest of some children in digital or online activities
- Low interest of some children in book learning activities
- Children becoming disinterested or disengaged due to stress/change in routine/lack of social element to the learning/lack of feedback

In order to address these challenges, our school is keen to emphasize the importance of Book Learning as being the foundation of all learning at home. The online platforms are designed to promote engagement with learning and to allow the tuition of some new skills, and to provide contact time with the teacher and other pupils, but in order to prevent a gap developing between children with significant online access and children who are facing the challenges listed above, the ratio should be around 80:20 between book learning and online learning.

Work should be set on the Aladdin HW facility, so that parents/guardians can clearly see what their child(ren) are being asked to do each day. An overview of the week should also be provided (as an attachment or a noticeboard message). This should be provided well in advance of beginning the weeks work, so that parents/guardians have an opportunity to print it and prepare their children or provide it to a minder should the parents be going to work.

Guidance and encouragement will be given through Aladdin and the platforms appropriate to the stream. Both platforms (See Saw and Google Classroom) encourage the children to share work and receive feedback on work completed. The teachers will also share their @monaleenns.ie email address in order to facilitate queries and feedback, especially where families are restricted in their use of See Saw and Google Classroom. Feedback should be given to all children on their learning on a regular basis.

Teachers who are engaging with students remotely will log on to the appropriate platforms every morning at a designated time for a period of one hour. Children who have access will be expected to engage remotely for this hour, during which teachers will communicate what work should be completed that day and provide 'contact time' with the children who are engaging remotely. Children can check in for however much of this hour is appropriate, depending on pressures they may be under for devices and supervision.

Time after that will be spent on bookwork and online tasks, and teachers will be focussed on assessing children's work and providing appropriate feedback through the designated platforms and/or email.

Teachers will then plan accordingly to provide a child centred and differentiated approach (and if the whole school is learning from home, teachers in the various streams will collaborate to ensure a common approach regarding strategies and content, where appropriate). This model can be revised as appropriate should the need arise, or if on review, it should be decided that the needs of pupils are not being met sufficiently.

## **Parents/Guardians**

Parents/guardians can help to maximize distance learning by:

- Instilling in their children the importance of continuing to engage with their education despite the school being closed
- Working with the school to remove the barriers to engagement
- Liaising regularly with the Class Teacher, especially with queries or feedback that can help to improve their child's engagement
- Supervising and taking an interest in the completion of online tasks and book learning tasks alike wherever possible (it is recognised that when parents/guardians work from home that this is not easy to do)
- Continuing with encouraging and praising their child(ren)'s academic achievements
- Contacting the school immediately if they discover any issues such as online bullying or inappropriate content being shared by their own or another pupil

## **Pods and Bubbles**

If a full class (bubble) is sent home for two weeks, this plan will come into effect in order to teach those children. The children in the class should take home the books needed as directed by the Class Teacher. The teacher will then liaise with the families through Aladdin Connect in order to initiate the distance learning programme for the two week period.

If a pod is sent home for two weeks, the children in the pod should take home the appropriate books as directed by the Class Teacher. The teacher will then instruct the children what work is to be completed via Aladdin Connect. Feedback will be given on work completed, however the teacher will not be available to engage during the school day as he/she will be teaching the remaining children in the class.

If the whole school is shut down for two weeks, or an extended period, then this plan comes fully into effect.

## **Collecting Books/Packs**

If book collections or work-pack collections need to be arranged for entire classes, the parent-teacher meeting facility on Aladdin Connect will be used to facilitate social distancing between the parents/guardians who are collecting the books or packs. Individual collections will be accommodated by appointment, arranged through the office.

## **Pupil With an Underlying Condition**

In the event of a pupil needing to stay home during Covid 19 restrictions due to an underlying health condition, the school will endeavour to support the pupil appropriately. Work will be provided and if possible, direct tuition will be provided remotely, should the personnel be available to provide it. Situations like this will be managed on a case by case basis and planned according to the needs and the class level of the child. It may be possible to provide partial integration with the school day, e.g. that a child attends during the time that the class is outside playing, in order to facilitate social contact.

## **Meetings and Communication**

In-School Management, Digital Learning Team, Class streams and whole school staff meetings will be held on Zoom/WhatsApp/Phone as appropriate in the event of an extended lock down period, in order to disseminate information and review and plan existing strategies. Aladdin Connect, text and email will be used to communicate between staff and between school and the extended school community.

## **GDPR**

Our school strives to protect children's personal data at all times. This becomes more challenging when the children are learning remotely. Children are encouraged to change their passwords for the online platforms from time to time, and to never share their passwords. Any breaches of personal accounts should be reported to the Class Teacher immediately so that remedial action can be taken.

## **Revisions and Updates**

The situation regarding Covid 19 is ever evolving. It is possible that a class or a pod could be sent home for a two week period, or that the school could be shut down for the same period. It is also possible that a full lockdown could occur as happened before. We will react appropriately to evolving situations and update this plan accordingly. We will continue to support individual children who are staying at home for health reasons remotely through individualized plans in consultation with the class teacher and continue our preparedness for any extended closures in the meantime.

## **Communication with parents**

This policy will be published on the school website and promoted on the school App.

# **IMPLEMENTATION AND REVIEW**

This policy will be in effect from September 2020. The policy will be reviewed on a two year cycle or as required by any changes in the circumstances around school closures.

The school management team and the teachers will implement this policy.

The Board of Management ratified this policy on \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_

**Chairperson**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Principal**

**Date of Implementation:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Review Date:** \_\_\_\_\_