

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. This policy will formalize our school's approach to distance learning should the need arise to move learning online due to a class or whole school closure. In the event of a pupil needing to stay home due to an underlying health condition, the school will endeavour to support the pupil appropriately.

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 versus 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 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 has embedded the use of Google Classroom as a distance learning platform for all children in the higher classes and Seesaw as the distance learning platform for the lower classes. Digital learning is integrated to the curriculum across all streams to facilitate an effective transition to online learning if the need should arise.

Online video conferencing will be used for interaction in the event of an extended lockdown. Zoom or Google Meet will be used by staff to interact with students.

Guidelines for good online communication:

- Under no circumstances can pictures or recordings be taken of video calls.
- Staff, families and students are expected to behave in an appropriate, safe, respectful and kind manner online.
- It is the duty of parents/guardians to supervise children while they are working online and to ensure any content which they are submitting to their teacher is appropriate.
- Staff members can communicate with pupils and their families via Aladdin or through an established app (eg. Google Classroom, Seesaw, Zoom, Google Meet).
- Any electronic forms of communication will be for educational purposes and to allow for communication with families.
- Students and staff will communicate using tools which have been approved by the school and of which parents have been notified (Google Classroom, Seesaw, Zoom, Google Meet).
- Parental permission will be acquired before setting up a profile for a pupil on a communication forum.
- For video (e.g. Zoom calls), parental permission is implied, as the link to a video call will be communicated to the parent/guardian via Aladdin. By virtue of the pupil logging on to the call, permission is assumed.
- A family name should be used when joining the meeting.
- Online video conferencing platforms have inherent security risks, the platform will be used with maximum security arrangements available. Monaleen NS cannot accept responsibility for the security of online platforms, in the event that they are hacked.
- Communication using a mobile phone will not be frequent, but in the rare exception where it is necessary, staff members will ensure that their caller ID is private.

Guidelines for staff members using online communication methods:

- Under no circumstances can pictures or recordings be taken of video calls.
- Staff members will communicate with pupils and families during the hours of 9am - 2.40pm, where possible.
- Staff members will have high expectations regarding pupil behaviour, with any communication which takes place online.
- Staff members will seek to become familiar with apps before using them with pupils.
- Staff will check that consent has been given, before setting up a pupil profile for an online app.
- Staff members will report any concerns regarding online behaviour or interactions to school management.
- Staff are encouraged to generate a new meeting ID and password for each Zoom meeting being held.
- Staff members will notify parents/guardians of the date, time and password for a video call via Aladdin.
- Staff members will only admit participants to video conferences, if they recognise the name of the family/student.

Rules for pupils using online communication methods:

For submitting learning:

1. Submit work and pictures that are appropriate - have an adult take a look at your work before you send it.
2. Use kind and friendly words.

For video calls/Zoom:

- Pictures or recordings of the video call are not allowed.

- Remember our school rules - they are still in place, even online.
- If you have the chance to talk, speak in your normal voice, using kind and friendly words.
- Show respect by listening to others while they are speaking.
- Ensure that you are dressed appropriately for the video call.

Guidelines for parents and guardians:

For learning

- It is the responsibility of parents and guardians to ensure that pupils are supervised while they work online.
- Check over the work which pupils send to their teacher, ensuring it is appropriate.
- Continue to revise online safety measures with pupils.

For video calls/Zoom

- Under no circumstances can pictures or recordings be taken of video calls.
- Ensure that the school has the correct email address for inviting you to join apps and meetings.
- The main purpose of a video call is to maintain a social connection between the school staff and pupils at this difficult time. Encourage pupils to listen and enjoy the experience.
- You will automatically enter a waiting room when the code for a Zoom call has been entered.
- Please note that school staff will only accept users into video call if you can be identified by the display name on your Zoom account.
- Please ensure that your child is on time for a scheduled video.
- Make sure to familiarise your child with the software in advance, for video in particular, show them how to mute/unmute.
- Be aware that when participating in group video calls, you can be seen and heard unless you are muted or have disabled your camera.
- Participants in the call should be dressed appropriately.
- An appropriate background/room should be chosen for the video call.
- Parents are asked to contact the school immediately if they discover any issues such as online bullying or inappropriate content being shared by their own or another pupil.

It is important to note that any breach of the above guidelines will result in a discontinuation of this method of communication. A breach may also result in a person being immediately removed from a meeting or in a meeting being immediately terminated. In this case, the child's parent will receive a report on the incident.

Pod, Class or Whole School Closure

In the event of a class or whole school closure, mainstream class teachers will engage in daily contact online with the class. This will include at least three online video conferencing sessions per week, but teachers have the option to run more if deemed suitable for the class.

In the event of a pod being sent home the students at home will be assigned the same work as the students in school. The class teacher will be engaged with face to face teaching of the remaining students in the class during that period however every effort will be made to support remote learning of the pod.

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 from two sources and the appropriate differentiation will be put in place. Some children with SEN may require extra online video conferencing sessions with their SEN teacher or SNA, particularly in order to facilitate social groups. This will be assessed on a case by case basis.

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.

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.

An overview of the week's work should also be provided on Aladdin to parents/guardians well in advance of beginning the week's 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 the platforms appropriate to the stream. Both platforms (Google Classroom and Seesaw) 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 with parents/guardians, especially where families are restricted in their use of Seesaw and Google Classroom. Feedback should be given to all children on their learning on a regular basis.

Teachers who are engaging with whole classes remotely will log on to the appropriate platforms every morning at a prearranged time for a minimum period of one hour. Children who have access will be expected to engage remotely during this hour, during which teachers will communicate what work should be completed that day. Children can check in for however much of this designated time 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 plan to provide a child-centred and differentiated approach. 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.

Meetings and Communication

In-School Management, Digital Learning Team, Class streams and whole school staff meetings will be held online in the event of an extended lockdown period. 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 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

This policy will come into effect for any pod, class or classes sent home for remote learning. This is a working document. As we try out new ways of supporting distance learning, the document will be updated.

Communication with Parents

This policy will be published on the school website.

IMPLEMENTATION AND REVIEW

This policy will be in effect from April 2021. 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: _____