Information on Blended Learning

Dear Parent / Guardian

We are writing to you to outline the learning experience in Carmarthenshire schools at this time as we continue to deal with the coronavirus pandemic.

We feel it is important to explain what schools expect, and what you can expect as a parent when pupils spend some time learning in school and some time learning from home.

We hope this will help us all to be realistic about what we can achieve, and prepare us better if there are further 'firebreak' restrictions or any other arrangements which may affect our schools in the future.

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New terms (words) and learning methods – some basic definitions:

Whilst schools are open, and are operating safely, we wish to encourage **full attendance at school**. If your child is healthy, is not showing any Covid symptoms, has not been told to self-isolate by a medical professional or told to stay home from school because of Test, Trace, Protect , then school still provides the best learning environment for all learners.

Blended Learning – this is a term which describes a wide range of teaching methods and approaches – some digital, others non-digital, some face to face with a teacher in school, others from a distance such as working from home

Jargon Buster	Where?	Examples
Blended Learning	In school	- **Face to face** with a teacher in class - **Independent** learning (working without direct teacher input such as tasks or challenges set for pupils to lead their own learning and solve problems)
	Distance learning (not on school site and usually at home)	**Synchronous learning** – online learning where the teacher and learner can interact in real time e.g. **live streaming meetings**. These meetings are often arranged beforehand through MS Teams or Google Meet
		Asynchronous learning – digital learning which is not in real time (live) with the teacher (e.g. researching on the internet, watching a pre-recorded clip of the teacher online). These activities can be done at a time determined by the learner (on-demand) and via resources delivered online through J2E, MS Teams, Google Classroom or Hwbmail
		Asynchronous non-digital learning e.g. written work such as writing an essay, completing a written past paper, reading a book such as a textbook or a story book/novel. creative activities, such as: listening to music, drawing/painting, rehearsing a part for a play, physical activities, such as taking an exercise class, or playing sport
	Collaborative learning	Pupils learning together and from one another. This happens every day in our schools, but can also happen digitally, at a distance, such as when pupils share ideas online opportunities through Hwb including J2E, Office365 and Google G Suite.
	Flipped classroom	Learners preview lessons at home and then develop skills and deeper learning in school with peers and teachers.

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When working from home, schools in Carmarthenshire will arrange that pupils are able to complete reasonable hours of activity drawn from the wide range of blended learning opportunities available to them. A blend of these methods can be more effective in delivering teaching, promoting engagement within a positive learning environment.

This means that schools **will not expect pupils to be on-screen for hours on end during the day.** We expect pupils to **undertake activities which are a mix of digital and non-digital and asynchronous/ synchronous.** Therefore, parents should not worry, for example, about expecting five hours of live streaming every day. A healthy balance of activities is expected.

Summary of blended learning activities which can be used in different arrangements and times to suit desired learning opportunities.

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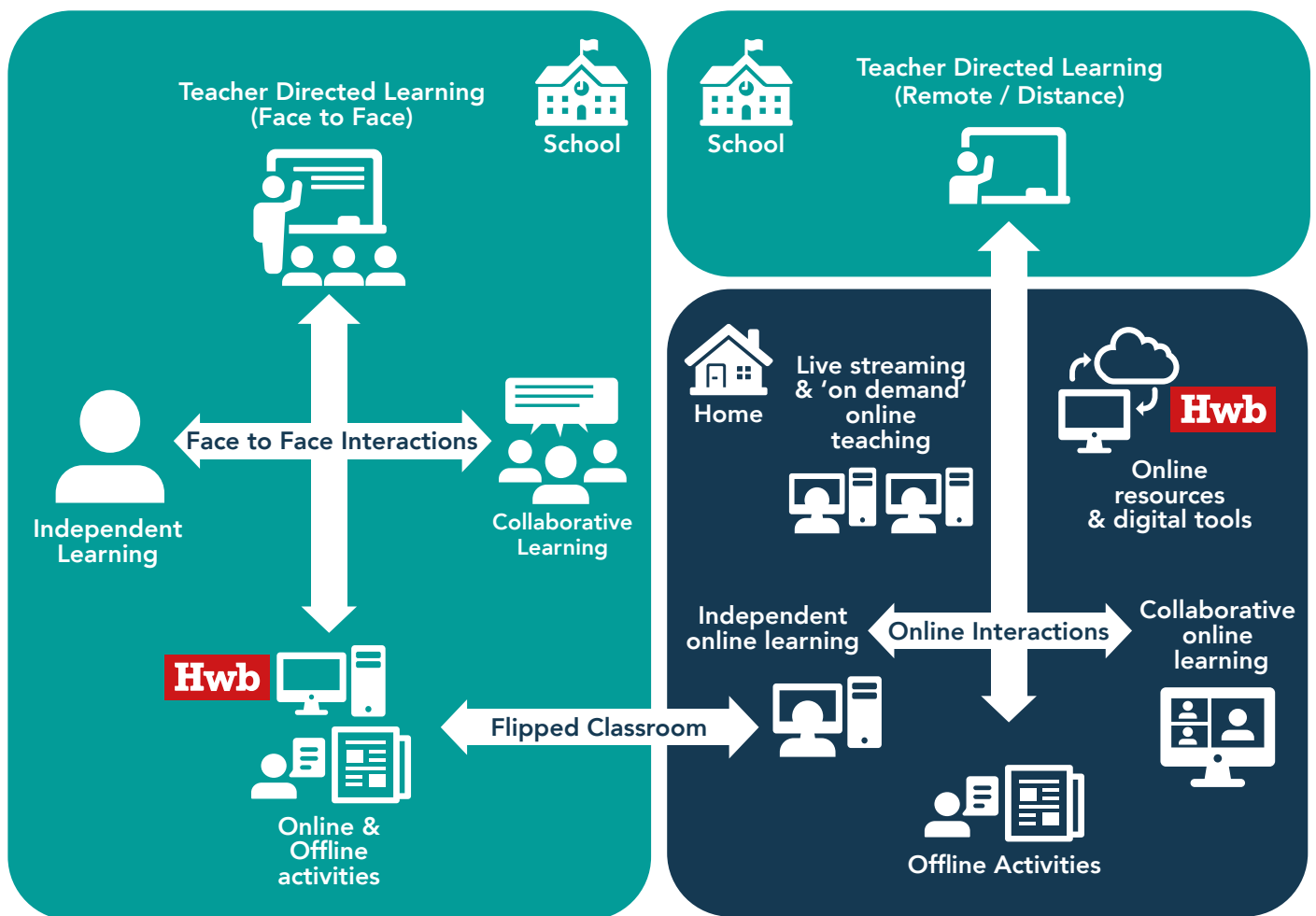
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In terms of time to be spent on schoolwork at home, this is a difficult matter to be precise upon:

In normal times:

- Schools are open to deliver 25 hours of lessons a week

- A-Level students can do well in their studies if they complete an average of one hour per subject per day above their teacher contact time

- GCSE students might spend up to a couple of hours a day above their teacher contact time

- Younger learners in secondary school might reasonably have a few items of homework per evening, taking around 20 minutes each to complete

- Older primary pupils might be spending some time above their teacher contact time (e.g. a year 6 project or similar)

For distance learning (working at home):

- Under current circumstances, we would **promote a flexible** approach where the teacher could provide a variety of lesson delivery as outlined above, and our preference is to **leave it to schools and teachers to gauge how much work can be reasonably completed as compared to a normal working week in school**.

- Online lessons delivered by teachers may vary in length. Teachers may also choose to show a shorter pre-recorded clip to stimulate discussion and then be on hand online or on email to answer questions.

- Some educational sources[1] suggest that time spent on the computer **over and above the teacher's input** should be approximately 30% of the normal school day (which is about 90 minutes)

- Teachers will then gauge an appropriate time for pupils to complete other set tasks which are broadly consistent with the age, stage and ability of the pupils and be guided by the norms of what is required to ensure good progress. So, our first instinct would be to **encourage you to trust in the teacher's professional judgement.**

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We also ask you as parents to consider:

- Giving some thought to the additional challenges of working at home, such as encouraging your child to take regular breaks and having a quiet space to work.

- Older teenagers, particularly, may have a different body clock to other household members and choose to complete work at alternative times, as compared to the normal working day. That said, we would always support that:
    - **They have a good pattern of sleep**
    - **Take regular mealtimes**

- Think about when it is appropriate to support your child and when not to.

- We are also trying to nurture resilience in our young people to help them develop as independent learners so, if they are stuck and you think you can help, guide them to come to their own answers rather than complete the task for them.

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Teachers and school leaders will monitor that work set is completed to the required standard and on time. Staff may on occasions take longer to mark/assess a piece of work compared to the 'norm'. However, if they have concerns, they will chase that up with your son/daughter in the normal fashion and will only contact you if they begin to have concerns.

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In the same way, we would ask you as a parent to kindly do the same. Give your child every opportunity to complete their work and only contact school through the normal channels if you have any concerns

Families which have had digital equipment loaned to them

At the start of this year, approx. 1600 devices were provided to enable them to learn from home whilst our schools were shut. Now learners have returned to full time education, usage of the devices at home has reduced significantly.

As part of this 'new normal' we are seeing bubbles or year groups of pupils self-isolating and many of these pupils now require IT equipment, and we need to meet this demand.

Some schools have already managed the distribution and collection of IT kit , however, in order to offer flexibility, we are asking that all devices are returned to school (if they have not already been returned) sometime in the new year, depending on the situation at the time. You will be further advised in due course. These devices will be checked, then managed at the school's discretion, allowing Headteachers to arrange short-term loans for pupils that require them if there's a further need to self-isolate. Parents/Guardians will be required to complete the necessary paperwork to ensure that the device is covered by county insurance.

All devices will need to be returned by the end of the summer term for stocktaking. A review of the scheme will also be carried out to make sure it remains appropriate and if so, fit for purpose.

I hope you find the information in this letter useful, it is important we all work together in this new way of learning and I would like to thank you once again for your continued support.

Yours faithfully,

Gareth Morgans

Director
Department for Education and Children

References
1.https://www.educationnext.org/ideal-blended-learning-combination-instructional-computer-time/ , accessed 12.11.20

Further reading into the different types of blended learning: https://edtechnology.co.uk/latest-news/ultimate-guide-to-blended-learning/, accessed 12.11.20

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