

**Following conversations with several of our schools, we can share the following:**

**About teaching live classes online:**

- Live classes online are much closer to the real face to face experience than sending group emails to students which generate 20 return emails to teacher which require further comment/feedback etc. (*“very unwieldy”*) Some students are not always comfortable posing questions to teachers via email despite teachers requesting that they ask for help as required. (Too impersonal)
- Live classes allow real time connection and a check in facility in real time. Students are more confident to respond/ask questions/ interact with peers in this format rather than to emails from teacher.
- Live classes enable opportunities to “chat casually” which are useful especially in non- exam classes – time can be set aside to facilitate questions, ease anxiety and “be “with each other.
- Live classes require a schedule – some schools establish the schedule for each year group based on a new block timetable between 10-2pm /based on original timetable e.g. where there are 3 classes of 1<sup>st</sup> year History and Geography in the week, the one on Thursday morning is the one to be used for live class while the class of Geography is on the schedule for Monday afternoon. Schools have found when the schedule is established by SLT, the classes are spread out over the week and everyone is aware of when these take place. In the event that a teacher requires a second live class, they can schedule it for a time during one of their other History classes and again, keep an eye on maintaining a balanced spread of classes. Equally if a teacher is still uncomfortable with the technology, their slot remains available even if they choose not to use it or until they are ready to use it. Schools have found that in time all teachers try out the live class as they are aware that their colleagues are doing so and they do so more readily with support from their colleagues. In all cases reported, teachers have reported a positive experience and agree to use this approach more regularly. More is achieved in a more efficient way than by using emails.
- School has established live classes for all 3<sup>rd</sup> year and LC students – The school agreed to this approach on the day of closure and used the weeks before Easter to get all engaged. The two separate year groups follow school timetable Monday to Friday in this format. This includes PE and other non-exam classes. By end of week one, all teething problems re technology “*How do I switch on? What level of control have I as host of virtual classroom?*” type questions had been resolved – key to success is support from small number of colleagues who are very competent in using technology and are expert at sharing this knowledge with colleagues. In the main on week one the live classes were run like lectures but by week three many of the live classes included teacher led activity, student activity, time for discussion and corrections and have become more like face to face classroom experiences. Plan for after Easter is to extend the live classes to 5<sup>th</sup> years and possibly 2<sup>nd</sup> years. Some teachers already doing this.

**Supporting SEN**

- Teachers differentiate materials according to needs of students in the class group – where student struggling, teacher alerts anchor teacher/SENCo for the year group and anchor teacher/ SENCo review work and instructions – live class separately with child/ email with further instructions which child and parent can

access/ screen cast with simpler instructions created by teacher to be given to small number of students struggling.

- Anchor teacher/SNA contacts individual family to check in/connect and discuss what is involved in schoolwork at this time. School has created video showing parent and child how to access work on platform in simplified steps.
- SENCo online every day with students – class group set up for each group of w/drawn students depending on need
- Biology teacher raises concern with SENCo re student in 6<sup>th</sup> year struggling with one particular topic and work set in this area – Other Biology teacher used ZOOM to go over relevant information with that student and included the two friends who are also struggling with this topic.

### ***Supporting Wellbeing***

- Following distressed phone calls from home, Principal/Guidance Counsellor/ Chaplain/ YH has advised Student Support Team of issues in home, struggles with technology, issues with illness, student who is child minding as parent still goes to work/is ill. School agrees on a strategy re homework and schoolwork for these students and advises subject teachers. Different expectations set for these students.

### ***About the technology, and remote teaching and learning:***

- Despite the messages to the system to take a break over the Easter holidays, many teachers have used the Easter period to upskill or *to get ahead* of their students in terms of comfort levels and the technology. Many were struggling with the new reality of school life before the Easter holidays. Many felt overwhelmed by the steep learning curve required to get to grips with current situation and current realities of own situations and use of technology. The level of fatigue in the system before the holidays was high. Teachers need to pace themselves and their expectations – some students' feedback indicates they are overwhelmed with all the work being set by teachers in the online experience. Collaboration and sharing ideas and resources with colleagues using school platforms while working on school devices has increased considerably since the schools closed.

### ***Engagement:***

- Engagement: Small year group in 6<sup>th</sup> year (3 or 4 students not engaging). In 3<sup>rd</sup> year (6 or 7 not engaging) – parents contacted, and situation discussed. Some improvement in engagement from the few. Some broadband issues but most students access school on their phones. All other year groups - Teachers requested to send Principal concerns re engagement – Principal collates information for YH – YH makes calls home and discusses student's engagement across all subject areas.
- This is at 40% in our school. Contact via email followed up by phone call to home. Parents make excuses and still engagement does not improve.
- Engagement is as it would be normally (perhaps slightly less) School issuing an Easter report so parents can see child's level of engagement across all subject

- areas. Report available to staff first week back for completion and will be issued to parents by Friday of week one.
- Engagement is at 80% - using VSware management system to monitor – originally at 50% so much improved since making parents aware of the VSWare facility.
- Teachers email students and YH follow up with call home to parents. Records of attempts are kept.
- SS team contact students of concern and families.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> years are the most engaged – 3<sup>rd</sup> years most challenging as JC arrangements changed.
- How to engage the dispossessed – 3<sup>rd</sup> years in a state of confusion
- All students in direct provision facility have received laptops (one per family) from local SVDeP and County Council – big improvement in engagement.
- All subject teachers set one weekly assignment or an agreed number of assignments (depending on year group) for students in their classes in the five weeks leading up to end of term. These assignments are assessed and form the basis for the end of year report for parents and students. Students and parents are advised of this plan in week one of this term and that these assignments will be assessed to include engagement, meeting deadlines, working with others (where students are divided into groups to complete a project like task) etc... School believes that this will improve engagement and motivation in a meaningful way for students in the remaining weeks of term.

**Concerns:**

- Time lost for practical classes and need for preparation for exams in these disciplines.
- Project write up time required. Projects! Projects! Projects!
- Access to specialist rooms and equipment (Junior and Leaving Cert classes)
- Book rental – 3<sup>rd</sup> years will need their books for September if they are to do exams in Sept – school cannot recycle their books for incoming first years /second years.
- Students still have not emptied lockers (despite calls etc. in available timeframe) and schools cannot get into the building to sort out reassignment & recycling of these for other students.
- YH ended up buying a bed and giving old phone to a student living in challenging home circumstances.
- TUSLA referrals still being made as homes become more challenging places.
- Staff - level of fatigue high – expectation that all are available between 9am and 4pm each day but often emails come for homes where there are few devices and as homework is finished in the evening. In turn teachers not setting homework until after 6pm and students who have worked all day according to revision timetable /block classes etc finding the alerts too much. (Discipline required and balance to be struck as people get frustrated)
- Older teachers concerned that they are not where they would be in terms of learning and course material. (Need to reassure)
- Students in homes where parent is receiving chemo/ following liver transplant – 6<sup>th</sup> year
- Staff have underlying conditions (return to school in July?)
- Increasing numbers of 5<sup>th</sup> year students applying to repeat the year.

### **What we have learned over the past few weeks:**

- Screen cast works well for students who can then play teacher's video explaining the concept etc. and stop and replay as required. Followed up with set work to practice and deepen understanding of concept explained in video and then follow up with live class for comment/questions is a useful approach and a good example of blended practice.
- Edmodo, Google Classroom and MS Teams very useful for managing the learning online. Be careful of using too many platforms with the same cohort of students – confusion can occur. In Microsoft alone, teachers are using Teams, Sharepoint, One Note and emails – hope to consolidate all onto TEAMS when returning after Easter. Be consistent in only using the school system Avoid 3<sup>rd</sup> party Apps *where possible* as students get confused if they have to log on to different systems.
- School website sets out school use of different platforms for parents' information and reference. This is useful as parents have a greater understanding of how the learning is structured during Covid-19 times.
- School has developed a policy re conference style /live classes which will be ratified this week at BOM meeting – training and advice given to all staff – plan we will promote this in the weeks after Easter for all year groups using skeleton style schedule – once a week class etc... until staff more comfortable with this approach. Staff can continue with screencast approach until ready.
- Students have multiple sites in which to talk to each other (Facebook Live, Tick Tock, Insta etc) Parents could let them use Skype or FaceTime either. Students should be encouraged to talk to grandparents this way also.
- There are many different variations of broadband when you live on the side of a mountain.
- Parents very happy with school efforts – one parent reported that child had seven live classes in one day – exhausting but connected. Let's talk about pacing!
- Many teachers are overwhelmed, and careful planning can alleviate this. For example, I only do my video lessons every second day and on the other days I prepare them and upload any slides/documents in advance to prep the students. After the meeting I upload a Form to get their feedback and questions.

### **Other:**

- School has started using its laser printer machines to make face shields for HSE – technology teacher makes 40 per day in school.
- There is a huge commitment from all /majority of staff to get this working for students. In most schools there are three groups – those who are deeply committed, those who get on with the job and those who are disengaged. (Disengagement occurs for many different reasons, struggling with home life, with technology, just disengaged.)
- There is a huge sense of relief as our school had embraced technology and commenced good planning on digital strategy/ teachers have devices / students have emails/ all, including parents can use VSWare behaviour system to monitor own child's engagement.
- Every school requires a lead person(s) in area of technology to support other staff.