

EIS Advice to Members on Reporting During School Closure

Context

This advice is intended to support members during the current period of school closure in relation to report writing that may have been planned for Term 4.

The summer term is one in which many schools would normally write end of year reports. Given continuing school closure and current lockdown restrictions, and in the context of the empowered schools agenda, it is advised that collegiate discussion involving all teaching staff who would be normally have been involved in writing reports at this time, takes place to consider and come to an agreement on how best to proceed.

The following points may be helpful in informing such discussions.

Purpose/ rationale of report writing

As a starting point for discussion, it is worth exploring the rationale for writing reports at this time. Are written reports necessary? Is there a legitimate purpose in seeking to write and distribute pupil reports while multiple other priorities arising from unforeseen circumstances are being addressed?

Where schools have recently held parents' evenings, there is likely to be little more to report given that the past few weeks of children's progress has been restricted somewhat by the recent swift move to home-based learning. It is likely that reports written during this term would cover much of the same ground as discussed with parents during recent consultation evenings.

When there are many other priorities being addressed by teachers currently, such as keeping children engaged in learning and seeking to address their wellbeing needs, all from home settings where family, caring and domestic considerations also require to be balanced, it could be difficult to justify diverting significant swathes of teacher time to report writing when little new ground will be covered.

Where there has not been a recent parents' evening for a particular year group or class, or in the case of writing reports for pupils who are in their final year of Primary school, it might be agreed that there is a stronger case for writing reports at this time.

Where this is the case, current circumstances are likely to demand that reports being written by teachers at home without access to assessment records and pupil work take on a different format than usual. It is unlikely that teachers will be in a position to write reports in the same detail as they would when they have full access to the range of evidence of children's progress in learning over the course of the year.

Where it is agreed that writing reports will serve good purpose at this time, discussion and agreement should take place regarding the revised format and level of detail that can, in the circumstances, be included, such that the reports are meaningful for parents and learners. Again, any decision reached should take account of and be balanced against other current working time priorities.

Practical Considerations: access to assessment evidence

Collegiate discussion should focus on practical as well as educational matters. End of year reports are mostly written in school and always with teachers having access to the full range of classroom evidence that's required to write pupil reports in the level of detail previously agreed- evidence such as pupil jotters and work folders, class displays, assessment records and so on, covering the whole school session.

Few if any teachers will have access to the full range of such evidence at present, therefore it will not be possible in most cases for reports to be written in the usual way this term.

With this in mind, it might be agreed that a significantly abridged version of the usual report could be written providing an holistic view, as far as teachers are able to provide it, of the child's progress since the last reporting phase.

Abbreviated reports might take the form of brief interim reports or tracking reports, and would not seek to cover all of the elements of the usual full report.

Practical Considerations: managing collaboration among jobs-share and part-time teachers

Where classes and associated reporting responsibilities are shared between/among teachers, there could be significant challenges at the moment in the context of lockdown and home-working in enabling the requisite professional collaboration on report-writing.

The majority of teachers employed on a part-time or job share basis are women; in most cases, women opt for part-time and job share arrangements in order to balance work with childcare and other caring roles. In the current context, many women teachers are likely to be facing even greater challenge in managing these multi-priorities.

Where it is agreed that reports are to be written for pupils during Term 4, consideration should be given to how collaboration will be facilitated, as required.

Practical considerations: access to technology

In addition to time, such collaboration in the current circumstances, demands availability and reliability of the requisite technology, internet access and software. Not all teachers have this.

This is an issue which will affect many teachers so is likely to be a relatively common barrier and one which would need to be overcome by the school/local authority to enable the completion of electronic reports by their teaching staff.

Practical Considerations: distribution of reports

Should there be agreement that reports are to be written, consideration should also be given to how they will be distributed to parents given current social distancing and lockdown measures, and in light of the risk of infection being carried by paper.

The logistics of collation of reports is also an issue for Secondary contexts to resolve. Reports are usually written by each subject teacher that a child has and collated by office staff before being sent home in booklet format with young people for their parents. Clearly, this cannot be done with

schools currently closed and when it is known that the Covid 19 virus can be transmitted via surfaces, including paper. How would this be overcome and how would any electronic solution take account of the fact that not all parents would be able to access emailed reports?

Working Time

Given the very challenging contexts in which teachers are working currently, there is likely to be additional strain on weekly working time within the parameters of the 35-hour week. Many teachers find themselves responsible for significantly more than class. Clearly if report writing is to be prioritised at this time, it may not be possible for teachers to overtake other activities that they will have been engaged in over recent weeks.

Equality Considerations

In considering the feasibility of report writing while teachers are working at home, thought should be given to teachers who are disabled and who require to have reasonable adjustments in place to enable their completion of reports under normal circumstances.

Data Protection

A further consideration is the need for local authorities and schools to comply with data protection law. Any arrangements for the completion of reports by teachers working at home must be legally compliant, including where teachers are using their own ICT devices to access pupil data. The legal responsibility for ensuring compliance is with the local authority who also has a responsibility to provide clear guidance to employees in relation to such matters.

Where a school decides to proceed with the writing of electronic reports, it should be in the knowledge that all staff involved in writing reports have the requisite technological capacity to ensure that data is being processed securely.

Potential Deferral of Reports

Whilst it might seem straightforward in some ways to defer report writing for Term 4 until the first term of the new school session when it is thought that schools will reopen, it should be borne in mind that expectations for next session's reporting- both written reports and parents' evenings- will also be in place. These, together with what are likely to be altered priorities to those envisaged for next year's School Improvement Plans, will need to be factored in to future negotiations around Working Time Agreements within the parameters of the 35-hour working week.

General Advice

Should any member believe that unrealistic arrangements are being put in place around reporting during Term 4, they should raise the matter in the first instance with the School Rep and/or the Local Association Secretary as appropriate.