Department for Education

Using Complete Curriculum Programmes for remote education

Research Report

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CooperGibson Research

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Contents

1. Introduction

In January 2018, the Department for Education (DfE) launched the Curriculum Fund, to help teachers deliver the more challenging National Curriculum introduced in 2014, while reducing the workload associated with curriculum planning and resourcing. As part of the Curriculum Fund, the DfE set up the curriculum programme pilot, a £2.4m grant allocated to piloting complete curriculum programmes (CCPs). These are packages of resources designed for teachers to deliver a National Curriculum subject across a key stage.

Eleven lead schools successfully applied to run two-term pilots, with seven being funded from January 2019 and four from April 2019.[1] The pilot was used to fund lead schools to work with a minimum of six schools in which to test and refine their existing curriculum programmes (referred to as participating schools), and to gather evidence on how those programmes improve pupil outcomes and reduce teacher workload.

CooperGibson Research were commissioned to carry out a study of the pilot implementation of the CCPs in lead and participating schools. This study explored how CCPs were implemented, the benefits, and perceptions of the potential impact of CCPs. The final report was completed in 2019.

1.1 Exploring use of CCPs for remote education

This small study follows the research study of the CCP pilot and aims to inform policy development around curriculum programmes. It will also inform policy development around remote and online learning.

The DfE asked CooperGibson Research to explore with a small sample of schools involved in the pilot, how they had used CCPs during the Covid-19 lockdown (when schools were closed between March and June 2020) and how they continue to use them for students isolating and learning at home.

The research was designed to explore and understand:

- The process of preparing for school closures and how CCPs translated to the remote education space.
- Ways in which the CCPs were useful or inhibitive to remote learning.

[1] Two of the April start lead schools delayed delivery of their curriculum programmes in participating schools until September 2019. Details of the lead schools and the length of their projects, including those that were extended can be found here. All leads schools were subsequently offered extensions of up to two terms and nine of the lead schools applied for and secured these extensions.

- Pedagogical fidelity of the programmes when used for remote education.
- Support and guidance to enable teachers to use the CCPs effectively for remote education.
- Impact on workload.
- Any barriers or challenges of using CCPs remotely and improvements that could be made.

The study involved ten in-depth telephone interviews with schools known to the DfE to be using the CCPs during the first lockdown period in England, when schools were closed (March to June 2020). The research team contacted two lead schools and requested that they participate in a telephone interview to share their experiences of using CCPs for remote education. These were schools which had designed CCPs in key stage 3 geography and science for use in their own schools, and subsequently shared the programmes with other schools.

The lead schools were then asked to provide contact details for their participating schools which had used the CCPs for remote education. Participating schools were those which the lead schools partnered with, and which piloted the geography and science key stage 3 curriculum programmes as a new approach in their schools. Participating schools were contacted by the research team to request an interview.

The interviews took place during November and early December 2020. Two interviews were conducted with subject leads in the lead schools. A further eight in-depth interviews were conducted with participating schools (four representing the geography CCP and four representing the science CCP). These interviews took place with staff leading on CCPs in their schools, including subject leads, lead teachers, teachers and key stage 3 coordinators.

This was an exploratory piece of research and as such involved a small sample. The findings therefore, cannot be considered to be representative of all CCPs and schools involved in the Curriculum Fund pilot.

2. Adapting CCPs for remote education use

Decisions on use of CCPs were generally made at department level. Several adaptations were said to be required to ensure that they were suitable for remote education. Most schools opted for a blended approach, mixing live/real-time with online materials for students. Others opted for the full asynchronous learning where content is available online for students to access when it best suits their schedules.

2.1 Decision process and approach to remote education

Decisions in participating schools around how to provide remote education once schools closed were driven by senior leadership teams and those leading subject departments, rather than by lead schools, which tended to have a facilitating role. Key decisions were around:

- Whether students would continue learning new content or move to revision work (often made at school level) - schools piloting CCPs opted for students to continue their learning using existing CCP materials and structures that they were familiar with.

- The content and topics/units that would be covered for remote education and sequencing - department leads and teachers reviewed CCP content to ascertain what might be more suitable for home learning. Usually, specific topics, units or modules were made available to students, rather than the whole programme as this was thought to be more accessible and less likely to be overwhelming.

- Modes of delivery, including use of online, live/virtual, hard copy and blended approaches - a mix of approaches was common.

Schools were adapting quickly to the rapidly changing situation, prioritising and managing imminent learning needs. They took various approaches to remote education, including providing PowerPoint slides, worksheets and/or workbooks, using platforms to upload materials for students to access, narrating lessons over existing CCP PowerPoint materials, providing recorded lessons or conducting live lessons.

One teacher described how as a school, they took rapid steps to prepare for potential school closures and remote education. The school decided that online and live lessons was the best option for the students to give them a varied and engaging experience and to maintain contact. They planned group virtual calls to conduct lessons, use of CCP materials, plus PowerPoint slides to cover key concepts, online quiz questions and use of the chat feature during live lessons for students to communicate with the teacher.

Some schools or trusts chose not to conduct live lessons due to students having limited digital access and literacy, safeguarding concerns and the time and resources required to provide the necessary infrastructure and training (including the likelihood of adding to workload and anxiety of teachers). In some cases, this policy has changed with teachers now being encouraged to use alternative methods and teachers feeling more prepared and confident in the use of technology to support learning.

2.2 Adaptations and translation of CCPs for remote use

All those interviewed were able to describe a series of adaptations to the CCP materials which enabled them to be used remotely. This included a mix of:

- **Minor changes to the sequencing** of the programme, selecting topics that were more suited for home learning. This included consideration of the nature of practical activities as well as selection of appropriate content (that which was more complex and required detailed teacher explanation was delayed until students returned to school).

- **Inclusion of clear step-by-step instructions** for students, either written on PowerPoint slides or in workbooks using bullet points or sub-headings, or by use of narration over PowerPoint slides or pre-recorded videos.

- **Production of concise materials** for students to work through independently, such as tasks sheets, PowerPoint slides for each lesson, or booklets. Usually these were accessed online (or where digital access was limited, they were provided in hard copy form).

- **Adding to existing CCP resources**, new video clips (for example of science demonstrations), pre-recorded videos of teachers conducting an experiment, activities to ‘break up the work’ and provide explanations, reading sheets, with questions for comprehension, and online quizzes (to identify engagement and progress).

> I created workbooks to be accessed online, based on the [CCP materials]. I split up the tasks a bit more, added in more description of what the learning was about, and additional questions where I thought students needed more explanation. (Participating school subject lead).

One lead school coordinated the adaptations with support from teachers across their network of schools. They already had workbooks in use in the classroom to deliver the curriculum programme, however, it did not include aspects that teachers would normally

cover, such as an introduction to the lesson and new learning content. In some schools, teachers would provide the introduction through PowerPoint slides. These were converted to be used in students' remote learning materials. By going through this translation process, they found it to be a useful addition and have since introduced it to all new materials going forwards.

Feedback from the schools involved in this small study was generally that whilst there were a number of adaptations to be made to the CCPs, these were limited in terms of extent and difficulty. The main concerns were to ensure that the learning materials were accessible, students understood the requirements, the resources were not intimidating (without a teacher present to break down tasks and provide instructions), and they were engaging and interesting.

As the CCP materials were already in use in schools and were designed to be used by students, these were felt to be reasonably easy to translate to remote education. Rather than needing to provide more resources or content, the adaptations mentioned above were necessary to enable students to work independently. Several interviewees suggested that having the CCP available to them had helped them to make an easier transition to remote learning because they were making small adaptations to pre-existing resources that were already tailored to their students.

2.3 Impact on workload

The transition to remotely used materials was a gradual one whilst schools were reacting to changing situations. A few noted that during early stages of school closures, workload of teachers increased because they were:

- Reviewing programmes and topics to decide what to include and not include.
- Amending materials to suit independent student work and online access.
- Learning new technologies and ways of working.

This became less critical as time progressed and teachers or departments found more efficient ways of working, such as preparing materials for use across whole year groups or two year groups (using the same units across both year groups and extending or scaffolding further to adapt for abilities), as well as sharing responsibility for developing materials with colleagues. Some noted that in comparison to other year groups or subjects which were not using the CCPs, the workload was much lower due to them having access to ready-made materials.

It was a massive time saver, I worked on developing GCSE content for online learning as I didn't need to worry about key stage 3, as they had the [CCP materials]. Other subjects needed to develop a pack to use from home as PowerPoint and worksheets were not easily accessible online. (Participating school subject lead).

It reduced workload during lockdown. The resources were already prepared, it just meant that weekly we were uploading them and creating quizzes to check that students were engaged. Whereas with other years groups, we were producing booklets. (Participating school subject lead).

3. Using CCPs remotely

When adapted for remote education, the CCPs were on the whole, faithful to their design and intended pedagogy, although the nature of remote education meant that whole class teaching and direct instruction, was more difficult. Monitoring student engagement and progress was also considered to be a challenge, as was lack of digital access and literacy for students, parents and staff.

3.1 Pedagogical fidelity

Interviewees commented that the intended pedagogical approach was generally not compromised. They highlighted that learning objectives remained as they were prior to school closures, as did much of the sequencing (with a few exceptions around topics they felt to be inappropriate for home learning), structure of materials, scaffolding, stretch and challenge aspects, and the knowledge-rich nature of resources. Where use of the programmes deviated from the intended pedagogical approach, this was due to the nature of remote education:

- **Whole class teaching** did not occur in several of the schools (although some used or trailed live lessons using a reduced teaching timetable). Instead, some used recorded lessons and/or focused on independent learning.

- **Direct instruction** was more difficult to achieve via remote methods compared to teaching in the classroom, although teachers used alternative means such as providing detailed and simple, step-by-step written instructions, adding narration over slides, or producing videos of themselves. These approaches would replicate what a teacher would normally do in class.

> We would record instructions, recoding our own voices over the slides saying pause the video now and complete section A…and we would ask some questions that we would have asked out loud in class and then pause for them to think about the answers and write down what they thought. (Participating school teacher)

> So, when you are making a booklet, it is not just putting in a picture, it is saying look at the picture below, what does it show? It is putting in the things that you would say as a teacher. (Participating school teacher)

- **Reduced practical activities**, particularly for science, where the home environment was not suited to the facilities/equipment required. Alternatives were designed or videos used to show experiments.

- **Reduced content/knowledge** covered to ensure the learning was more accessible and manageable in a reduced timetable.

- **More focus on independent learning** with use of independent tasks such as experiments, small projects or a written exercise, to capture whether students had learnt the most important knowledge.

- **Use of guided reading** and interactive reading (where for example, the teacher would read a sentence, pause and ask students to provide their interpretation) was difficult to achieve remotely (particularly when not using live lessons). Instead, they included a glossary and comprehension questions in their materials.

Several teachers commented generally about remote education in that it lacked 'teacher modelling' (for example, of map reading skills), the ability of teachers to check knowledge development through informal questioning and observation, and to monitor students' progress.

3.2 Support and guidance for teachers and students

Both lead schools communicated by email with participating schools to offer support and advice. In some cases, this was with subject leads rather than teachers. One lead school increased the number of network meetings during the lockdown period (March to June 2020) to share best practice (for example, in delivering online lessons). They said that smaller schools felt isolated during this period and attendance of teachers at the meetings had improved at the time.

Lead schools discussed the CCP materials with participating schools to identify what would be appropriate for remote education and the amendments required. They offered new materials and support where this was required. Where teachers had access to CCPs and were able to 'chunk' the learning, the support required was minimal. Others took a more formal approach to developing all of their programme in collaboration with the lead school, in order to future proof the materials should further school closures occur.

Any references to training were in relation to delivering remote education, use of technology in particular, and how to deliver live lessons. One teacher noted how their school had invested in training all students to use a communication platform. However, in most cases, students and teachers were learning by trial and error until some time later when they were provided with more formal support.

3.3 Continued use of CCPs

All interviewees said that they were still using their CCPs in school and some had expanded to other year groups beyond the pilot. In terms of remote education, the adapted materials were retained and used for students who were isolating or vulnerable and not able to attend school, including in one school where a whole year group was at home. Teachers therefore felt better prepared for future lockdown scenarios, particularly in schools where a package of resources had been translated for remote education for each year group.

Schools did not tend to revert fully to how they were delivering prior to school closures. The legacy of the remote education experience was:

- Teachers being more open to and considering alternative modes of delivery and methods, including interactive learning (for example, embedded videos which explain or demonstrate concepts, with related questions and asking students to record themselves completing a practical or explaining a concept).
- Maintaining use of technology where it was successful (for example, use of online quizzes and setting homework using online approaches).
- Retention of online resource banks for students to easily access everything in one place.
- Use of clear instructions and introductions to lessons.

3.4 Challenges

Where challenges and difficulties were mentioned, these tended to relate more to digital access and remote learning issues, than to the CCPs themselves:

- Computer literacy and digital accessibility for students, with many using mobile phones to access online learning platforms, therefore finding it difficult to access extensive workpacks.
- Difficulties in monitoring whether students had completed their work, if they had understood the learning, or if they were progressing. One teacher mentioned this in relation to lower ability students who they felt were more likely to use the answers provided in the materials rather than work through tasks as expected.
- Limited participation in live lessons in some schools and difficulties in managing behaviour remotely, particularly when large groups were taking part.

- Staff digital literacy.
- Inconsistency in how much parents support students.
- The need to provide training and support to students, parents and staff to enable them to use different technologies.

4. Suitability of CCPs for remote education

It was felt that CCPs provided a suitable framework, content and materials to use for remote education but that any materials used remotely should be purposefully designed for this mode of delivery. Other important considerations were versatility, simplicity, accessibility, comprehensibility and suitability.

4.1 Fitness-for-purpose

Most interviewees felt that the CCP materials translated well to remote education and they were easily adaptable compared to other subjects. All mentioned that adaptations were required to enable them to be used and as such, they felt that the original design of the programmes meant that they were not fit-for-purpose for remote education. However, the CCPs provided a useful skeleton to use.

> It is a framework. The layout of topics and progression is suitable for remote learning but it just has to be less content heavy. (Participating school subject lead)

A small number of schools mentioned use of online materials produced by Oak National Academy. Some had started to use these during school closures or more recently for isolating students. Often these resources were used alongside the CCP materials. They felt that these materials were beneficial because they were specifically designed for remote learning. A teacher commented that they were more intuitive for students, compatible with mobile devices (compared to viewing PowerPoint materials on a mobile phone), interesting as they involve interactive activities and videos to watch with explanations, and were ‘ready to go’. This they thought saved them time which was important when returning to teaching in school.

4.2 Feedback from students and parents

Teachers commented on the positive feedback they had received from both parents and pupils. Students liked the use of videos to explain or demonstrate concepts, practical activities, and narration to introduce lessons and explain what to do. One teacher said that their students had appreciated the progression path, from lower to higher level tasks, and being able to see the answers at the end of the resources to check their learning. Another mentioned that students could make connections between practical activities or videos to the learning and that this improved their motivation when they could see they were progressing. Parents had fed back on how they found the work interesting and how their children had enjoyed the learning sessions.

4.3 Impact

Most comments around impact and benefits of using CCPs for remote education related to student engagement. Teachers found that students were attempting to do the work and engaging with the content overall. A small number said that this engagement was better than other year groups although, one did also mention considerable levels of contact with parents to support engagement. A small number also mentioned poor engagement however and the difficulties of tracking and monitoring student work.

Where practical activities are concerned, one lead school interviewee commented that remote education is not as effective due to the lack of hands-on experience and collaborative learning. Whilst they attempted to build in remote group work, they said that this was difficult to do effectively as they could not ensure all students' participation (for example, where some students were more diligent than others).

4.4 Differences across student and teacher groups

As with the feedback received through our research on the Curriculum Programme pilot, these packages of resources were considered to be particularly helpful for non-specialist or less experienced teachers because they provided all the materials, knowledge and information required to deliver lessons. The comprehensive nature of the materials was also perceived to be beneficial for non-specialist teachers when delivering remote education, because they would not have colleagues nearby to offer guidance or support.

In terms of students, those requiring additional support were said to find remote education a challenge, including those using CCPs. However, teachers described how these students were further catered for with additional scaffolding and support, such as use of video clips provided by Oak National Academy, which were embedded with CCP materials.

Students from disadvantaged groups were highlighted as being less likely to have digital access and skills. Several interviewees noted that these students were more difficult to engage, including those using the CCPs remotely.

4.5 Success factors

When considering use of CCPs for remote education, interviewees highlighted several key factors that would enable or improve their success:

- **Release of whole units** in advance to aid planning and decisions on what to cover, or not cover, remotely.

- Lead schools providing **guidance** on the best way to deliver their programme remotely (one interviewee noted that schools were now experimenting and that this could lead to inconsistency).

- **Versatility** so that materials could be provided in different formats, including hard copy if required. A small number of schools felt that hard copy versions were still more accessible and useful.

- **Simplicity** in materials, clear instructions and clarity of literacy

> It needs to be, here is the task, read this and answer this…It sounds boring but it isn't because if the instruction is straightforward then they can access interesting and engaging ideas. (lead school subject lead)

- Ensuring the materials are **accessible, comprehensive and suitable** for mixed ability teaching, including use of interactive tools, videos, animated demonstrations and graphics.

- Consideration of different ways to use online **tools to assess work** or check students had completed their work.

- **Improving digital access and skills**, enabling students to access materials and use technology effectively without the teacher present to support them.

- **Purposeful design** for remote education.

- Ensuring there is **contact with teachers** rather than students just working through the materials.

- Providing **networks and connections** between practitioners, sharing ideas and experiences with those in similar and different contexts. Having a contact for teachers to access for support.

5. Conclusion

Of the small number of participating schools providing feedback about their experiences of remote education, the overwhelming message was that they had coped well given the circumstances and had felt adequately supported by lead schools.

The transition to remote education had been a rapid one and schools were still managing this process. Some were future-proofing their curriculum programmes by producing remote-ready materials for all year groups and several continue to use the materials for isolating students.

All said that as they were, the CCPs were not suitable for remote education and needed a level of adaption. The amendments did not appear to be overly significant but were related to ensuring that students had clear instructions (replacing what a teacher would say in class), that tasks and reading were broken down into small manageable chunks and were not too text heavy, that content and activities were suitable for home learning, and that engaging and interactive tasks were included.

The transition of CCPs to remote education did create workload early in the process but, subject leads found ways to reduce it by collaborating and sharing responsibilities and combining year groups. However, several felt that the transition process had been easier than for other subjects or years groups because the CCPs had provided existing structure, content and resources which needed minimal adaptation. Use of these existing materials had meant that workload had been less burdensome compared to other curriculum approaches.

Identifying the impact of using the CCPs remotely was difficult, particularly because feedback suggested that student engagement in learning during school closures was mixed across the board. However, comments around engagement tended to relate to the challenges of remote education, the digital divide and the elements of teaching face-to-face that are difficult to replicate in another form.

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The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education.

For any enquiries regarding this publication, contact us at:
eve.schofield@education.gov.uk or www.education.gov.uk/contactus

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