

Education Secretary speech to Education Policy Institute on remote Learning

I'd like to thank the Education Policy Institute for the opportunity to join your discussion today, and for keeping their focus on this crucial issue. Of course, I'd also like to thank Apple as well for hosting the event. The Covid pandemic has changed our way of life: we do business differently... we shop differently... and of course we learn and we teach differently.

Technology moves rapidly at the best of times but no one could have foreseen how fast it would have to travel to help us navigate a way through this global health crisis.

Unprecedented problems require unprecedented solutions – and schools, teachers, and leaders have all pulled together to bring about one of the biggest shifts the education sector has ever seen. Our increasing dependence on technology has changed our entire approach to teaching with a switch to remote education.

Because we have become so used to looking at the negative effects of the pandemic we have lost sight of one of the more positive aspects and how it has changed learning for the better.

While some of the consequences of remote learning have been challenging to say the least, some of them have turned out to be an unqualified success.

First I must start by congratulating the teachers and school leaders who have made it so, and who have worked so hard and so fast to transfer their curriculum into a series of lessons and materials that can be applied remotely as well as to the classroom.

Schools are now routinely delivering high-quality teaching for up to five hours a day to children who are learning at home. This is giving them a better chance to keep pace with what they would have been learning if they'd been in school.

This pandemic has certainly brought communities closer... as teachers and parents have often had to work together. I'm sure both have a far better grasp of what the other has to contend with as a result of this experience. This rapid shift in teaching methods means teachers have built up a wealth of experience to help make remote education smoother and more effective. For instance schools are now delivering recorded or live teaching online as a matter of course, with time given for pupils to work independently to complete assignments.

I know most teachers have probably produced their own materials to support remote education but there is also a wealth of extra resources teachers can

call on.

I'm sure you are all familiar with the Oak National Academy lessons. These recorded video lessons were assembled across a broad range of subjects and age ranges by teachers coming together. Oak Academy is one of many examples of the additional help that is out there, from textbook publishers, digital teaching tools and training providers.

This has been another stand-out success in an otherwise grim pandemic landscape but it will be giving an enduring and invaluable legacy that future generations of children will be able to benefit from. I don't underestimate the extra challenge involved in this immense transformation, which has been nothing less than a total stepchange in how children learn.

I want all school leaders to know that they are not alone in adjusting to this. Any school can get immediate free support at Get Help with Remote Education on the gov.uk website. As well as free access to digital education platforms and devices, this provides an online 'one-stop-shop' for all schools and colleges to help them keep up to date with the latest information and guidance on remote education, as well as tips and advice from teachers and leaders.

There are a number of designated EdTech Demonstrator Schools and Colleges that can give friendly support and advice and guidance to help schools with technology issues, including those schools whose pupils have special educational needs.

I said that today I was going to focus on what we have to celebrate in our teaching communities from the past year which brings me to something that I am enormously proud of.

From the start of the pandemic we knew that while many children would have the necessary technology and access to it to enable them to study remotely, there would be a number who did not.

I am acutely aware of the huge responsibility we have for all of our children, but none more so than those who are socially and economically disadvantaged.

For this reason, my department has been engaged in a massive logistical project to deliver hundreds of thousands of extra devices to schools across the country, so that every child, especially those from disadvantaged homes, can keep their learning on track.

Now, thanks to one of the world's largest hardware shopping expeditions, we have purchased an additional 1.3 million devices. Of these, we've already delivered an additional 800,000 laptops and tablets and nearly 240,000 have gone out to schools since the start of this month.

We are also working with the country's leading mobile network operators, enabling schools to request free data uplifts for disadvantaged families.

And this really signals our vision for the future of technology in education

beyond Covid... making sure that digitally agile teaching becomes the standard and not the exception, and that we continue to stretch ourselves to make the most of what technology can offer us.

I know that for EPI, today's event is just one of a series of conversations that you are having with the sector. But it's an important conversation. Because it's not just about looking at where we are today, but making sure that we take advantage of what we've learnt today to make sure it's fit for the future.

For us, the future of technology needs to be that continued conversation, and I welcome your insights on how we can work better and together to keep it going but making sure that we are delivering real change, where it is felt in our schools by the pupils who are learning.

When we eventually move on from this pandemic we will be able to look back with huge pride at what we were able to do for our pupils and students despite the extreme challenges posed by the Covid pandemic. Remote education has been a major achievement, not just for children today but for all of those in the years to come. And the revolution in learning that it will bring.