

Quality Expectations for Effective Distance Learning

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Quality Expectations for Effective Distance Learning

1. Introduction

The current regional circumstances and related health and safety concerns have required schools to move temporarily to online learning. While this is a precautionary measure, it also highlights the importance of ensuring that schools can sustain continuity of learning, protect student wellbeing, and maintain the expected level of educational quality and learning effectiveness, as far as reasonably possible, across different modes of delivery.

Schools will benefit from a clear and practical framework that helps them build resilience, sustain learning, preserve quality, and support students across changing modes of delivery. This is intended not only to support continuity during temporary online learning, but also to strengthen schools' ability to always provide a flexible and high-quality learning experience.

This document sets out the quality expectations for continuity of learning. Although it has been developed in direct response to the current situation, it is intended to remain relevant as a standing framework that schools can draw on whenever continuity arrangements are needed.

Recognising that some groups of students may require closer review or additional support during periods of adjusted delivery, this document is also accompanied by an appendix offering further guidance on supporting vulnerable learners during distance learning.

As schools put these expectations into practice, they are expected to review their current arrangements, strengthen them where needed, and adapt them appropriately to learner needs, school context, and the different modes of delivery used to support continuity of learning.

2. Scope and Purpose

This document is intended to support K-12 schools in reviewing, strengthening, and maintaining the key arrangements that help sustain continuity of learning when different learning modalities are employed. It applies to school-wide arrangements that affect students' access to learning, the quality of teaching and support, and the school's readiness to manage continuity effectively.



The purpose of the document is to provide schools with a clear point of reference for the quality of arrangements expected in these areas, while supporting consistency across the sector and helping schools maintain a practical and proportionate approach.

3. Structure of the Quality Expectations

The quality expectations are organised into three sections. Together, these sections aim to provide a balanced view of continuity by focusing on the student experience, the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning, and the school's leadership and operational arrangements that support effective delivery across different modes of provision.

The first section focuses on students' access, participation, wellbeing, and safeguarding. It looks at whether students can access learning, remain engaged, and continue to be supported and protected in ways that enable them to participate meaningfully in their learning.

The second section focuses on teaching, learning, assessment, and feedback. It looks at the quality and effectiveness of learning provision, including how learning is planned, delivered, monitored, and supported so that students can continue to learn and make progress as far as reasonably possible.

The third section focuses on leadership, communication, and readiness for flexible delivery. It looks at how the school's leadership, planning, communication, and operational arrangements help maintain continuity and support the effective delivery of learning across various modes of provision.

Taken together, these sections are intended to help schools consider both the immediate quality and effectiveness of learning provision and the wider arrangements needed to sustain continuity successfully.

4. Expectations for Effective Distance Learning

The expectations below are intended to guide schools in sustaining continuity of learning, protecting student wellbeing, and maintaining the quality and effectiveness of learning as far as reasonably possible when different learning modalities are employed.

4.1 Students' Access, Participation, Wellbeing, and Safeguarding

This section focuses on the arrangements schools are expected to have in place to help students access learning, stay engaged, and continue to be supported and protected across different modes of delivery.

Area	Quality expectation	What this looks like in practice
Access to learning	Schools are expected to put in place arrangements that enable students to access the school's learning platform, essential learning materials, and core communication channels.	Students have reliable and timely access to login credentials, learning platforms, and communication channels, with practical alternative arrangements in place for those facing access barriers.
Student access mapping	Schools are expected to maintain up-to-date records of students who may face barriers to participation and take action to support their continued access and engagement.	The school maintains an up-to-date register of students who may face barriers such as limited device access, unreliable internet, shared home technology, or limited adult support. This information is reviewed regularly and used to plan practical responses, such as adjusting access arrangements, following up with families, or offering alternative ways for students to remain engaged.
Attendance and participation	Schools are expected to have a clear approach for monitoring attendance, participation, and student engagement when learning is delivered through online or other alternative arrangements.	Teachers and leaders use a consistent process to record attendance, monitor participation in live and assigned learning, and identify students whose engagement is declining. When concerns arise, the school promptly follows up with students and families, records actions taken, and considers whether additional support or adjustments are needed.
Support for vulnerable groups	Schools are expected to identify and monitor students of determination, vulnerable learners, and other students who may require additional support,	Support arrangements are adapted so that students who may be more affected by online learning remain visible and supported. For younger students, this may include more regular

	and seek to maintain suitable support arrangements, including more frequent individual follow-up where necessary.	parent contact, simplified activities, or shorter learning sessions. For older students, it may include differentiated tasks, individual teacher check-ins, learning support adjustments, or closer monitoring of participation and submitted work.
Wellbeing support	Schools are expected to ensure that students and families are able to access appropriate wellbeing and pastoral support during changes in delivery arrangements, including support that promotes stability, reassurance, and emotional safety.	Wellbeing support remains accessible during distance learning. For younger students, this may include reassuring routines, regular communication with parents, and simple strategies that help children feel secure during changes in learning arrangements. For older students, it may include access to counselling or pastoral staff, virtual check-ins, and clear routes for raising concerns about stress, isolation, or workload.
Safeguarding and online safety	Schools are expected to communicate clear safeguarding expectations and reporting procedures to students, staff, and families across different learning arrangements, and to review safeguarding policies and protocols to ensure they address the specific risks associated with distance learning.	The school shares age-appropriate guidance with students, staff, and families on safe participation in online learning, including expectations for conduct, privacy, supervision, and use of digital platforms. Reporting procedures for concerns are clear, understood, and accessible, and staff remain vigilant for signs that a student may need safeguarding support.

4.2 Teaching, Learning, Assessment, and Feedback

This section focuses on the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning arrangements, including how learning is planned, delivered, monitored, and supported so that students can continue to make progress as far as reasonably possible. In this context, effectiveness refers not only to the continuity of provision, but also how well students are able to understand, engage with, and make progress in their learning.



Area	Quality expectation	What this looks like in practice
Continuity of curriculum	Schools are expected to maintain continuity in key areas of learning so that students can continue to build knowledge, skills, and understanding in a structured and progressive way, as far as reasonably possible.	Teachers continue to use curriculum plans to identify priority learning, sequence key concepts, and help students build on previous learning. Adjustments may be made to pace, format, or coverage, but students continue to experience a coherent learning journey rather than disconnected or purely task-based provision.
Structured delivery	Schools are expected to have in place a clear and structured learning model that can be adapted across different modes of delivery, including an appropriate balance of live teaching, guided tasks, and independent work where relevant, so that students can engage meaningfully and learn effectively.	Students and families are provided with a clear online timetable or weekly learning schedule that shows when live sessions will take place, what independent or guided activities are expected, and how learning will be organised. For younger students, this may involve shorter live sessions supported by simple guided activities at home. For older students, it may involve a more detailed subject-based timetable that balances live teaching, recorded input, and independent tasks.
Clarity of expectations	Teachers are expected to communicate clear learning intentions, instructions, and activity expectations to students in ways that remain consistent and accessible across changing delivery arrangements.	Students are given age-appropriate and purposeful learning tasks that promote understanding, application, and engagement in a remote setting, rather than only passive viewing or repetitive completion activities. Instructions are communicated in ways that are clear and accessible in



		<p>an online setting. For younger students, this might include short, recorded explanations, visual prompts, or guidance for parents. For older students, this may include clear task instructions posted on the learning platform, deadlines, submission expectations, and guidance on completing work.</p>
<p>Student engagement</p>	<p>Schools are expected to promote teaching methods that encourage participation and interaction, where appropriate.</p>	<p>Teaching includes thoughtful and engaging online strategies that support active student participation. For younger students, this might include short interactive segments, verbal responses, visuals, or movement-based activities during live sessions. For older students, it could include questioning, polls, short written responses, chat participation, or guided interaction during live or platform-based learning.</p>
<p>Assessment and feedback</p>	<p>Schools are expected to have arrangements in place to monitor student learning, review students' work, and provide timely and relevant feedback that helps students understand their next steps in learning.</p>	<p>Teachers use suitable online methods such as questioning, short quizzes, live responses, review of submitted work, or brief follow-up tasks to check understanding and identify misconceptions. Students receive regular and constructive feedback that helps them improve, clarifies misunderstandings, and understand their next steps in learning. For younger students, some feedback</p>



		might also be shared through parents in a simple and practical way.
Monitoring progress	Schools should have arrangements in place to monitor students' progress over time and identify where progress may be slowing or additional support may be required.	Teachers and leaders review evidence available through distance learning arrangements to understand how well students are progressing over time. This may include patterns in participation, quality of submitted work, completion of learning tasks, responses to quizzes, or other indicators of progress. When progress appears to be slowing, schools identify this early and consider what additional support, follow-up, or adjustment in provision may be needed.
Workload management	Schools are expected to coordinate workload across subjects and learning activities so that expectations remain manageable for students and sustainable for staff.	The school reviews the total volume of online sessions, assignments, and independent tasks to ensure that expectations remain manageable. For younger students, this might mean shorter sessions and fewer tasks requiring screen use. For older students, it could mean coordinating deadlines and balancing live lessons with independent study so that students are not overwhelmed during the week.

4.3 Leadership, Communication, and Readiness for Flexible Delivery

This section focuses on how school leaders can help ensure that continuity arrangements are clear, coordinated, effective, and sufficiently flexible to support learning across different modes of delivery.

Area	Quality expectation	What this looks like in practice
Continuity planning	Schools are expected to maintain a current continuity plan that supports a smooth transition and continuity of learning across various modes of delivery when necessary.	The school has a practical continuity plan that outlines who will lead key actions, how communication will take place, how teaching arrangements will be implemented, and how students and families will be supported during the transition. The plan is current enough to be used in practice and not just kept as a reference document.
Role clarity	Schools are expected to clarify roles and responsibilities regarding continuity arrangements.	Staff understand who is responsible for leading the continuity response, coordinating communication, overseeing safeguarding, supporting teaching, and addressing operational or technical issues. This helps minimise confusion and allows schools to respond more smoothly when different arrangements are introduced.
Parent communication	Schools are expected to communicate clearly and promptly with parents about expectations, routines, and support routes, including clear information on the roles and responsibilities of the school and families during periods of adjusted delivery.	Parents receive timely, clear, and reassuring communication about schedules, expectations, and available support. Communication acknowledges the varying capacities of families to support online learning and avoids placing unreasonable expectations on parents to act as substitute teachers.



Staff continuity	Schools are expected to review the availability of key staff and have basic contingency arrangements in place.	The school identifies essential staff roles needed to maintain continuity and quality, considers where temporary gaps may arise, and plans reasonable backup arrangements so that teaching, student support, and leadership oversight can continue without unnecessary disruption.
Staff wellbeing	Schools are expected to consider the wellbeing and workload of staff during periods of changed delivery, and ensure that appropriate support and communication are provided.	Staff have access to clear communication about expectations, manageable workload arrangements, and wellbeing support during periods of adjusted delivery.
Digital readiness	Schools are expected to ensure that platforms, systems, and support arrangements remain operational and accessible so that learning can continue effectively across different delivery arrangements.	The school checks that its core platforms are working, that students and staff can access them, and that support is available when technical issues arise. This helps reduce disruptions to learning and ensures that technical issues do not become a barrier to participation
Data and digital privacy	Schools are expected to ensure that student data is handled responsibly and that digital platforms used for learning meet appropriate privacy and security standards.	The school has reviewed the privacy and data protection implications of platforms used for distance learning, and has provided clear guidance to staff and families on responsible data handling.
Leadership oversight	Senior leaders are expected to oversee implementation, review how effectively arrangements support student learning, engagement, and wellbeing across different modes of delivery, and respond promptly when	Leaders monitor the effectiveness of continuity arrangements by reviewing participation, teaching quality, student support, and emerging issues across the school. When gaps or inconsistencies are identified, leaders act promptly to



	adjustments or improvements are needed.	strengthen practice, clarify expectations, or provide additional support.
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5. Guiding Principles for Effective Distance Learning Provision

When applying these quality expectations during periods of distance learning, schools are encouraged to consider the following guiding principles. These are intended to support effective implementation, help schools respond proportionately to business continuity circumstances, and ensure that learning arrangements remain educationally purposeful, manageable, and supportive of students, families, and staff.

Guiding principle	What this means in practice
Equity of access should be actively addressed	Schools should not assume that all students have equal access to devices, quiet study space, or adult support at home. Where barriers are identified, schools should consider practical solutions such as loan devices, alternative access arrangements, asynchronous options, simplified participation routes, or printed materials where appropriate.
Engagement should be monitored beyond log-in	Presence online does not necessarily mean meaningful participation. Schools should therefore use appropriate methods to understand whether students are engaging with learning, completing work, responding to feedback, and staying connected to their learning over time.
The quality of learning should take priority over the volume of activity	Effective online provision should focus on purposeful learning, clear expectations, and meaningful interaction rather than prolonged screen time, excessive task volume, or high levels of passive activity. More content or more hours do not necessarily lead to better learning.
Session design should reflect students' age, stage, and potential	The structure, pace, and duration of online learning should be appropriate to learners' developmental stage. Younger students are likely to require shorter, more interactive, and more guided experiences, while older



	students may be able to manage longer sessions and greater independence.
Workload should be manageable for both students and staff	Schools should consider the cumulative demands placed on students and teachers, including live sessions, preparation, assignment completion, marking, feedback, and communication. Sustainable arrangements are more likely to support consistency and effectiveness over time.
Communication should be clear, timely, and coordinated	During business continuity situations, families and staff may receive information from multiple sources. Schools should aim to communicate key messages in a clear, timely, and consolidated manner, avoiding fragmented or excessive communication that may cause confusion or anxiety.
Safeguarding and data protection should remain visible in online environments	Rapid shifts in delivery can lead to the use of new platforms, tools, or communication practices. Schools should ensure that approved and secure systems are used, that online safety expectations remain clear, and that safeguarding standards continue to be held in remote settings.
Assessment should remain purposeful and proportionate	Schools should maintain meaningful ways of checking understanding and giving feedback, but should avoid replacing effective teaching with excessive testing or an over-reliance on task completion. Assessment during online provision should primarily support learning, identify misconceptions, and help guide next steps.
Parents should be supported, but not overburdened	Parents play an important supporting role, especially for younger students, but online provision should not depend on unreasonable levels of parental supervision, teaching, or troubleshooting. Schools should clearly communicate what support is helpful and what remains the school's responsibility.
Wellbeing should be safeguarded alongside continuity	Continuity arrangements should be planned in ways that support emotional wellbeing, a sense of routine, and a manageable learning



	experience. Schools should remain alert to signs of stress, fatigue, isolation, or disengagement among students and staff.
Flexibility should be used to preserve participation and learning	Schools may need to adapt provision to changing circumstances, student needs, and practical constraints. Such flexibility should be used to help sustain engagement and quality, rather than to lower expectations unnecessarily or create inconsistency without clear rationale.
Internal review should inform timely adjustment	Schools should regularly review arrangements and use simple internal checks to understand what is working well, where participation or progress might be uneven, and where provision may need to be adjusted. Effective online provision usually depends on timely refinement, not fixed delivery alone.

6. What Happens Next

These quality expectations are issued by KHDA as part of its regulatory role in overseeing the quality of private education in Dubai. They represent the minimum standard that schools are expected to have in place during periods of adjusted delivery. Schools are required to ensure that measures are in place to meet the quality expectations set out in this document, with the aim of sustaining continuity of learning, protecting students and staff, and preserving the quality of learning as far as reasonably possible during periods in which different learning modalities are employed.

Schools should therefore review their current arrangements and strengthen them where necessary, taking into account learner needs, school context, and the mode or pattern of delivery. Schools are encouraged to complete this initial review within two weeks of receiving this document.

As implementation progresses, KHDA may seek to understand how schools are putting these expectations into practice, including how continuity, quality, and effectiveness of learning are being maintained, how student participation and engagement are being supported and monitored, and how the wellbeing of students and staff is being safeguarded. This may include requesting concise

information from schools about the arrangements they have in place or, where appropriate, initiating virtual review visits or discussions with school leaders.

Any such follow-up would be intended to support schools, identify common themes, and provide a clearer understanding of how continuity arrangements are working in practice. The approach would remain proportionate to the circumstances and considerate of the need to avoid unnecessary burden on schools.

Appendix: Supporting Vulnerable Learners during Distance Learning

This appendix provides additional guidance to support the application of the Quality Expectations for Effective Distance Learning for students who may need closer review or additional support during periods of adjusted delivery.

It is intended to help schools consider how the quality expectations may need to be applied, adapted, or reinforced for vulnerable learners, including students of determination, younger children, and students whose participation, wellbeing, or access to learning may be more significantly affected during periods of distance learning.

Students of Determination

During periods of distance learning, students of determination may require adapted arrangements to support meaningful participation, access to learning, and continued progress. Schools should review existing support plans, accommodations, and individual learning arrangements to determine whether temporary adjustments are needed.

Students of Determination	
Guidance	Suggested actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review whether current IEP targets, accommodations, and support arrangements continue to be suitable during temporary distance learning. Consider how support can continue as far as reasonably possible, even where the delivery method changes. Watch for signs of regression, anxiety, frustration, or reduced engagement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider adjustments such as adapted pacing, visual supports, simplified instructions, or individual follow-up. Clarify with families what support remains available and how concerns can be raised. Record any temporary adjustments and any areas that may require later review.



Additional Considerations for Learners Requiring Targeted or Intensive Support

Some learners may require more targeted or intensive support during periods of distance learning in order to remain engaged, visible, and able to participate meaningfully. Schools should consider whether additional adjustments or more frequent support arrangements are needed for these learners.

Additional Considerations for Learners Requiring Targeted or Intensive Support (Level 2 and Level 3 students)	
Guidance	Suggested Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools should identify learners receiving targeted (Wave 2) or intensive (Wave 3) support and actively review whether the current distance learning arrangements allow them to access learning meaningfully. • Where learners are finding it difficult to maintain attention, organise tasks, understand expectations, or complete work independently, schools may need to consider reasonable adjustments to structure, workload, pacing, or support frequency. • The aim during temporary online learning is to maintain access, engagement, participation, and reasonable progress, rather than replicate the full face-to-face support model. • Schools should maintain regular communication with families and review whether adjustments are helping the learner to participate more confidently. • Where a learner's needs are more significant and remote provision alone might not be sufficient, schools may wish to consider whether additional arrangements are suitable on an exceptional basis, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide clearer daily or weekly learning structure for identified learners, such as simplified timetables, visual schedules, or prioritised task lists. • Break learning tasks into smaller, manageable steps and provide chunked instructions rather than multi-step directions. • Use predictable routines and clearly signal transitions (for example countdowns, online timers, or visual prompts). • Reduce cognitive load where possible by adjusting task length, allowing reduced written output, or focusing on key learning priorities. • Offer alternative ways for learners to demonstrate participation, such as short verbal responses, chat contributions, submission of work in stages, or recorded explanations.

<p>ensuring alignment with safeguarding, supervision, and risk-management processes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase frequency of check-ins through brief one-on-one or small-group sessions to support understanding, reassurance, and engagement. • Consider targeted small-group teaching or additional guided practice sessions for learners requiring more structured support. • Maintain regular communication with families to understand what is manageable at home and to align expectations. • Monitor engagement patterns and review adjustments where participation continues to decline. • Record any temporary adaptations made and review whether further support or escalation may be required.
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Early Years Learners

Younger children need an age-appropriate and flexible approach during periods of distance learning. Their participation may look different from that of older students and might include shorter live interactions, guided play-based activities, or simple teacher-directed tasks supported at home.

Early Years Learners	
Guidance	Suggested actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online provision for younger learners should remain developmentally appropriate and realistic for children and families. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep expectations clear, simple, and age-appropriate.



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Younger children might benefit more from short, interactive, and play-based experiences than long periods online. • Families should feel supported, not expected to replace the teacher. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasise interaction, routine, and practical home-based learning wherever possible. • Reassure families about what meaningful participation may look like during this period.
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Additional Wellbeing and Safeguarding Considerations

During periods of distance learning, some vulnerable learners may be more affected by anxiety, stress, isolation, reduced visibility, or changes in behaviour. Schools should stay vigilant for signs that a student may require closer pastoral, safeguarding, or wellbeing support, particularly where concerns could be less apparent in remote settings.

Safety, Wellbeing and Behaviour	
Guidance	Suggested Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safeguarding responsibilities and reporting processes should remain active during online learning. • Changes in behaviour or engagement may indicate stress, anxiety, uncertainty, or past experiences. • Online learning may introduce new risks, including cyberbullying, social exclusion, harassment, or emotional distress. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure students and families know who is available for support. • Respond calmly and consistently where behaviour may reflect anxiety or disruption. • Review promptly if safeguarding, bullying, or wellbeing concerns continue or intensify.

Transitions, Examinations and Family Circumstances

Some learners may be more significantly affected by transition points, examination-related pressure, or family circumstances during periods of distance learning. Schools should consider whether these

factors are affecting participation, wellbeing, or continuity of learning and respond with timely communication and appropriate support.

Transitions, Examinations and Family Circumstances	
Guidance	Suggested actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some learners and families may need additional clarity around transfers, progression, placement, examinations, or continuity of enrolment. • Financial pressure or acute family stress might affect access, participation, and wellbeing. • Timely communication can help reduce uncertainty and protect continuity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep families informed of relevant processes, timelines, and documentation requirements. • Consider whether delays or uncertainty might disproportionately impact vulnerable learners. • Use existing support pathways and internal review processes where additional flexibility may be suitable.

Illustrative Scenarios and Frequently Asked Questions

The following illustrative scenarios and frequently asked questions are provided to support the practical application of this appendix. They are intended to help schools interpret the guidance in context and consider how best to respond to a range of situations that may arise during distance learning.

Illustrative Scenarios	
Scenario	Possible school consideration
A student of determination is attending online lessons but is becoming increasingly dysregulated and unable to sustain engagement.	The school may wish to review whether the current format is suitable, consider temporary adjustments to the timetable or task design, reconnect with the family, and determine whether additional support or closer monitoring is needed.



<p>A parent reports that two siblings are sharing one device and one child is repeatedly marked absent.</p>	<p>The school may wish to explore whether the issue is one of access rather than non-compliance, and whether feasible alternative arrangements can be made within the school's existing model.</p>
<p>A family with a child in the early years section says their child cannot remain online for long periods, and the parent is struggling to support learning during work hours.</p>	<p>The school may wish to clarify realistic expectations for early years participation, offer simpler play-based suggestions, and communicate what meaningful engagement might look like in this age group.</p>
<p>A student is attending online lessons but rarely responds, appears withdrawn, and does not complete tasks.</p>	<p>The school may wish to consider whether this indicates anxiety, disengagement, or a barrier to access, and if a short check-in, closer review, or small adjustment could help the learner re-engage.</p>
<p>A student already involved in a bullying case is now receiving abusive messages through online channels outside of lesson time.</p>	<p>The school should treat this as an active wellbeing and safeguarding concern, review the response pathway, support affected students, document actions taken, and communicate clearly with the families involved.</p>
<p>A student affected by past instability or conflict appears more anxious during online learning and becomes unsettled when routines change.</p>	<p>The school might want to respond with reassurance and consistency, prepare the learner in advance for any changes where possible, and consider whether temporary adjustments could help the learner feel more secure and able to engage.</p>
<p>A student with significant support needs, including limited or non-verbal communication, is unable to participate meaningfully in whole-class online lessons even when logged in, and requires continuous adult support to engage with learning activities.</p>	<p>The school may wish to review whether whole-class online lessons are currently suitable for this student and consider more individualised approaches. This may include setting a smaller number of personalised learning tasks, providing short one-to-one or very small-group sessions, using visual or practical activities that can be completed offline, and focusing on maintaining key communication, functional, or independence skills rather than covering the full curriculum. The school may</p>

	<p>also wish to agree on a simple daily or weekly routine with the family and regularly</p>
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