

Distance Learning Policy

(Response to COVID-19 School Closure)

This document has not yet been formally ratified by RAK Academy Board of Governors but has been released for implementation. Document No. POL33.120520.A-9

1. Rationale and Aims

This brief document provides guidelines for conducting academic activities at RAK Academy using Distance Learning. The use of Distance Learning may be required in the event of a geo-political, pandemics, socio-political, or any other catastrophic situation that prevents students and the academic staff from coming to schools to undertake in-class and face-to-face Teaching and Learning.

The scope of this document currently is limited to the Academy's response to the temporary closure of schools in the UAE due to the COVID-19 crisis. Therefore, although titled as a policy, the document contains planning elements to the response. The document will be repurposed later to work as a policy as part of the Education Continuity Planning framework. This document will be released as a draft initially and later as a formal policy document.

As we embark on switching to a complete Distance Learning mode of delivering education, we do understand that the transition will not be without challenges. The transition experience in other countries in response to COVID-19 is known to cause anxiety and stress for students, parents, teachers and administrative staff, and therefore requires a period of adjustment. Therefore, it is important that all stakeholders demonstrate patience and fortitude while trying to ensure that our students continue to learn during the time when education cannot be imparted in schools. It is also important that the communication of the school with students and parents is clear and frequent to support the evolving situation.

While our focus is for enabling Distance Learning initially was for two weeks only, the system will be used for an extended period, as the authorities have decided to continue school closures beyond the timeframe originally stipulated. Also, in the Academic Year 2020-21, there may be periods when a combination of Distance Learning and In-School Instructions are combined depending upon the evolving situation and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, at RAK Academy we intend to use the competencies achieved to make Blended Learning as the key concept in our ongoing education.

2. Infrastructure Needs

In order to be successful, the Distance Learning programme requires an appropriate hardware and software infrastructure in place.

For teachers and students, this includes hardware (a computer and necessary peripherals such as a microphone, speakers, and a webcam), software (platform for Distance Learning – please see below), and the Internet (a WiFi connection).

RAK Academy works with the teaching staff to ensure that everyone has access to the necessary infrastructure. Students are also required to have access to a computer and an Internet connection to enable them to access and use the Distance Learning Platform (DLP). While at RAK Academy, we try our best to help students to have equitable access, parents are responsible for ensuring that their students have access to necessary devices and connectivity, the two cornerstones of Distance Learning.

RAK Academy expects that the parents will be able to assist their students (especially younger ones) in Distance Learning. However, we do not expect parents to become teachers more than they do during the regular school operations. Thus, based upon instructions provided by teachers, students should be able to consume the content, and complete the assignments, etc. independently. We do understand that there will be an adjustment period in the beginning while all stakeholders come to grips with the new method of Teaching and Learning.



We at RAK Academy will do whatever is needed to provide the best possible experience for everyone, but at the same time we all need to be flexible and patient as we move through this step.

Platform for Distance Learning

For Grade 3 and above, G Suite for Education (Google Classroom) will be used for Distance Learning. For lower grades, each individual school determines what platform (Google Classroom, the Portfolio functionality in ClassDojo, or Seesaw) will be used.

Where needed and as appropriate, live conferencing will also be used. For live conferencing, the web-conferencing functionality of Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, and other approved tools will be used.

3. Provisions

The Distance Learning is often divided into two modes:

- **Synchronous Learning:** In this mode, the teacher and students login to a live web conference (audio, audio/video, screen sharing) where the teacher delivers a session, gets involved in discussion sessions with students, and/or undertakes a Q/A session. This mode of learning requires a Web Conferencing platform.
- **Asynchronous Learning:** In this mode, the teacher posts content on the Distance Learning platform. This may include videos (recorded by the teacher or available online from other sources), lesson slides, lesson content (as documents), assignments, quizzes, and tests. Students study the content and do the assignments and tests at their convenience while meeting any deadlines of the assignments provided by teachers.

Typically, a combination of synchronous and asynchronous mode of learning is used in effective Distance Learning. How Distance Learning is actually undertaken depends upon the grade and how the Grade Leader/HOS determines as the best method to deliver.

4. Contact

As we rely heavily on online interaction during Distance Learning, all stakeholders should make sure that they login to the Distance Learning platforms regularly: for students and parents to be apprised of the content, assignments, and tests etc. and for teachers to ensure that they are answering queries from students timely. The method of communication between students/parents and teachers should be through the message functionality in respective platforms.

All stakeholders should check their emails daily during the week (Sunday-Thursday) so that they can respond to the requirements and needs of members of staff and of leaders.

Each school is responsible to make sure that a list of contacts with an email address is made available to the staff and students/parents. At least one phone number needs to be provided for escalation in case emails are not answered.

5. Readiness for Distance Learning

Each Head of School is responsible to ensure that a Distance Learning programme is in place for all classes in their school. This will include but not limited to the following, for each grade, class, and department:

- A platform of Distance Learning has been identified for use (among the adopted by RAK Academy as listed above or any additions that are approved).
- Content, assignments and assessment, and the method of interaction with students (synchronous, asynchronous, or a combination) have been identified.
- The content, assignments, quizzes, tests, etc. for each week have been posted on the platform by the previous Saturday (5:00 pm).



- A periodic and event based communications are created and sent to the parents providing details about the content, assignments and assessment, and the method of interaction.
- A means to ensure that all students are being taught as per the plan is in place. This may include drop-ins, review of the content on the platforms performed by the HOS or by members of the leadership team or by respective Grade Leaders or HOD as determined by the HOS.
- Determine a means of attendance/registration of students and ensures that registration is entered in ISAMS in a timely manner.

Note that the teachers will need to continue teaching from their Schemes of Work that were being taught before the Distance Learning using the usual progression of skills and knowledge. Depending upon the situation, the content to be taught may be regulated.

Teachers must ensure the following:

- A clear and brief message about what students should expect during each day.
- One or more interactive content (such as quizzes) where students are shown rich-media content and then are asked questions, is made available.
- One or more teacher generated videos (for example, with voice over) and videos links from the Internet are embedded in the lessons.
- Day consists of two or more (3 to 10 minutes) live stream or pre-recorded videos.
- No class should have any requirements of print-complete-scan-submit cycle for graded work.
- Submission dates for students clearly defined for tasks and assignments.

Teachers will assess work of students on an ongoing basis and provide feedback on the tasks and assignments. In all platforms, teachers can see who has logged on. While teachers can use this information to see who is accessing the platform, teachers will create specific activities that will need to be completed in lieu of attendance on the online platform.

6. Web Conferencing

Where appropriate and as instructed by HOS, the teachers can use video lessons. One method of a lesson is to post a prerecorded video which is placed between a live introduction, a method of attendance and a live video-based Q/A session.

While being on a live video or during a recorded video session, the teachers should be wearing appropriate attire. Teachers should also ensure that the recording environment (visual and audio) is professional.

It is recommended that all live conferences are recorded for safeguarding purposes. Teachers should not store recorded live conferences on their personal computers. It is recommended that teachers delete recorded videos no longer needed. The IT Team can recover deleted video files as required. More information on Safeguarding in Appendix 1: Guidelines for Safeguarding during Distance Learning.

7. Quality Assurance

A Distance Learning Quality Assurance system has been put in place to ensure the quality of the following aspects:

- Availability:
 - Teachers are available online and off-line and promptly address questions from students
 - Teachers are logging in punctually and regularly to the Distance Learning Platform
- Daily Attendance:
 - Means of attendance are defined and conveyed to students
 - Daily attendance is taken regularly and uploaded to the system
- Lesson Preparation:



- Is the lesson appropriate
 - Are written or video instructions clear
 - Is the lesson suitably resourced
- Tasks and Activities:
 - Session includes activities involving students individually or in groups
 - There are clear guidelines how students are assessed
 - There are quizzes, assignments, and questions regularly posted
- Actual Engagement:
 - Student and teacher engagement is evident through task submission, comments responded to, active conferences, etc.
- Livestreaming:
 - Google Meet or other approved video conferencing platforms are used frequently
- Quality:
 - Assigned work is appropriate in quantity (LESS is More)
- Feedback:
 - Feedback to students is provided as per departmental policy
- Academic Support:
 - The Teaching Assistants are able to provide support through Distance Learning platforms
 - Special needs students are taken care of
- Management Review:
 - Senior leaders and middle managers line management minutes submitted to HOS and SIP

As Phase 2 of the Distance Learning Quality Assurance, the following areas will be targeted:

- Impact of Distance Learning on student outcomes:
 - Attainment
 - Progress
- Assessment processes:
 - Assessment methods
 - Moderation
 - Standardization
 - Remote proctoring
- Teaching and Learning within the Distance Learning provision
- Continuously identify notable strengths
- Continuously identify areas for development

8. SEND Support and Wellbeing

As mentioned earlier, Distance Learning is new to most of us. At RAK Academy, we strive to do our best to ensure that we transition all stakeholders to this mode of operations as smoothly as possible.

RAK Academy is committed to providing continuity of education for its students in the event of an extended school closure. RAK Academy will ensure that all students, including those Students of Determination/SEND can access and take part in Distance Learning should and when the need arises.

Teachers will ensure that Virtual Classrooms are accessible to SEND students, where activities are differentiated and support staff (TA/HLTA) are used effectively to provide additional support. This will be in the form of smaller group sessions and or individual sessions.



The Inclusion Team, including School Counsellors, will be on hand to provide support to students as the need arises. The SENDCo and SEND Teacher will remain in regular contact with parents of Students of Determination/SEND to provide guidance and support.

We do anticipate however that this might create stress and anxiety. Each school will provide a counselling contact to be available for students, staff and parents to get help as needed. More information on supporting the Wellbeing of students, staff and parents in Appendix 2: Wellbeing Guidelines within the context of Distance Learning.

Appendix 1: Guidelines for Safeguarding during Distance Learning

The safeguarding risks associated with “Distance learning” are similar to those associated with more traditional educational or home environments. These include peer-on-peer harm of any kind that are practiced and evidenced online. It also applies to harmful online behaviour of any kind, in relationships between adult and young person, and construed as abuse. Most offline harmful practices can be mirrored online in distance working environments and situations of self isolation or quarantine.

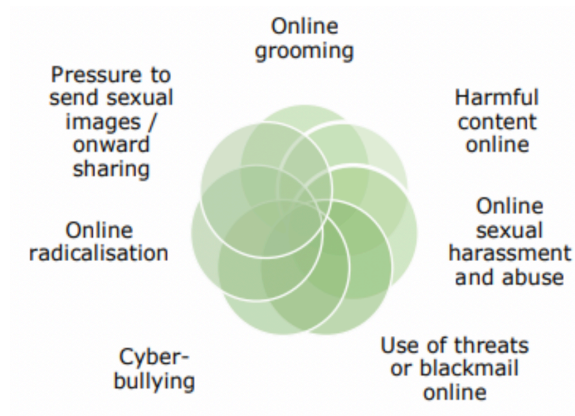


Figure 1 – Examples of different forms of online harm

The Academy Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and Procedures applies for the Distance Learning in line with the Guidelines of this document. Wellbeing considerations are also important. The current fears around COVID-19, disruptions to daily life and social isolation may cause many of us to experience moderate levels of anxiety. This is normal and to be expected. It is our natural response to challenging circumstances which will help us to manage these circumstances more effectively.

Young people already suffering from baseline anxiety disorder or other mental ill-health may find the current circumstances particularly challenging. Some young people may experience high or acute anxiety.

Some signs to be aware of include:

- Preoccupation and excessive worry
- Showing emotional and behavioural interference/paralysis and showing signs of not being able to cope
- Avoidance of responsibilities or relationships
- Perseverance - meaning that the student cannot move away from their thoughts or are chronically thinking about risk and threat
- Ruminates - thinking too deeply about the situation

If students are showing these signs, then staff should consult and follow the channels of pastoral referral. As part of this, staff might decide to refer the student to counselling that can be delivered virtually.

When to report:

- a student is at risk of harm or abuse, in distress or struggling with their mental health
- a staff member poses a risk of harm to students
- identify inappropriate, harmful or illegal material shared online by the student

How can our Academy prevent inappropriate and harmful material from being shared online?



Staff have the ability to mute online platform participants, moderate online discussion groups, disable users' videos and/or remove a participant from a virtual classroom.

How should staff respond if they see inappropriate or harmful content being shared online?

The appropriate response will depend on individual circumstances. Actions could include; deleting inappropriate comments, removing content from an online forum, removing participants from a class and/or escalating concerns in accordance with the Academy policies. Report the concern to the CPO to spot patterns and identify harm at an early stage.

What action should our Academy be taking to support our students who might be vulnerable to abuse or having pastoral concerns?

Students previously identified as vulnerable to abuse by the safeguarding team, or those with existing child protection concerns or safety plans, should continue to be monitored or risk assessed. Initiate regular check-ins with the student, parent and/or carer as appropriate.

How can our Academy support a student who is distressed or struggling with anxiety?

If a student becomes distressed during a virtual session, the teacher should inform the pastoral team who will contact the parents and discuss the support required.

Codes of Conduct and acceptable use of policy guidelines for Distance Learning:

Online communications can increase the blurring of boundaries and it is important that staff maintain professional boundaries at all times when conducting online distance learning. The following points should be taken in consideration:

- Online interactions – as addressed by the Distance Learning expectations shared separately
- Professional boundaries - staff should maintain the same professional boundaries with students online as they are required to maintain in person
- Appropriate location to join a virtual classroom - a neutral location
- Appropriate dress code when joining a virtual classroom
- Use of social media – as per the Academy Safeguarding Code of Conduct guidelines
- Digital communications between students and staff to be conducted via the Academy email and the decided online platforms

How the Academy will monitor student and staff activities during Distance and online learning?

The management will periodically drop into the online classes and monitor regularly the content of the resources.

Are there additional steps that we can take to safeguard students and staff during virtual one-to-one sessions?

- Postponing any non-essential one-to-one educational sessions. Please note that counselling sessions will not be postponed
- Letting the CP team and the SLT (relevant to your school) know the timing, location and reason of the session in advance and sending confirmation of it after
- Requiring the session to take place in a common area that is within earshot of another person in the student's residence
- For counselling or other confidential sessions, the student should, where possible, be located in a room which is private, but which is not a bedroom or bathroom. If a student cannot avoid taking a counselling session from their bedroom, the counsellor should consider holding the session with audio only, not video
- Making sure that the student knows that they can stop the session at any time and how to raise a concern or get help if needed



- Making sure that staff know how to raise a concern about the session, and that it is their responsibility to maintain appropriate professional boundaries
- Making sure that the staff member complies with the requirements to obtain appropriate consent from students and/or parents of children under a certain age to engage in virtual one-to-one sessions with staff or counsellors

Should counsellors take an audio or video-recording of virtual counselling sessions?

We recommend that the Academy do not record any virtual counselling sessions. Given the confidential and personal nature of counselling sessions, there are high risks associated with recording sessions, such as:

- Recording sessions removes privacy and confidentiality and could lead to students opting out of much needed support
- Recording sessions could also lead students to withhold information, which could restrict the ability of the school counsellor to support the student
- If a recording were disclosed to others it could have serious implications for the student, counsellor and the Academy



Appendix 2: Wellbeing Guidelines within the context of Distance Learning

RAK Academy endeavours to be a caring community which promotes to the best of its ability the personal, physical and intellectual development of its students. The Wellbeing of students and staff have always been central to the RAK Academy vision and is an integral part of the curriculum. In light of the recent COVID-19 pandemic, RAK Academy creates clear guidelines to ensure students and staff well supported and monitored. The guidelines are created to address the new existing social and emotional learning needs of students, staff and families and protect the wellbeing of all the stakeholders during the COVID 19 pandemic.

Looking after Students:

Pastoral care is the most important provision in a school. Students cannot learn to the best of, if their pastoral needs are not met. Steps to maintain the students' wellbeing include:

- Maintaining communications with all stakeholders about wellbeing
- e- Safety and Cybersecurity policy as well as the Academy safeguarding Policy serve to assist the wellbeing of everyone
- Using attendance registers to monitor students' attendance and engagement
- Regular Virtual assemblies led by Class Teachers, Counsellors, Grade Leaders, Intervention Leaders and SLT
- Daily welcome videos and live streaming
- Reduced timetable
- Virtual counselling sessions when needed
- Creating offscreen challenges, events and activities
- Encouraging and rewarding students' good work
- Generating surveys related to wellbeing and safeguarding
- Sharing clear information to ask for support if required
- Communicating with students showing concerns via phone, calls, emails or live sessions
- Virtual social interaction activities

Looking after Staff:

Teachers' wellbeing can feel threatened with the Distance Learning. Therefore, the Academy management are applying a few strategies to maintain staff wellbeing:

- Clear expectations about their roles, responsibilities and accountabilities during the Distance Learning
- Creating Q&A document related to COVID 19 situation
- Individual Wellbeing support if required
- Virtual social gatherings
- Weekly Staff welfare messages
- Wellbeing surveys

Looking after Parents:

Parents trying to combine working from home and supporting the online learning of their children. The Academy is implementing a few strategies to support parents through

- Hotline phone numbers to communicate concerns or problems
- Transparent communications with parents via messages, newsletter and emails
- Communicating regularly with parents
- Gaining feedback through conference meetings e.g. google meet, zoom meeting etc.
- Surveys to parents



- Wellbeing webinars for parents
- Providing tips and strategies to support their children
- Updating contact details in case of wellbeing concerns