Is it **hands up** for more **'cyber' school days?**

6.50 p.m.: Anna has set the alarm for tomorrow morning and is gearing up for school as usual. No need to pack her bag tonight though because this time tomorrow Anna will have had her first of four virtual school days planned for this school year.

1 In the opening paragraph, what is the writer trying to do?

A give details of virtual schooling

B explain that Anna's about to try something new

C give information about Anna's school

D describe how Anna gets ready for school

Anna's day will begin as usual as she joins her slightly irritating younger siblings for breakfast, then she'll retreat to her room, possibly in her pyjamas, where she'll log on, check her timetable and get going on the day's lessons. Maybe she'll start with maths. Who knows? For one day, the choice will be hers. What is more, she'll be able to enjoy this new-found sense of freedom from the comfort of her own home – knowing that school will remain open for teachers to be on hand for online support.

2 Why is the choice of lessons important for Anna?

A Without the teachers present, she can study anything.

B She can decide for herself which subjects she does when.

C She can just do the subjects she likes.

D The right choice leaves her free to do other things.

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So, is this paving the way for full-time cyber school? Not at all! This pilot scheme starts at 9 a.m. tomorrow. However, it will only offer students a small number of planned virtual study days during the academic year. The idea is becoming a hot topic amongst teachers and students following the success of a trial at a neighbouring school. A bout of extremely bad weather resulted in some schools closing for several days, or 'snow days' as they are known. Poor attendance on snow days means that teachers often have to adapt the syllabus, so that students can catch up on missed lessons – all very stressful when exams loom. When one neighbouring school offered its students the chance to study at home the results were surprising, with a 90% online attendance.

3 The results of a one-day trial of cyber school

A were unexpectedly good.

B paved the way for full-time virtual school.

C proved unsuccessful.

D showed that teachers found it stressful.

The results caught the attention of other head teachers on the look-out for suggestions on how to motivate teachers and students alike and, ultimately, improve grades. They believe that a few days of virtual school is going to offer an exciting change to the usual routine – and who doesn't want some time off? More progressive teachers, keen to make the most of this scheme, say they will be able to be more creative in their planning. As well as that, they insist, the online collaboration between students and teachers is preparing them for the future. By the time they get to university, they'll have been collaborating online for a few years. It's a win-win situation.

4 What was the main reason that head teachers liked the idea of virtual school days?

A Students would work better from home.

B It would make students and teachers want to achieve more.

C Teachers would be able to show their creativity.

D Everybody would get more holiday time.

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However, not everyone is sold on the idea. Far from it being an easy option for teachers who won't have to be in class, some teachers worry that the scheme is likely to put them under increasing pressure to plan even more than they already do. They'll also have the added responsibility of being on call for feedback at any time during the school day.

5 Why do virtual school days cause concern for some teachers?

A They don't like giving feedback online.

B They don't think the idea helps students get better grades.

C They don't want to have an increased workload.

D They aren't sure students really benefit from them.

Opinions are also divided as to how it will work for Anna's favourite subjects, science and sport. Her science teacher says she'll have access to the best science experiments online. Think of it as a front row view with no distractions! As for sport, however, the school won't be including it for the time being although Anna and her friends have already decided that they could take selfies at basketball training and send them into school.

Possibly the biggest drawback for students like Anna is that her younger brothers will probably be a bit of a pain when she's trying to concentrate, but it will only be for a few odd days each year. And anyway, what are headphones for? For the time being, she's glad she's going to have more control over her time and be her own boss for the day. Will she miss being in class with her friends? 'Yeah, kind of, but we'll be doing stuff online together so I think it'll be OK.'

6 What may be the main problem for Anna of studying at home?

A not being able to do sport

B not being in class with her friends

C having to help out with her siblings

D being distracted while she's working

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