

# e-Safety

## Safety Considerations

The use of the internet in today's homes and classrooms exposes young people to many risks. Due to the internet being a largely unregulated entity it is possible for pupils to find inappropriate material accidentally. There are many other pitfalls to be found when looking at the internet in schools. The most important issues to be concerned about are:

- Cyberbullying
- Exposure to inappropriate, harmful or illegal material
- Ensuring pupils' identity is kept private

### 1. Cyberbullying

Although cyberbullying may appear to be a new problem in schools today, it is in fact the age old problem of bullying but through a different medium. "Cyberbullying' refers to bullying via electronic communication tools" (Li 2006). This means that cyberbullying can, and does, occur through the use of blogs, wikis and to a lesser extent social bookmarking. In this increasingly digitalised world cyberbullying is becoming an ever increasing problem and it is important that the correct procedures are put in place to ensure that every school is prepared for any instance of cyberbullying in their school, just as with physical or verbal bullying.

### 2. Exposure to Inappropriate, Harmful or Illegal Material

Due to the size and depth of information available on the internet there is a high chance that pupils may find inappropriate, harmful or illegal material at some point during their school years. It is important that teachers are aware of this issue when designing activities for your class. Of course the likelihood of finding inappropriate material can be lessened by adding firewalls to computers in school and at home.

### 3. Ensuring Pupils' Identity is Kept Private

Disclosing person information on the internet is a problem in society today. Research conducted by the National Centre for Technology in Education (2007) found that "an understanding and knowledge of keeping personal information private" is a key skill which pupils must be taught/learn in order to use the internet safely at home and at school. This is a particular problem with blogging because it is very easy to disclose a lot of information about yourself over time without realising what you have said.

# How Can We Ensure Pupils Are safe on the Internet?

## 1. Acceptable Use Policies

Acceptable use policies (referred to as AUP from now on) are documents that are drawn up by the school management “detailing the ways in which ICT can and cannot be used by both pupils and staff” (National Centre for Technology in Education 2007). An AUP is just like any other policy document which means it should include the relevant procedures and sanctions for disciplinary proceedings, it should also be reviewed regularly to ensure that it is up to date with the latest tools and affordances that the internet has to offer the school community. The AUP offers a framework for you to work under and give a clear example to pupils that inappropriate use of the internet in school will be a serious disciplinary matter.

## 2. Teaching Internet Safety

Teaching internet safety is a vital component to integrating web based tools into a classroom. Just as when a Construction Studies Teacher is showing a pupil the correct methods and procedures for using a potentially harmful tool, a teacher who wishes to incorporate the internet into his/her pupils’ learning must exercise a similar level of caution and explain the potential hazards in as much details as with a potentially harmful piece of equipment.

## 3. Working with Parents

Parents are the primary educators of your pupils and it is important to remain aware of it when teaching pupils about internet safety. It is relatively easy to ensure pupils are safe on the internet in school as each school will undoubtedly have a firewall and the teacher in charge of any class, where the pupils have access to the internet, will have the necessary software to monitor the pupils’ internet usage. However, once the pupils return home and are asked to research a given topic and contribute to a class social bookmarking repository it is impossible for the school to monitor the websites that the pupils view. It is therefore important that you work closely with parents to ensure that they are aware of the dangers posed by the internet and take the correct precautions to ensure their child’s safety online.

## Conclusion

When implementing web based tools into the classroom it is vitally important that the safety of pupils is considered and maintained at all times. It is not just the responsibility of the teacher to ensure pupils are safe but also the school community at large, parents and the pupils themselves to foster a cultural of safe internet that encourages all participants to be safe and enjoy their online endeavours.