

Free guide: E-safety – 5 ways to safeguard your school

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Why is e-safety so important?

E-safety is a top priority for Ofsted, and now forms a key part of Ofsted inspections. The reasons are obvious. The internet can be a Pandora's Box of material that can easily fall into the wrong hands, and in providing the use of computers, either as part of lessons or as a VLE for everyday use, it falls within the remit of the school to ensure children are exposed to unsuitable material.

E-safety and Ofsted

This September, Ofsted issued new guidelines for e-safety provision in schools. During an inspection, Ofsted will look at how the school educates staff in the use of technology, and how it protects and educates the children in the risks out there. It will also look at what measures are put in place should an issue arise, and how well the school informs parents about how they can keep their children safe whilst online. The way a school deals with this education, protection and prevention will dictate the level of award for this area.

Ofsted believe e-safety should be constant and consistent from an early age; The Safe Use Of Technologies, an Ofsted report from 2010, actually found that pupils who are given greater freedom at school to use new technologies have a better knowledge and understanding of how to stay safe online.

The schools that Ofsted awarded "Outstanding" status for their e-safety ran 'managed systems': by allowing children to take responsibility and manage their own risk, they actually became more safe and responsible users of technology.

Those schools that restricted access to almost every website, or avoided adopting online systems and VLEs altogether to alleviate the risk, actually served only to make children more vulnerable, as they weren't given the opportunity to learn how to assess and deal with online risk for themselves.

So, with that in mind, we have five tips to help your school be as e-safety conscious as possible, whilst not restricting your pupils' enjoyment and opportunity to use online resources to their full potential.

1. Make sure staff have good quality, regular training on e-safety

Not every teacher will be completely computer-literate, but knowing the basics is a good start. Teachers will need to know how to deal with online behaviour, like cyberbullying.

Certain VLEs will allow teachers to monitor interaction between pupils, with filters for offensive language. Extra vigilance is also needed around underage use of social networking sites. Teachers will also need to know how to deal with online child exploitation and potential harm to personal identity and reputation.

Ideally, one member of staff should receive accredited training to become an E-safety Officer. Training is available for teachers from course providers such as Kidscape - they're CPD accredited, and can be contacted on 0207 730 3300 or via e-mail at training@kidscape.org.uk.

2. Educate your children in e-safety

Children should be empowered from an early age to safeguard themselves and their personal information; those children who understand the risks are more likely to be vigilant and able to deal with the risks.

Make them aware that they need to keep their personal information (log in details, passwords for example) private, that they should consider the long-term implications of anything they post online, that they shouldn't upload or post anything inappropriate, illegal or offensive, and that they should adhere to age restrictions and other conditions when accessing websites.

Pupils should also be completely aware of cyberbullying and the fact that bullying through messaging systems on VLEs is monitored regularly.

3. Provide support for children who feel unsafe

One of Ofsted's key areas of focus is the provision of support to children who feel unsafe, or are a victim of online

bullying. Ofsted inspectors will ask schools what kind of support children will have access to if they feel unsafe, how safe pupils feel at school and their understanding of safety issues such as bullying, and pupils views on safety and harassment issues. Make pupils completely aware that, in the event of them feeling unsafe, they can speak to a teacher regarding the matter in confidence.

You can also protect children from seeing content that isn't suitable for them in a number of ways: through filtering, which will restrict access to unsuitable websites; time limits, so that the length of time a child spends on the internet is restricted; monitoring, where you'll be informed if a child attempts to enter a certain site; and reporting, where you'll be provided with information on sites a child has used. These can all be set via your internet service provider, specialist software, or via the settings on your computer.

A set of guidelines could be provided for your pupils, on what they should do if they feel unsafe or if they come across unsuitable material. The Child Exploitation & Online Protection Centre (CEOP) can provide more information and resources, via their website, www.thinkuknow.co.uk.

4. Choose a trusted VLE

Some VLEs are flexible enough to provide the teacher with the ability to monitor interaction between pupils. Depending on the VLE you choose, you'll be able to view messages between children, making sure that messages are schoolwork related, and acting upon those that aren't.

Your VLE should only allow pupils to receive messages from their teachers and other pupils. Complex filter systems built in to your VLE will protect pupils from being the recipients of offensive content messages from their peers, even if the offending words they use are misspelled.

These messages will be flagged up to the teacher - and the message won't send. Learnanywhere and Learner Journey, which boast the above features, also prevent pupils' details within the school's system from appearing in Google searches - safeguarding them from outside risks.

5. Keep up to date with the latest information and technology

Schools are now expected to provide a safe, online space for children to work, learn and interact - and Ofsted expects schools to have processes in place to make sure the internet is used safely. But the digital world is constantly changing. By keeping up with the latest information regarding e-safety, you can be prepared for both Ofsted inspections and any risks to your school's pupils.

New technologies like instant messaging, or even text messages can put children at risk or be used as a channel for bullying, so ensure you're aware of how these technologies work and what you need to do to prevent them being misused.

You can keep an eye on changes to the inspection handbook regarding e-safety at www.Ofsted.gov.uk.

About Webanywhere

Since 2003, we've provided website services and e-learning solutions to help schools communicate, collaborate and promote themselves online.

As a provider of websites, learning platforms, design services and e-learning content, we're also recognised by leading organisations. We're an approved supplier to the UK Government Procurement Service, a Moodle partner, a Mahara partner and a Google Apps Authorised Reseller.

For more information on Webanywhere or to get the latest education news, advice and tips via email, please get in touch

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