Guide to using the internet safely

Introduction

As with any activity, using computers, and more particularly the internet, exposes children to a number of risks. Our responsibility is to minimise these risks, while still providing children with the educational benefits and value that the internet can bring. Tanya Byron's report, *Safer Children in a Digital World*, highlights three risks of the internet to children.

1. Inappropriate content
2. Inappropriate contact
3. Inappropriate conduct

It is also important to consider a child's digital footprint and the opportunity cost of the time he or she spends online. These issues are discussed in turn below.

Content

In schools, technical measures (such as filtering) are in place. This significantly reduces the risk of exposure to inappropriate content on the web. Many schools can edit their own filtering settings and some web-based services (e.g. Google) have 'safe' modes. Schools should ensure that filtering does not block educationally valuable content. Because technical solutions are rarely 100 per cent effective, many schools operate a policy of asking children to 'turn the screen off/turn the tablet over and tell an adult' if they inadvertently come across inappropriate content.

Contact

In addition to warning primary children of physical 'stranger danger', it is also important to ensure that the children's online activities within, and – more importantly – beyond school, do not endanger them through contact with people who would wish them harm. Excellent materials are available from Childnet International (www.childnet.com) and CEOP (www.thinkuknow.co.uk), among others, to educate children about the dangers of providing personal information online, and other risks.

Conduct

Children's behaviour online can result in harm to themselves or others. Teaching children from an early age to respect others' intellectual property, in part through modelling good practice, may make them less willing to make illegal copies of music, videos or software later in life. Also ensure that your school's anti-bullying policy deals effectively with cyberbullying, so that any child who experiences it knows that they can report it, and that it will be taken seriously.

Digital footprint

Beyond the password protection of a school's learning platform, or similar commercial or local authority systems, content produced by children for the open web is likely to remain in one or more archives or indexes for an indefinite period of time. Similarly, logs of any user's online activities are maintained, usually securely, by website operators and service providers. While the opportunity to be visible to a wide audience for work is appealing, and has a lot to offer educationally, associating children's full names with work published on the internet creates a link between that and a child's online identity, which is unlikely to be appropriate for primary-level children.

Opportunity cost of being online

Time spent in front of a screen is time not being spent on other individual or social pursuits. *Switched on Computing* aims to link high-quality computing education with a diverse range of activities in the classroom and beyond. Children should be encouraged to see using technology as just one part of a broad, rounded experience of childhood.

Summary

As with any issue surrounding safeguarding children and young people, follow – and ensure the children in your care follow – your school's agreed policies, but also take any opportunities you can to emphasise to the children that, by and large, their behaviour online should mirror their (high) standards of behaviour offline. Ofsted's report, *The safe use of new technologies* (www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/safe-use-of-new-technologies), makes a convincing case for educating children about online safety, rather than merely policing their access to content.

> 'Pupils were more vulnerable overall when schools used locked down systems because they were not given enough opportunities to learn how to assess and manage risk for themselves.'

You may find Ofsted's 2013 briefing, *Inspecting e-safety in schools*, useful to refer to for examples of best practice.

Educating children to make safe, responsible and effective use of the internet is one of the aims of *Switched on Computing*.