



January 2007

ICT briefing note

Regarding: E-safety and internet filtering

Following: Discussion of the approaches to e-safety taken within the SWGfL, with our broadband suppliers, RM

A survey of around 1400 schools in the South West, showed that an alarming number of schools were aware of incidents on their premises relating to viewing or attempting to view, inappropriate or illegal images, viewed via the internet. My personal hypothesis is that if anything, the results given below probably include an unknown degree of under-reporting, plus incidents that the schools were unaware of. Whilst it is important that we do not overreact to the risks involved in internet use, it does show that we cannot afford to become complacent and must make sure that we take appropriate measures to protect everyone. The numbers below show that it is more a question of *when* incidents happen as opposed to *if* incidents happen.

Nature of incident	% of schools	Approx. number of schools
Pupils viewing inappropriate images	49%	686
Staff viewing/attempting to view inappropriate images	8.6%	120
Staff viewing/attempting to view illegal images	2.6%	36

The risks of internet use go beyond inappropriate images and include issues that relate to violence and intolerance (eg. bomb and weapon making, racial hatred), finance (scams and gambling), bullying, grooming, etc.

I will be working with colleagues from Wokingham and RM to explore what options may exist, with changing technology, to enforce certain aspects of "acceptable use" at the broadband supplier level. If we can do this, it will give us a stronger level of basic protection automatically and reduce the burden on schools.

General advice in the light of the above

Pupils should only ever access the internet via an appropriately filtered service.

All staff should also access the internet via an appropriately filtered service. *



There may need to be a process to allow staff to request time-limited access to the internet unfiltered, if the filtering is preventing them from carrying out legitimate activities (eg. research into drug use or sex education). The request should be agreed by a member of SLT before being passed to a network technician for action. The request should be recorded (a simple entry in a table would suffice), stating the date of the request, why unfiltered access was needed, when it was needed and for how long, which member of SLT sanctioned the request, when the filtering was turned off and when normal filtering was restored.

E-safety should be taught alongside other safety messages as a basic life skill. Children should be aware that the internet is effectively a public space and should be used with proper regard to personal safety. They should know that they must not give out any personal details or arrange to meet someone who they have met via the internet, in the same way that they would not accept a lift from a stranger.

All staff and pupils (or their parents in the case of younger children) should be aware of the school's e-safety policy and its key points and should sign a statement to that effect. For staff, a copy of the policy should be included in their induction pack.

Everyone should be clear that the use of the school's computer systems will be monitored as a routine part of network management and that monitoring will include email and websites visited.

There should be a named person in each school who acts as a single point of contact for e-safety issues and information.

*This is not just because there is clear evidence of a child protection issue in schools, because a worrying minority of staff have either viewed or attempted to view illegal or inappropriate images. It is also to protect the institution and to protect the staff, eg. a network technician who gives someone unfiltered internet access for no apparently good reason may fall under suspicion if that person is later found to have accessed inappropriate material. It will also help provide protection against unfounded or malicious allegations.

Internet filtering is not sufficient on its own. It is far from perfect and with new sites popping up with great rapidity those compiling filter lists are constantly playing "catch-up". Sometimes it will frustrate people who are trying to carry out legitimate tasks. However it does provide a basic and essential measure of protection to children, staff and institutions. Combined with other appropriate measures and approaches it is part of the package that allows us to make best use of a hugely powerful and potentially highly beneficial resource.