

2. ADMINISTRATION AND DATA/INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

Internet Access Policy for Schools

A template for schools

In delivering the curriculum, teachers need to plan for and make use of communications technology, for example, web-based resources and e-mail. Access to life-long learning and employment increasingly requires computer and communications use and learners need to develop life skills in their use. Home and social Internet use is expanding and it is becoming an important part of learning and communication during leisure time. This brings learners into contact with a wider range of information, the scope and nature of which may or may not be appropriate for the learner. Some schools are discussing with parents strategies for the responsible use of the Internet in the home and community. The Policy template aims to inform and initiate debate and offers sets of possible responses to commonly-asked questions.

Why write an Internet Access Policy?

The Internet is managed by a worldwide, non-statutory collaboration of independent agencies that serve mainly an adult audience. Without appropriate measures, access to unsuitable materials would be possible and security compromised. An Internet Access Policy will help to ensure that Internet use supports schools' educational aims and that responsibilities to learners are met. In addition, a school's ICT development plan must set out their policy to protect learners from access to undesirable materials. Although teachers will have heard about the inappropriate aspects of the Internet, few will have had opportunities to discuss the issues in detail. The writing of the policy provides such an opportunity and the agreed policy produced is more likely to be implemented effectively. The template is intended to assist the writing process without bypassing the essential debate.

Using the Policy

When writing your policy, a wide range of educational, management, and technical issues will need to be considered. In the attached template there is a series of questions with discussion and a range of possible statements. The writing team should consider each question and select statements that are appropriate to the school context. Naturally, the team may decide to edit or replace statements. Simply delete statements that are not relevant to your school.

Contents

- Internet Access Policy for Schools - a template for schools to edit:
- Acceptable Use Statement for learners in secondary schools.
- Rules for Responsible Internet Use for children in primary schools
- Sample letter to parents with permission form
- References and further reading for schools and for parents

(a) Who will write the policy?

Discussion: The School's Internet Access Policy is part of the school's ICT Policy and ICT Development Plan and will relate to other policies including those for Life Sciences.

Possible statement:

The Internet Access Policy has been written by a team with a wide range of experience and will be reviewed on a yearly basis. It has been agreed by the School Management Team and approved by the School Governing Body (SGB).

Created: by

To be revised:

(b) Why is Internet access important?

Possible statements:

(Please copy, edit or replace with your own statements)

The purpose of Internet access in school is to raise educational standards, to support the professional work of staff and to enhance the school's management information and business administration systems.

Access to the Internet is a necessary tool for staff and learners. It is an entitlement for learners who show a responsible and mature approach.

(c) *What are the benefits to the school?*

Possible statement:

The Department of Basic Education has set targets for ICT use in all schools. A number of studies and government projects have indicated the benefits to be gained through the appropriate use of the Internet in education.

These benefits include:

- Access to world-wide educational resources including museums and art galleries;
- Inclusion in National Department of Education initiatives such as SA-Sams;
- Information and cultural exchanges between learners world-wide;
- Cultural, vocational, social and leisure use in libraries, clubs and at home;
- Discussion with experts in many fields for learners and staff;
- Staff professional development - access to educational materials and good curriculum practice;
- Communication with the advisory and support services, professional associations and colleagues;
- Improved access to technical support including remote management of networks;
- Exchange of curriculum and administration data

(d) *How will Internet use provide effective learning?*

Discussion: Teachers, parents and learners need to develop good practice in using the Internet as a tool for teaching and learning. There is a fine balance between encouraging autonomous learning and maintaining adequate supervision. Systems to ensure Internet use is as safe as possible will enable increased use, the quality of that use becomes a critical factor.

Possible statements:

Internet access will be planned to enrich and extend learning activities. Access levels will be reviewed to reflect the curriculum requirement;

- Learners will be given clear objectives for Internet use;
- Staff will have the facilities to bring sites into the curriculum environment;
- Learners will be educated in taking responsibility for Internet access.

(e) *How will learners be taught to assess Internet content?*

Discussion: Learners in school are unlikely to see inappropriate content in books due to selection by publisher and teacher. However, ICT teaching should be widened to incorporate Internet content issues, for instance the value and credibility of Web materials in relationship to other media. The tendency to use the Web when better information may be obtained from books may need to be challenged.

Possible statements:

- Learners will be taught ways to validate information before accepting that it is necessarily accurate;
- Learners will be taught to acknowledge the source of information, when using Internet material for their own use;

(f) *How will e-mail be managed?*

Discussion: E-mail is an essential means of communication within education. Educators and Learners need to use e-mail as an essential part of communication with the school community and for research projects. The SMT should work closely with the ISP to ensure that facilities for filtering e-mail for viruses, are regularly updated.

E-mail content should not be considered private.

Possible statements

- Learners need to use e-mail as part of the National Curriculum Statement;
- E-mail must only be used in school for educational purposes;
- In-coming e-mail will be regarded as public. Received e-mail may be examined and could, for example, be pinned to a notice board for collection by educators;
- The forwarding of chain letters will be banned, as will the use of chat lines;
- Learners will be allowed to access personal e-mail from the school system;

(g) *How will publishing on the Web be managed?*

Discussion: Many schools have created Web sites that inspire learners to publish work to a high standard, for a very wide audience. A Web site can celebrate learners' work, promote the school and publish resources for projects or homework. Ground rules are important to ensure that the Web site reflects the school's ethos and

that information is accurate and well presented. As the school's Web site can be accessed by anyone on the Internet, the security of staff and learners must be considered carefully. The publishing of learners' names beside photographs that identify individuals is considered inappropriate on Web pages.

Possible statements:

- Secondary school learners will be made aware that all material must be the author's own work, or where permission to reproduce has been obtained, clearly marked with the copyright owner's name;
- Home information or individual e-mail identities will not be published;
- Photographs must not identify individual learners. Group shots or pictures taken over the shoulder will be used in preference to individual "passport" style images;
- Full names will not be used anywhere on the Web site, particularly alongside photographs;
- Written permission from parents will be sought before photographs of learners are published on the school Web site.

(h) What other Internet applications are available?

Discussion: The Internet is the underlying technology, i.e. the wires and switches. New applications are being developed to use this ability to communicate, including conferencing applications such as Chat, Newsgroups and Webcams. Many of these facilities have great potential for education, for instance learners could exchange live text, speech or video with a similar class in England or Italy, at low cost. However, most new applications start without the needs of young users being considered, particularly in the area of security.

Possible statements:

- Learners will not be allowed to access public chat rooms;
- New facilities will be thoroughly tested before learners are given access;

(i) How will Internet access be authorised?

Discussion: The school should allocate access to the Internet on the basis of educational need and it should be clear who has Internet access, and who has not. In the case of a primary school, all staff and all learners might be granted access as a blanket requirement, with a single written record made by the head of department to this effect. A secondary school might decide that individual registration is required. An important decision is whether parental permission is required.

Possible statements:

- Internet access is a necessary part of the National Curriculum Statement. It is an entitlement for learners based on responsible use;
- At Stage 1, the majority of the access to the Internet will be by teacher or adult demonstration. However there may be situations when children have supervised access to specific approved on-line materials;
- At Stage 2, Internet access will be granted to a whole class as part of the scheme of work, after a suitable education in responsible Internet use;
- Parents will be informed that learners will be provided with supervised Internet access.
- Parents will be asked to sign and return a permission form;
- Secondary learners must apply for Internet access individually by signing the applicable policy, countersigned by a parent or staff member.

(j) How will the risks be assessed?

Discussion: The school will need to address the issue that it is difficult to remove completely the risk that learners might access unsuitable materials via the school system.

Possible statements:

- In common with other media such as magazines, books and video, some material available via the Internet is unsuitable for learners. The school will supervise learners and take all reasonable precautions to ensure that users access only appropriate material. However, due to the international scale and linked nature of information available via the Internet, it is not possible to guarantee that unsuitable material will never appear on a terminal.
- The use of computer systems without permission or for purposes not agreed by the school could constitute a serious offence under the School Code;
- Methods to identify, assess and minimise risks will be reviewed;
- Staff, parents, governors and advisers will work to establish agreement that every reasonable measure is being taken;
- The Phase Head or HOD will ensure that the policy is implemented effectively.

(k) *How will the school ensure Internet access is safe?*

The school Internet access will be monitored via the usage of passwords and will at a later stage include filtering appropriate to the age of pupils.

Discussion: The Internet is a communications medium that is freely available to any person wishing to send e-mail or publish a Web site on almost any topic. Access to appropriate information should be encouraged and Internet access must be safe for all members of the school community from the youngest learners to teacher and administrative staff member. Learners will generally need protected access to the Internet. However, older secondary learners, as part of a supervised project, might need to access adult materials, for instance a set novel that includes references to sexuality. Teachers might need to research areas including drugs, medical conditions, bullying or harassment. In such cases, legitimate use must be recognised and the user protected from possible accusation of inappropriate use. Secondary schools that decide to operate without the protection of the walled garden need to put in place mechanisms to prevent children accessing inappropriate material. Listed below are some of the options:

- **Blocking strategies** remove access to a list of unsuitable sites or newsgroups. Maintenance of the blocking list is a major task as new sites appear every day.
- **A walled-garden or pass list** provides access only to a list of approved sites. Inevitably this approach will restrict learners' access to valid information.
- **Filtering** examines the content of Web pages or e-mail messages for unsuitable words.
- **Rating systems** give each Web page a rating for sexual, profane, violent or other unacceptable content. Web browsers can be set to reject these pages.

None of these systems can be completely effective and a combination of approaches will be required, alongside adequate supervision. It is important to establish the criteria used to accept or reject material, whether the criteria are set by the software supplier, the ISP or the school and whether the criteria are appropriate. Blocking and/or filtering may be performed by the Internet Service Provider (ISP) or at school level. School-level systems require management to maintain effectiveness and place greater responsibility on the school. Systems to alter the degree of control to suit the age and learning context of the pupil are being developed, again requiring a degree of local management.

Possible statements:

- Learners and teachers will be informed that Internet use will be supervised and monitored;
- The school will work in partnership with parents, and the Internet Service Provider to ensure systems to protect learners are reviewed and improved;
- If staff or learners discover unsuitable sites, the URL (address) and content will be reported to the Internet Service Provider via the ICT co-ordinator;
- Any material that the school suspects is illegal will be referred to the ICT co-ordinator;
- If staff or senior learners require open but filtered Internet access, separate facilities will be provided;
- Learners will be made aware that the writer of an e-mail or the author of a Web page might not be the person claimed;
- Learners will be encouraged to tell a teacher immediately if they encounter any material that makes them feel uncomfortable.

(l) *How will the security of school ICT systems be maintained?*

Discussion: The Internet is a new connection to the outside world that could compromise system performance or threaten security.

Possible statements:

- Security strategies are discussed and reviewed with the ISP on a regular basis;
- The security of the whole system will be reviewed with regard to threats to security from Internet access;
- Virus protection is installed and updated regularly;

(m) *How will complaints regarding Internet use be handled?*

Discussion: Prompt action will be required if a complaint is made. The facts of the case will need to be established, for instance whether the issue has arisen through Internet use inside or outside school. Transgressions of the rules could include minor as well as the potentially serious and a range of sanctions will be required, linked to the school's Code of Conduct.

Possible statements:

- Responsibility for handling incidents will be given to senior members of staff;
- Learners and parents will be informed of the complaints procedures;
- Parents and learners will need to work in partnership with staff to resolve issues;
- As with drugs issues, there may be occasions when the police must be contacted.

- Early contact will be made to establish the legal position and discuss strategies;
- Sanctions available include interview/counselling by the phase head and, if appropriate, informing parents or caretakers;
- A learner may have e-mail, Internet or computer access denied for a period of time depending on the nature of the incident.

(n) How will staff and learners be consulted?

Discussion: It is very important that staff feel prepared for Internet use and subscribe to the school Internet Access Policy. Staff should be given opportunities to discuss the issues and develop appropriate teaching strategies. It would be unreasonable if staff, particularly supply staff, were asked to take charge of an Internet activity without training. Reassurance and discussion may be required.

Possible statements:

- Training is available through the ICT team;
- Rules for Internet access will be posted near computer systems. The Acceptable Use Statement or Rules for Responsible Internet Use could be printed as posters (see appendix);
- All staff including teachers and support staff will be provided with the Internet Access Policy and its importance explained;
- Parents' attention will be drawn to the Policy in newsletters, the school brochure and on the school Web site;
- A module on responsible Internet use will be included in the Code of Conduct covering both school and home use.

(o) How will parents' support be enlisted?

Discussion: Internet use in learners' homes is increasing rapidly, encouraged by offers of free software and access on magazine covers. Unless parents are aware of the dangers, learners may have unrestricted access to the Internet. The school may be able to help parents plan appropriate, supervised use of the Internet at home.

Possible statements:

- A careful balance between informing and alarming parents will be maintained;
- Demonstrations and practical IT sessions for parents will be organised to encourage a partnership approach;
- Joint home / school guidelines on issues such as safe Internet use will be established;
- Suitable educational and leisure activities that make responsible use of the Internet will be developed with parents;

Acceptable Internet Use Statement for Staff and Senior Learners

The computer system is owned by the school and is made available to learners to further their education and to staff to enhance their professional activities including teaching, research, administration and management. The school's Internet Access Policy has been drawn up to protect all parties - the learners, the staff and the school.

The school reserves the right to examine or delete any files that may be held on its computer system or to monitor any Internet sites visited.

- Access must only be made via the authorised account and password, which must not be made available to any other person;
- All Internet use should be appropriate to staff professional activity or student's education;
- Activity that threatens the integrity of the school ICT systems, or that attacks or corrupts other systems, is forbidden;
- Sites and materials accessed must be appropriate to work in school. Users will recognise materials that are inappropriate and should expect to have their access removed.
- Users are responsible for e-mail they send and for contacts made that may result in e-mail being received;
- The normal rules of social interaction apply to e-mail. The remoteness of the recipients must not be used to excuse anti social behaviour: harassment, intimidation and bullying behaviour.
- The same professional levels of language and content should be applied as for letters or other media, particularly as e-mail is often forwarded;
- Posting anonymous messages and forwarding chain letters is forbidden;
- Copyright of materials and intellectual property rights must be respected;
- Legitimate private interests may be followed, providing school use is not compromised;
- Use for personal financial gain, gambling, political purposes or advertising is forbidden.

(Display this page as a poster near computers and provide learners and parents with a copy of these rules.)

Rules for Responsible Internet Use:

The school has installed computers and Internet access to help our learning. These rules will keep everyone safe and help us be fair to others.

- I will ask permission from a member of staff before using the Internet;
- I will use only my own login and password, which I will keep secret;
- I will not access other people's files;
- I will use the computers only for school work and homework;
- I will not bring discs into school unless I have permission;
- I will only e-mail people I know, or my teacher has approved;
- The messages I send will be polite and sensible;
- I will not give my home address or phone number, or arrange to meet someone, unless my parent, carer or teacher has given permission;
- To help protect other learners and myself, I will tell a teacher if I see anything I am unhappy with or I receive messages I do not like;
- I understand that the school may check my computer files and may monitor the Internet sites I visit.

Sample Letter to Parents

Dear Parents,

Responsible Use of the Internet

As part of learners' curriculum enhancement and the development of ICT skills, Anywhere School is providing supervised access to the Internet including email.

Although there have been concerns about learners having access to undesirable materials, we are taking positive steps to deal with this risk in school. Our school Internet access provider operates a filtering system that restricts access to inappropriate materials. This may not be the case at home and we enclose references to information on safe Internet access that may be of use.

Every endeavour is made to ensure that suitable restrictions are placed on the ability of children to access inappropriate materials.

I enclose a copy of the Rules for Responsible Internet Use that we operate at Anywhere School.

Should you wish to discuss any aspect of Internet use (or to see a lesson in operation) please telephone me to arrange an appointment.

Yours sincerely

Principal/ICT Co-ordinator

Permission for Internet Access

Parent's permission and Learner's agreement

I give permission for access to the Internet on the terms set out in the above letter.
I agree to follow the Rules for Responsible Internet Use.

Parent signature
Print name:
Date:
Learner signature:
Print name:
Class: