# Online safety resource for schools

## Introduction

The Partner Schools Global Network (PSGN) is the British Council's global community of schools delivering international curriculum and assessment provided by the UK awarding bodies. The PSGN supports school leaders, teachers, students and parents in over 1,700 partner schools in over 30 countries around the world. As well as support in delivering international school exams including IGCSEs and A-levels, the PSGN provides access to professional development, resources, networking opportunities and support for extra-curricular development.

The British Council is committed to working with its partners to develop a common understanding of child protection issues and good practice in keeping children safe in line with our global child protection strategy. The PSGN offers support to partner schools through online child protection awareness and cyber well-being training.

The fast-changing landscape of the internet and social media presents opportunities and challenges for the whole school community to consider. The British Council has collaborated with the South West Grid for Learning (SWGfL) to produce three e-safety brochures to support schools, parents and young people. Our aim is to support young people in becoming responsible digital citizens and in doing so to create a safer internet.

The South West Grid for Learning (SWGfL) is a UK charity that has been working with schools and other organisations to protect children online for over eighteen years. Through its innovative services, resources and support, SWGfL has developed an international reputation for supporting online safety and this has been recognised through numerous awards. SWGfL is a founding member of UKCIS (UK Council for Internet Safety) and works with governments, technology providers and partners across the world. Since 2010, SWGfL has led the UK Safer Internet Centre, alongside partners Childnet and the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF), as part of the European Commission's Safer Internet Programme.
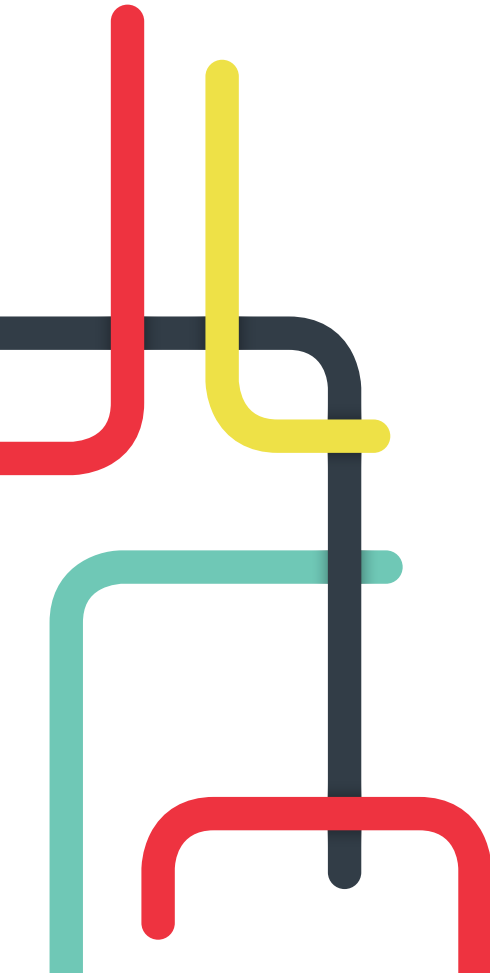
**The role of Schools in safeguarding young people**

Online communication technologies are a fundamental part of society and some of its keenest and most expert users are children and young people. The immersion of young people's lives within these online technologies means they swim in a constant ocean of new experiences, conversations and challenges, wherever they are.

EU Kids Online concluded that schools are best placed to teach children the digital and critical literacy skills required to maximise opportunities and minimise risks but is this realistic and how well equipped are schools to meet these challenges?

Schools provide technology for teaching and learning and create safe and secure online environments for children to learn. However, beyond the school, children continue to access that online world often without those same safeguards. A school's duty of care now extends beyond its own geography and timetable; they are one of several agencies whose interventions and vigilance are key to safeguarding their children and staff as they journey through those environments both within and beyond.

Given the challenges, what might a school do to ensure it not only meets that duty of care but also provides the right interventions, protocols and education to allow children and staff to flourish in their use of technology? And what are those actions and features that underpin an effective online safeguarding strategy?

# OWNERSHIP

Whilst schools may appoint an online safety lead to drive a strategy, it's not a role that someone can do on their own if that strategy is to become whole school culture. Online safety encompasses safeguarding; technical security; educative practice; evaluation and the ability to affect change.

It's a complex job. It needs to be devolved across a wide body of professional expertise to ensure the most appropriate people are given the opportunity to advise on their areas of expertise. This collaborative approach also ensures sustainability; if one of that team leaves, the strategy remains in place. The more people who have the opportunity to feed into and share a strategy, the better communicated it becomes; the wider the ownership and the chance it will affect practice.

Technical interventions are only a small part of the whole. All too often online safety issues are passed to technical staff within a school – why is this? Do we send drug related issues to the science and chemistry staff because they understand the compounds? Of course, we don't. Clearly safeguarding children is everyone's responsibility and online is no exception to that.

Involving children and young people, perhaps those on a school council, is ideal, including

them in developing and driving an online safety strategy for the school.

A good place to start is 360 degree safe **www.360safe.org.uk** – SWGfL's multi-award-winning self-assessment system for schools to review, track and progress their wider online safety policy and practice. This online tool encourages collaborative, blended working with any number of people feeding into the whole strategy. 360 degree safe is free to use and used by over 14,000 schools.

**In summary:**

* *Establish an online safety lead to oversee the strategy*

* *Establish an online safety group*

* *Encourage key staff members to contribute to shaping the sections of the strategy informed by their area of expertise*

* *Draw on the advice, support and knowledge of children and parents*

# REPORTING ROUTINES

> What mechanisms does the school have in place to support pupils, staff and parents facing online safety issues?

How can you safeguard children if you don't know what they are doing online? How does safeguarding intelligence come to your attention?

Reporting is a vital part of your online safety strategy and is in two forms – passive and active.

## ACTIVE REPORTING

These are the channels that allow children (and others) to tell you something. Many schools will have a member of staff (teacher/pastoral support) to whom children can turn to seek advice and support. However, research demonstrates that the older children become (and the more sensitive the issues they experience), the less likely they are to tell a trusted adult. They are most likely to tell friends. This is where setting up peer mentoring groups can be very useful in providing escalation routes to report issues other students are facing. One free-to-use example of a peer mentoring resource is the EU ENABLE resource at **enable.eun.org**

As most safeguarding incidents now have digital dimensions, do your reporting mechanisms extend into these spaces? Children should be afforded the opportunity to report concerns and issues when and where they want to. This might involve online reporting mechanisms, anonymous reporting opportunities or simply email contact.

## PASSIVE REPORTING

These are the mechanisms to understand what is being discussed online about you and your school; if parents or children are perhaps making comments. Appreciating the sentiment and influence of comments being made is important, especially if safeguarding allegations are being made.

**In summary:**

- *Having more than one reporting route allows more reliable access to safeguarding information as it emerges or happens*

- *It is important to ensure consistency of response across all reporting routes for those routes to be trusted and valued by the school community*

- *Consider the use of technology to provide reporting routes from groups or individuals wherever they are eg anonymous reporting (SWGfL Whisper )*

- *Consider exploring the use of passive reporting routes (SWGfL Alerts) to alert to issues arising online that affect the school and its community eg staff targeted by parents; comments made about the school.*

www.swgflwhisper.org.uk | https://boost.swgfl.org.uk

# POLICY

Does the school have online safety and acceptable use policies in place? How does the school assess that they are clear, understood and respected by all children and staff?

Many Schools are statutorily required to have a safeguarding policy that meets legislative requirements; is clear; effective and well-communicated. Online Safety, if not a separate policy on its own, needs to be clearly referenced within that policy set too. This tends to mean they are detailed and long and that makes them difficult to communicate and share in their entirety with the school community. And that's a problem. Policy is the way we communicate our expectations; the way things should happen. For policy to appear in practice it needs to be communicated in a way that it becomes part of the wider school climate.

We know that the majority of schools have online safety policies and in particular Acceptable Use Policies in place. However, the question is about their implementation and relevance; are they 'clear, understood and respected?

The easiest way to determine if it is 'clear understood and respected', is to ask a child/parent/staff user 'can you tell me about how you should use the Internet here?' If the answer is the same from each, you have understanding.

**In summary:**

- *Safeguarding Policies need to meet statutory requirements and online safety is a fundamental component of those obligations*

- *Online technology, risks, attitudes and behaviours change rapidly. Ensure your policy is reviewed annually*

- *Have a collaborative approach to policy writing that encourages contribution, debate and ownership. Consider including children and the wider school community in that process. Canvass their views*

- *Distil the key points of your policy into a set of clear summary points and drip feed them into the wider school culture such as book bags, splash-screens, newsletters, event programmes and in areas where technology is used*

- *Ensure online safeguarding is cross referenced in other policies, where appropriate eg behavior, pastoral, health and safety, school trips*

- *Template online safety policies are online at **www.swgfl.org.uk/policy***

# PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

How do you ensure that all staff receive appropriate online safety training that is relevant and regularly updated?

Whilst policies are often stated as a strength by schools, our own data over the last seven years indicates professional development of staff on online safety is amongst the very weakest areas of school provision. What does your professional development programme look like?

All teaching and non-teaching staff should receive regular (at least annual) and up-to-date training. The training may be integrated into the safeguarding or child protection training. The staff should be audited for their understanding of online safety in terms of skills and knowledge. It is imperative that all staff know how to recognise, respond and resolve online safety issues in a consistent manner in line with school policy.

We'd suggest that whilst all staff should have a common understanding, some staff members have advanced training that is likely to carry some form of recognised accreditation.

**In summary:**

- *Train all staff regularly (at least annually) in safeguarding that includes online safety*

- *Include support staff. Any route through which a disclosure might come. This builds consistency of response and trust.*

- *Identify those staff whose roles mean they require more in-depth training to support their professional development.*

Access Online Safety professional development at ***www.swgfl.org.uk/training***

360 Annual Report Data (www.swgfl.org.uk/report2018)

# CURRICULUM

Describe how your school educates children and young people to build knowledge, skills and confidence when it comes to online safety? How do you assess its effectiveness?

What does your online safety curriculum look like? What are the digital skills that you are providing children with?

Your curriculum should be progressive, flexible, relevant and engages pupils' interest. It should promote online safety through teaching pupils how to stay safe, how to protect themselves from harm and how to take responsibility for their own safety and the safety of others.

Given all of the other curriculum areas that compete for priority within a school, this may seem like a challenge. There are however free to use expert schemes that provide schools with a way of weaving online safety, digital

literacy and citizenship into what is already happening in other curriculum areas.

The UKCIS framework Education for a Connected World is a valuable starting point.

**In summary:**

- *Research an online safety framework that can assist with curriculum planning*

- *Explore ways in which online safety strands are embedded across other curriculum areas*

- *Establish a measure of impact as to the effectiveness of online safety education through those curriculum subjects*

# SECURE INFRASTRUCTURE

If a school provides online spaces for teaching and learning, it needs to ensure those spaces are as safe and secure as the physical spaces it also provides. It needs to strike a fine balance between risk of harm and the obvious potential benefits technology can provide.

As well as putting in place technical solutions to ensure systems are safe from external compromise and misuse, it is also important to manage how its systems are used by the school community. This is usually through the application of appropriate filtering and monitoring.

Filtering is a school's ability to manage access to online content and at the very least it should prevent access to illegal content (images of child sexual abuse; violent pornography and content likely to draw people into terrorism). School policy then defines what other legal content is appropriate for users, managed by the filtering system.

Monitoring however should alert a school when somebody attempts to misuse the system and instigate an intervention by the school. Monitoring is a key component of

safeguarding and another intelligence route that schools are obliged to respond to.

**In summary:**

* *Ensure filtering and monitoring systems are fit for purpose. Advice and guidance can be found at the UK Safer Internet site "Appropriate Filtering & Monitoring"*

* *Regularly review filtering and monitoring logs for safeguarding alerts. If that information is collected, it needs to be acted upon.*

* *Record interventions taken that have resulted from filtering and monitoring alerts. Use that record to inform and refine filtering and monitoring policy*

To assess how your school secures its infrastructure and data, visit **www.360data.org.uk**

360 Annual Report Data (www.swgfl.org.uk/report2018)

# EVALUATION

So what? How do you know that what you're doing is having the desired impact?

Canvass opinion as your online safeguarding strategy develops to ensure you are on the right track. Short online survey forms and tools may give you an insight into how well you are doing.

How effective is your online safety education? Do students value it? Do you assess student understanding at key points in their learning journey?

What do staff need in terms of their own development? Run staff training audits to ensure limited capacity and time is used most effectively.

The 360 Tool (www.360safe.org.uk) can not only improve ownership but can track the school improvement journey you are on. The data from the tool can inform whether the approaches

made are working and can keep a record of historical improvements too.

**In summary:**

- *Track your school..' improvement journey using tools like 360 Degree safe to measure progress*

- *Canvass opinion from a variety of school stakeholders to inform your strategy*

- *Audit staff training needs to target professional development resources more effectively*

- *Use your success data to promote the online safety strategy*

- *Celebrate and signal success with the Online Safety Mark*