

Using e-communication in Schools

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Using e-communication in school

Background

The Internet is an unmanaged, open communications channel. The World Wide Web, e-mail, blogs and social networking all transmit information using the Internet's communication infrastructure internationally at low cost. Anyone can send messages, discuss ideas and publish material with little restriction. These features of the Internet make it an invaluable resource used by millions of people every day.

Schools can help protect themselves by making it clear to pupils, staff and visitors that the use of school equipment for inappropriate reasons is "unauthorised".

E-mail, text messaging and IM all provide additional channels of communication between staff and pupils and inappropriate behaviour can occur, or communications can be misinterpreted. Staff might reflect on the power of the technology to identify the sender of inappropriate messages. Pupil contact with staff needs to be through approved communication channels.

Teaching e-safety

Developing effective practice in Internet and e-mail use for teaching and learning is essential. Librarians and teachers can help pupils to learn how to distil the meaning from the mass of information provided by the Internet.

It is the responsibility of all school staff to ensure pupils use technology responsibly and that they highlight safety issues as appropriate.

Using e-communication to enhance teaching and learning

Electronic communication has become the preferred method of communication at most schools, be that text message, email, IM or other means. E-communication can bring significant educational benefits and interesting projects between schools in neighbouring villages and in different continents.

The implications of e-communication use for the school and pupils need to be thought through and appropriate safety measures put in place. Unregulated communications can provide routes to pupils that bypass the traditional school boundaries.

Much e-communication use is purely of a social nature. Schools should consider whether social message use is considered to be a useful experience of a communications tool or is it judged as low priority? Schools may decide that access to social e-communications should only be made available outside lesson hours.

Using e-mail

In a 21st century school, email is an expected means of communication between staff, management and LEA and regional colleagues. Staff are therefore expected to check their email accounts regularly and to manage their communications in an organised and professional manner.

Emails sent or received on the email system form part of the official records of the school; they are not private property. The school does not recognise any right of employees to impose restrictions on disclosure of emails within the school or the LEA. Emails may be disclosed under the Freedom of Information Act, as part of legal proceedings (e.g. tribunals), and as part of disciplinary proceedings. Users are responsible for all actions relating to their email or user account and should therefore make every effort to ensure no other person has access to their account.

Electronic –Communications etiquette

Electronic – communication allows us to send messages very quickly. Sometimes the speed and ease of use can bring about careless mistakes. It is deemed good practice to carry out a few simple checks before clicking on the 'Send' button.

1. Double check the recipient to ensure your sending to the correct person.
2. If you're sending an attachment double check the correct file has been attached. Attachments greater than 5mb should not normally be sent by email.
3. Proof read your message to check that it reads correctly and that the contents cannot be misinterpreted and cause offence.

When using e-communication, all users should:

- Ensure communications do not harm the school or LEA's reputation, bring it into disrepute, incur liability on the part of the school, or adversely impact on its image.
- Not seek to gain access to other users accounts or associated storage
- Not use the communications systems for the creation, retention or distribution of disruptive or offensive messages, images, materials or software that include offensive or abusive comments about ethnicity or nationality, gender, disabilities, age, sexual orientation, appearance, religious beliefs and practices, political beliefs or social background. Employees who receive messages with this content from other employees of the school should report the matter to their line manager.
- Not send messages that might reasonably be considered by recipients to be bullying, harassing, abusive, malicious, discriminatory, defamatory, and

libellous or contain illegal or offensive material, or foul language.

- Not upload, download, use, retain, distribute, or disseminate any images, text, materials, or software which might reasonably be considered indecent, obscene, pornographic, or illegal.
- Not engage in any activity that is likely to
 - Corrupt or destroy other users' data or disrupt the work of other users
 - Communication systems should be used for work related activities only.
 - Be a breach of copyright or license provision with respect to both programmes and data, including intellectual property rights
- Not send chain letters, spam or jokes from a school account.
- Never discuss issues that are contentious, emotional or highly confidential.

Users who receive improper messages from individuals inside or outside the school, should discuss the matter in the first instance with their head of year or line manager.

When using e-communication, staff should not:

- Use their home or personal account to communicate with pupils, parents or any official school business. If work is received by email you must use your email account officially approved by the school and keep any comments within professional matters.
- Transfer any sensitive data via electronic means without first considering the Data Security Policy.

When using e-communication, staff and parents should not:

- Hold any discussion related to other pupils.
- Discuss personal information about other pupils.
- Discuss specifics about a sensitive student issue which was not initiated by the parent or had not previously been discussed with the parent.
- Hold a discussion related to other staff.

Guidance for parents who wish to discuss matters with the school using e-communication :

- Please send only non-vital messages by this medium. Parents need to remember that teachers are not office bound and spend the most of their working day with children and then in meetings so are not routinely able to check and respond to e-mails. For example, do not use e-mail to inform a teacher that your child is not to go home on the bus. A teacher may not have time to read your message in time. Instead use the telephone to be sure your message is received and clearly understood.
- Staff are not expected to attend to e-mails at times other than normal working hours as defined in the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Guidelines.
- Your child's absence from school, academic progress, learning expectations, or behavioural issues are best addressed through a telephone conversation or by arranging a meeting with your child's teacher. An e-mail message on these matters is not appropriate.
- Please remember that e-mail is not necessarily confidential. Confidential information including medical or health concerns should be conveyed by phone or personal contact.
- It would be useful to identify yourself and/or the name of your child in the subject line of your e-mail message.
- Please keep all contacts professional. Jokes, amusing or special stories, chain letters, or commercial advertising are inappropriate and could reduce valuable teaching time.
- Parents should not use teachers private e-mail accounts to communicate about school matters.

Useful Documents

- ✓ Ceredigion E-safety Guidance
- ✓ Data and Account Security
 - School Data Handling Policy
 - School Password Policy
- ✓ Acceptable Use Policies
 - Staff AUP
 - Student AUP
 - Parent AUP
- ✓ Infrastructure and Technology
 - Internet Filtering Policy