



Subject:
**ACCEPTABLE USE OF THE INTERNET AND DIGITAL
TECHNOLOGIES IN SCHOOLS**

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Target Audience:
Principals and Boards of Governors of all grant-aided schools;
Education and Library Boards;
Council for Catholic Maintained Schools;
Transferor Representatives' Council;
Association of Governing Bodies of Grammar Schools;
Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta;
Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education;
Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum;
Examinations and Assessment;
Teachers' Unions; and
Proprietors of Independent Schools.

Summary of Contents:
This Circular draws attention to a range of guidance on the safe use of the Internet and digital technologies in schools. The guidance is available on the [ICT in schools](#) section of the DE website and should be read online. It supersedes guidance issued in 1999 on the Policy for the Acceptable Use of the Internet in Schools.

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Governor Awareness:
Essential

Status of Contents:
Guidance and implementation

Related Documents:
Circular No: 1999/25

Expiry Date:
Not Applicable

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Safe and Effective Use Policy for the Internet and Digital Technologies in Schools

Use ICT, don't abuse ICT

*Used well, digital technologies are powerful, worthwhile educational tools;
technical safeguards can partly protect users,
but education in safe, effective practices is a key goal for schools.
Where deliberate misuse occurs, schools' rules and the law apply.*

1. Introduction

Boards of Governors of grant-aided schools have a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils (Article 17 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 2003). It is also the duty of the Board of Governors to determine the measures to be taken at a school to protect pupils from abuse (Article 18 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 refers).

In the exercise of those duties, Boards of Governors must ensure that their schools have a policy on the safe, healthy, acceptable and effective use of the Internet and other digital technology tools. They must also actively promote safe and acceptable working practices for all staff and pupils: these will serve to reassure parents and guardians.

It is essential that school policy and practices be kept under frequent review as new challenges, threats and legal requirements emerge regularly. In the course of inspections, the Education and Training Inspectorate will seek to ensure that appropriate measures are in place and are being followed.

The purpose of this guidance is to draw the attention of schools to the wide range of issues which their policy should address, and to direct school governors and managers to advice on what is currently regarded as the best practice.

The Department will endeavour to identify appropriate sources of good advice on policy and practice and keep this guidance up to date at www.deni.gov.uk

The responsibility for keeping policy current and practice active rests with schools.

2. Four Safe Use Principles

The advice that follows rests on four key principles:

- i) The Internet and other technology-based tools are very powerful resources that can enhance and potentially transform teaching and learning when used effectively and appropriately. (Refer to www.empoweringschools.com for the Department's policy). As far as possible, such tools should be accessible and free from restrictions that constrain their worthwhile educational value.

- ii) Technical safeguards are (and should be) maintained to ensure that the educational use made of such tools within schools is safe and secure, while protecting both the users and the systems from abuse. It must be accepted, however, that no matter how rigorous such measures may be, they will never be completely effective.
- iii) Ensuring that all users are taught, and that they learn and exhibit, safe, responsible, ethical, moral, legal, healthy, intelligent and effective working practices, is an important educational goal which it is the responsibility of the school to promote, and for all staff to model, at all times. This is important not least because users can derive educational value from the use of technology outside school premises and through systems that may not have all of the technical safeguards found in schools. While there is no legal requirement on schools to provide advice and guidance to parents and guardians, it is, however, a responsible step for a school to take.
- iv) Deliberate abuses which arise within schools should be subject to the rules and regulations of the school; and schools should ensure that their rules and regulations are kept up to date to enable them to act appropriately and effectively when required. Deliberate abuses which happen outside schools, but which impinge upon or affect school pupils and staff, should normally be dealt with through appropriate police and legal action.

3. Structure of Guidance

The guidance is published on the DE website in the [ICT in schools](#) section and, as it contains hyperlinks to many websites containing further advice, it is recommended that the guidance be read online. The guidance is organized as follows:

1. Management Responsibilities in Schools
 - A whole-school safe and effective use policy
 - Managing and reporting incidents and securing evidence of misuse
2. Code of Safe Practice for Safe and Effective Use
 - A school code of practice
 - A code of practice for pupils
 - Legal monitoring of email and Internet use
 - A code of practice for staff
 - Filtering of non-Classroom 2000 (C2k) systems and services
3. Education in Safe and Effective Practices
 - Internet Safety Education for Pupils
 - Internet Safety Awareness for School Staff
 - Internet Awareness for Parents and Carers
 - Internet Awareness for School Governors
 - Community use of school ICT resources
4. Health and Safety
 - Safe location and supervision of computers in schools
 - Posture - ergonomics

- Interactive Whiteboards and projectors
 - Photosensitive epilepsy
 - Mobile Phone - health and safety
 - Wireless Networks
5. Digital Publishing and Software Licensing
- Digital and video images of pupils on school websites
 - Making and storing digital and video images
 - Obscene publication provision
 - Copyright and Intellectual Property Rights
 - Creative Commons Licenses
6. Social Software
7. Management Information Systems
- Data Protection and school information systems
 - School e-portfolios
 - Computer misuse in schools
 - Use of school systems for commercial purposes
 - Premium Rate Numbers and Phone Bills
8. Child Protection
- Bullying and Harassment
 - Grooming and child pornography

It should be noted that some of the above material is of general UK-wide application, and may not relate directly to Northern Ireland. The material is provided as guidance only, to assist schools in determining their own policies and arrangements. It does not constitute legal advice. The Department of Education thanks Becta, Childnet International and the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre for their assistance in preparing these guidelines.

JOHN ANDERSON