SafeICT

# Internet Monitoring

# Explaining to Parents

**TRAINING**

High quality training for teaching and support staff, online or face-to-face; in-depth training for school senior management teams and governing bodies. Engaging lessons for children and young people.

**AWARENESS**

Parental engagement is vital to ensure that children are as safe online at home as they are in school. Parental awareness sessions raise the potential risks and issues children and young people face outside school.

**COLLABORATION**

Collaborative learning amongst children and young people whilst empowering a positive e-safety message has enormous benefits. Using this across the whole curriculum increases the learning experience

**CONSULTANCY**

The world of ICT moves at an incredible pace; keeping up with this can be frustrating, particularly if you don't understand what you are looking for or what you are being told by salesmen.

| TRAINING | AWARENESS | COLLABORATION | CONSULTATION |

e-safety adviser

**Disclaimer:**

This guide is exactly that; a guide only, and is not a substitute for legal advice.

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This guide has been produced in response to some posts on the Safetynet emailing list.  Safetynet was originally set up by Becta to provide a way for schools and others to discuss issues surrounding e-safety; you can subscribe here →

http://lists.education.gov.uk/mailman/listinfo/safetynet

A recent post was from a school asking for advice after a parent had complained about the school policy of monitoring Internet in school and the (alleged) infringement of human rights.

Amongst those that responded to this question were:

Ken Corrish – (@kcorish) – Senior e-Safety Consultant with SWGfL and UK Safer Internet Centre.

Rebecca Avery – (@esafety_officer) – Kent County Council e-Safety Officer

## Introduction

Whilst sometimes seen as one of the more frustrating IT services in schools, Internet filtering is one item in the e-safety toolbox that is of particular importance. When talking about an Internet filter there are two important aspects:

Very broadly speaking

- **Filtering** - this is a pro-active measure to ensure (as much as possible) or prevent users from accessing illegal or inappropriate (by age) websites.
- **Monitoring** - this is a reactive measure and for the most part means searching, browsing or interrogating filter logs (known as the cache) for Internet misuse.

These terms are important; mention to anyone that you are monitoring their Internet use and the immediate vision is of somebody sat at a computer screen watching every move and click; that is simply not the case.

The fact that an Internet filter is in place to filter and monitor activity is of particular importance because you then have questions raised of morality such as, "It's my human right to privacy", "big brother is watching", and others.

I happen to agree with this viewpoint, but at the same time I have no issues whatsoever with any monitoring whether it be online or not - as long as it is a justifiable reason and the expectations of that monitoring are set beforehand.

Consider CCTV at your school; everybody knows it is there because you can see it and there are (or should be) signs telling people that they are being monitored; everybody knows why it is there whether they agree with it or not.....it is justified for the protection and safety of children and staff whilst in school, and also the protection of the building and its contents.

But what about Internet filtering? How many of your parents know that the online activity of their child may be monitored? How many of your staff know? Importantly, do they know why? Whilst the answer should be "yes" to all I know that isn't the case and normally with good reason; how do you know what you don't know?

As with many things we do in life it is all about managing expectations, commonly known as justifying ourselves. But it is that justification that gives us precedence for doing something that others may deem controversial.


## Why do we Filter and Monitor?

Schools filter Internet activity for two reasons:

We filter to ensure

- (as much as possible) that children and young people (and to some extent adults) are not exposed to illegal or inappropriate websites. These sites are (or should be) restricted by category dependent on the age of the user. Exposure would include browsing to

> specifically look for such material, or as a consequence of a search that returns inappropriate results.
- (as much as possible) that the school has mitigated any risk to the children and young people, and thereby reduces any liability to the school by making reasonable endeavours to ensure the safety of those children and young people.

We monitor for assurance

- (as much as possible) that no inappropriate or illegal activity has taken place.
- To add to any evidential trail for disciplinary action if necessary.


## A right to privacy?

Everybody has a right to privacy, whether adult or child.  But in certain circumstances there is a reduced expectation of privacy.  In the context of this guide, that reduction is for security and safeguarding.   This expectation is applicable whether it is school-owned equipment, or personally owned equipment used on the school network (and in some cases even if that personally owned equipment isn't used on the school network, but is used in school or for school business).


## Managing Expectations

It is the expectations of the user that is particularly important; this will include school staff, students and parents/guardians of the students.  Consent is not a requirement, however you are required by law (Data Protection Act 1998) to make all reasonable efforts to inform users that you are monitoring them.  By making reasonable efforts you are working "with" the students and parents, not just merely telling them.

In reality, very few schools actually monitor Internet activity, and neither do local authorities or RBC's (remember, monitor is different to filter).  Whether that is right or not is out of scope for this paper, but the fact is you could; in fact Ofsted make clear that schools should be managing their own filter, and this would include monitoring for inappropriate activity, overly-restrictive filtering or otherwise.

Of course, some will disagree with what you are doing, but that is their right and again consent is not a requirement.  It is the understanding, not the consent that is important.


## Explaining to parents, staff and students

As previously mentioned, it is the understanding that is important, not the consent.  It is not appropriate to simply have a sentence in the school e-Safety or Acceptable Use Policy and for that to suffice; privacy is always an emotive issue.

Here are the "must do's":

- Statement in e-Safety Policy, e.g. "All staff, students and parents of students will be informed that Internet activity may be monitored in order to ensure as much as possible that users are not exposed to illegal or inappropriate websites, and to ensure as much as possible that users do not actively seek access to illegal or inappropriate websites," or words to that effect.  You would then briefly explain why.
- Statement in Acceptable Use Policy, e.g. "Users are reminded that Internet activity may be monitored".  That's it, you don't need anything more than that.  Don't forget, the AUP is simply a concise "cut-out-and-keep" version of the e-Safety Policy containing the rules.
- Explain to staff why monitoring is important, allow them to voice any concerns and set their expectations of how the data can be used.
- Explain to the students as well, allow them to ask questions.
- A letter home to parents, again explaining that the Internet activity may be monitored, and why.  Assure the parents that you talk to the students, who are allowed to voice concerns and ask questions.  This letter would normally form a part of the term 1 paperwork; ideally it would include the Acceptable Use Policy and a signature sheet.  Parents (and students if old enough) should sign the letter to say they understand, not to agree as again, consent is not required.
- Don't forget, Ofsted require that schools engage with parents and students when creating policy.

## Summary

- Filtering is different to monitoring.
- You do not require consent.
- But you must tell users if you do monitor, or if you have the facility to monitor.
- Set user expectations; explain under what circumstances it may be a requirement to monitor.
- Ensure you have a good statement in your e-Safety Policy.
- Ensure you have informed users that Internet use "May be subject to monitoring" in your Acceptable Use Policy.
- Ensure parents are informed, the reason why monitoring may take place, and they sign as read and understood.

### SEE NEXT PAGE FOR SAMPLE PARENTS LETTER

## Sample Letter to Parents:

Note:  This is an example only; do not use word for word but tailor to your own requirements.

Dear Parent/Guardian

Use of the Internet in school is a vital part of the education of your son/daughter.  Our school makes extensive use of the Internet in order to enhance their learning and provide facilities for research, collaboration and communication.

You will be aware that the Internet is host to a great many illegal and inappropriate websites, and as such we will ensure as far as possible that your child is unable to access sites such as this. We are able to do this using advanced software known as an Internet filter.  This filter categorizes websites in accordance with their content; the school allows or denies these categories dependent upon the age of the child.

The software also allows us to monitor Internet use; the Internet filter keeps logs of which user has accessed what Internet sites, and when.  Security and safeguarding of your child are of the utmost importance in our school; in order to ensure that there have been no attempts of inappropriate Internet activity we may occasionally monitor these logs.  If we believe there has been questionable activity involving your child we will inform you of the circumstances.

At the beginning of each school year we explain the importance of Internet filtering to your child. Furthermore we explain that there has to be a balance of privacy and safety; we also inform them that we can monitor their activity.  All children are given the opportunity to ask questions and give their viewpoint.  We would like to extend that opportunity to you also; if you have any questions or concerns please contact "name@ourschool.county.sch.uk"


Yours Sincerely

Alan Mackenzie

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I have read this letter and understand that my child's Internet access could be monitored to ensure that there is no illegal or inappropriate activity by any user of the school network.  I acknowledge that this has been explained to my child and that he/she has had the opportunity to voice their opinion, and to ask questions.

Name of Parent/Guardian –

Name of Child –

Signature -                              Date -