

# E-safety: the experience in English educational establishments

An audit of e-safety practices: 2005

Executive summary and recommendations

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## Executive Summary

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This report presents the findings of research examining e-safety – the risks associated with the use of new technologies - in English schools and colleges in 2005. It is based on a survey of 444 schools, in-depth interviews with 61 teachers, a survey of 25 English Local Education Authorities (LEAs) and five Regional Broadband Consortia (RBCs). It examines:

- the technical safety measures being used in schools and colleges to reduce the risks to children
- policies and procedures that are currently in place to manage e-safety in educational environments
- programmes of e-safety education aimed at pupils, parents and teachers
- how schools and colleges access and use the support that is available to them
- models of good practice that reduce risk and could be shared with others.

It provides professionals concerned with e-safety in educational settings with an accurate and up-to-date review of the challenges posed by new technologies. Then, based on the strategies in evidence, it considers how these challenges may be addressed. This first section outlines some of the key findings of the research, offering recommendations for future policy and practice.

1. Having a designated Internet Safety Coordinator in place *and* having an Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) better equips teachers to deal with breaches of e-safety.

Some educational establishments are better equipped to deal with e-safety than others. Where there is an Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) *and* an Internet Safety Coordinator is in place, teachers report that they are better able to deal with breaches of e-safety. Half of all educational establishments surveyed did not have a designated Internet or E-safety Safety Coordinator (see Section 3.1) and many had not reviewed their AUPs recently. Risks to children may be reduced if educational establishments can address the growth in the use of new technologies and

any attendant risks within their AUP, and, where a designated individual can take responsibility for keeping others up to date.

2. Some educational establishments are not being provided with up-to-date support and advice about e-safety by their Local Education Authority (LEA).

Not all educational establishments' Acceptable Use Policies cover issues regarding emerging technologies, or technologies that are not permitted to be used in educational environments, despite evidence of widespread recreational use by pupils. The research suggests a key role for LEAs in this regard. Teachers report that they, and their pupils, need more advice about certain issues: up-to-date support and advice concerning the viewing of unsuitable online material (sites with pornographic, violent, racist or terrorist content); and bullying via chat rooms, email or websites (see Section 5.1.5). The current advice provided to educational establishments by LEAs does not necessarily reflect this need.

3. Some educational establishments are not being provided with up-to-date support and advice about e-safety by the British Educational Communications and Technologies Agency (Becta).

Teachers in Primary schools are less likely to use the support and advice offered by Becta than teachers in Secondary schools (see Section 3.1). All educational establishments are more likely to seek support and advice from their LEA than from Becta. Teachers' awareness of Becta and the support and advice it can provide may be limited and the Agency needs to address its lack of visibility in English educational establishments.

4. Breaches of e-safety are most likely to occur among the older pupils in both Primary and Secondary schools. The most common breach is the viewing of unsuitable online material. However, the research found that where pupils were taught about e-safety, all breaches of e-safety were reduced.

Overall, breaches of e-safety occur most commonly in Year 6 of Primary school and in Years 10 and 11 of Secondary school (see Section 5.1). The patterns of breaches of e-safety suggest that pupils are more vulnerable in specific school years. Some risks associated with e-safety are age and gender specific, for example, risks such as contact with inappropriate persons (often termed 'grooming') are rare, but most often affects girls in Year Nine, whereas plagiarism peaks in Years Six, Ten and Eleven – as pupils prepare for crucial tests or examinations and is more common among boys. Therefore, the risks children face and the support educational establishments require to deal with them may be predicted to some degree.

5. Breaches of e-safety are more likely to occur in educational establishments where pupils are allowed to bring their own personal equipment on to the premises (such as laptops, portable storage devices, etc.). In some cases, such as incidents of bullying via mobile phone, breaches are not only more likely to occur, but also occur with greater frequency when mobile phones are allowed on the premises.

The research suggests the need to consider what equipment is allowed on to educational premises and how this may increase the risk of breaches to e-safety. The risks could be reduced by a more careful consideration of what equipment is allowed and the contexts in which it can be used. Educational establishments may be inadvertently increasing their exposure to breaches of e-safety and be compounding the risks pupils face as a result of the lack of clarity around personal equipment use. This then raises tensions around the positive educational capabilities of new technologies and any potential negative impacts.

6. Teachers ability to deal with breaches of e-safety varies according to the training and support they receive, the policies and procedures in place in schools and the effectiveness of technical systems.

The extent to which teachers are equipped to deal with breaches of e-safety and the risks these pose to pupils varied across educational establishments. Although some had clear policies and procedures in place

to manage e-safety, coupled with training, support and technical systems that teachers' perceived to be effective, many did not. The research points to clear gaps in the strategic management of e-safety in English educational establishments and suggests that the risks associated with breaches of e-safety can be directly reduced by adopting coherent strategies.

## Recommendations

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### **1. A strategic and integrated approach towards e-safety is required in educational establishments.**

E-safety needs to become integrated into educational establishments through a range of measures to ensure that it is addressed in an holistic manner. This could be done in three key ways;

- E-safety should be referred to in behavioural, anti-bullying, and child protection policies, as well as being part of every home-school agreement, so that awareness is raised amongst all members of the school community.
- One member of staff should act as designated Internet or E-safety Coordinator. This person would have responsibility for maintaining and monitoring strategies and systems to ensure that e-safety remains a priority.
- E-safety needs to be integrated into the curriculum, with direction and materials provided for teachers across all key stages and sectors.

### **2. A publicity campaign is needed to increase the visibility of Becta in English schools and colleges.**

Teachers and other key staff in educational establishments need to be made aware of the support, advice and resources available to them. The research shows that teachers are most likely to utilise their LEA in relation to e-safety issues.

Becta need to consider whether they want educational establishments to access them directly, in which case they need to implement a high profile awareness campaign and ensure that they are able to cater for any subsequent increase in demand for their services. Alternatively, Becta could choose to channel resources through LEAs so that teachers benefit from Becta's expertise at a local level.

### **3. Issues relating to mobile technologies and e-safety need to be addressed in teaching and learning.**

The research has found that where pupils are taught about e-safety, breaches of e-safety are reduced. Thus, to avoid, or exclude, teaching about new mobile technologies is to deny both the inevitable evolution of technology and the proven recreational use of these technologies by young people. Teaching materials need to be regularly reviewed in the



light of emerging technologies in order to prevent pupils being placed at increased risk.

#### **4. Monitoring e-safety in English educational establishments should be facilitated by LEAs**

In order to gain a greater understanding of the challenges faced by teachers responsible for e-safety, more effective monitoring of the situation in educational establishments is required. LEAs may be best placed to carry out this task, particularly paying regard to any relationship between the efficacy of e-safety strategies and the prevalence of e-safety breaches.

#### **5. Targeted directives are required to counter breaches of e-safety amongst particular pupil groups.**

The research shows that some pupils are more likely to be involved in breaches of e-safety than others. Pupils most commonly involved are those at the higher end of the school age range (i.e. Year 6 Primary and Years Ten and Eleven Secondary). Breaches are also influenced by gender, for example, girls are predominantly involved in incidents of bullying via mobile phones, whereas boys are more involved in incidents of plagiarism and the viewing of unsuitable online material. Therefore, strategies could be targeted specifically at groups of pupils based on known risks. Such an approach would protect pupils and reduce the problems associated with breaches of e-safety for staff.

#### **6. Educational establishments need to consider alternative ways of managing the use of personal equipment brought onto their premises by pupils.**

Although it is important not to overstate the tensions between the use of new technologies inside and outside school, the findings of this study show a clear association between the use of personal equipment on educational premises (e.g. laptops, mobile phones) and breaches of safety. That is, permitting the use of certain equipment or devices may increase risk. Therefore, educational establishments may need to develop new approaches to monitoring the appropriate use of such technologies on their premises.

## **7. Teachers require support that is tailored to their existing levels of expertise, but that takes account of the increased capabilities and uses of new technologies**

The research found that the support provided to and used by teachers varied in terms of its quality and relevance to their needs. The provision of such support (for example, programmes of education) was variable and more likely to be implemented in Primary schools. The needs of teachers should act as the starting point for a comprehensive training programme in e-safety, made available contingent on teachers' needs as opposed to their designated roles and responsibilities.