

**Subject:****Policy for the Acceptable Use of the Internet in Schools****Circular Number:**  
**1999/25****Date of Issue:**  
29 September 1999**Audience:**

- Principals and Boards of Governors of all grant-aided schools;
- Education and Library Boards;
- Council for Catholic Maintained Schools;
- Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment;
- Institutions of Higher Education;
- Teachers' Unions;
- Other educational interests.

**Summary of Contents:**

It is important that schools should draw up and implement a policy on the Acceptable Use of the Internet, and advise parents of pupils accordingly. A policy document, produced by the Education Technology Strategic Management Group, is attached to this Circular. The document may be adapted by schools to suit their needs, and should be formally adopted by school governors. The ability of a school to demonstrate that it has an effective policy in place is a precondition of benefiting from the forthcoming NOF-funded teacher training on the use of ICT in the classroom, and, by extension, the receipt of the Classroom 2000 managed service. Both the policy and further advice on this topic can be found on the NINE website at [www.nine.org.uk](http://www.nine.org.uk).

**Enquiries:**

Any enquiries about this policy document should be addressed to the Education and Library Boards' IT Advisers.

**Status of Contents:**

Advice on school policy-making. Governor awareness essential.

**Related Documents:**

None

**Superseded Documents:**

None

**Expiry Date:**

Not applicable

**DENI & NINE Websites:**

This Circular is also available  
on  
<http://www.deni.gov.uk>

and on  
<http://www.nine.org.uk>

**POLICY FOR THE ACCEPTABLE USE OF THE INTERNET IN SCHOOLS**

**Strategic Management Group  
Northern Ireland Education Technology Strategy**

**September 1999**

## **POLICY FOR THE ACCEPTABLE USE OF THE INTERNET IN SCHOOLS**

The following safeguards may be adapted and expanded to suit the requirements of individual schools.

### **1. Staff and Pupils**

a. When using the Internet, all users must comply with all copyright, libel, fraud, discrimination and obscenity laws, and all school staff (both teachers and support staff) are expected to communicate in a professional manner consistent with the rules of behaviour governing employees in the education sector.

b. Pupils are responsible for their good behaviour on the school networks, just as they are on and off school premises. While the use of information and communication technologies is a required aspect of the statutory Northern Ireland Curriculum, access to the Internet and to NINE Connect remains a privilege and not a right. It is given to pupils who act in a considerate and responsible manner, and should be withdrawn if they fail to maintain acceptable standards of use.

c. Staff should ensure that pupils know and understand that no Internet user is permitted to:

- retrieve, send, copy or display offensive messages or pictures;
- use obscene or racist language;
- harass, insult or attack others;
- damage computers, computer systems or computer networks;
- violate copyright laws;
- use another user's password;
- trespass in another user's folders, work or files;
- intentionally waste resources (such as on-line time and consumables);
- use the network for unapproved commercial purposes.

d. Use of the NINE Connect services by the Northern Ireland education community must be in support of the aims and objectives of the Northern Ireland Curriculum.

## **2. Location and Supervision**

- a. It is an absolute requirement that the school ensures that access to the Internet provided to staff and pupils in any school or educational institution through any Internet Service Provider is a filtered service. All users should be aware that the school can and does track and record the sites visited, the searches made on the Internet and e-mail sent and received by individual users.
- b. Internet access for pupils in schools should be available only on computers that are in highly-used areas of the school such as classrooms, libraries, study rooms, computer laboratories and media centres. Machines which are connected to the Internet should be in full view of people circulating in the area.
- c. While using the Internet at school, pupils should, where possible, be supervised. However, when appropriate, pupils may pursue electronic research independent of staff supervision if they have been granted permission. In all cases, pupils should be reminded of their responsibility to use these resources in line with the school policy on acceptable use.
- d. Schools should ensure that all pupils understand how they are to use the Internet appropriately and why the rules exist.
- e. Network administrators may review files and communications to maintain system integrity and ensure that users are using the system responsibly. While normal privacy is respected and protected by password controls, as with the Internet itself, users must not expect files stored on NINE Connect servers to be absolutely private.

## **3. NINE Connect**

- a. NINE Connect supports the implementation and sharing of effective practices and collaborative networking across the province, as well as nationally and internationally. Staff should be encouraged to use NINE Connect resources in their teaching and learning activities, to conduct research, and for contact with others in the education world.
- b. Electronic information-handling skills are now fundamental to the preparation of citizens and future employees in the Information Age. Staff should be encouraged to investigate the possibilities provided by access to this electronic information and communication resource, and blend its use, as appropriate, within the curriculum. They should model appropriate and effective use, and provide guidance and instruction to pupils in the acceptable use of the Internet.

## **4. Examples of Acceptable and Unacceptable Use**

- a. On-line activities which are encouraged include, for example:
  - the use of email and computer conferencing for communication between colleagues, between pupil(s) and teacher(s), between pupil(s) and pupil(s), between schools and industry;

- use of the Internet to investigate and research school subjects, cross-curricular themes and topics related to social and personal development;
- use of the Internet to investigate careers and Further and Higher education;
- the development of pupils' competence in ICT skills and their general research skills.

b. On-line activities which are not permitted include, for example:

- searching, viewing and/or retrieving materials that are not related to the aims of the curriculum or future careers;
- copying, saving and/or redistributing copyright protected material, without approval;
- subscribing to any services or ordering any goods or services, unless specifically approved by the school;
- playing computer games or using other interactive 'chat' sites, unless specifically assigned by the teacher;
- using the network in such a way that use of the network by other users is disrupted (for example: downloading large files during peak usage times; sending mass email messages);
- publishing, sharing or distributing any personal information about a user (such as: home address; email address; phone number, etc.);
- any activity that violates a school rule.

## **5. Advice for Parents**

a. While in school, teachers will guide pupils toward appropriate materials on the Internet. Outside school, parents or guardians bear the same responsibility for such guidance as they would normally exercise with information sources such as television, telephones, movies, radio and other media.

b. Appropriate home use of the Internet by children can be educationally beneficial, and can make a useful contribution to home and school work. It should, however, be supervised, and parents should be aware that they are responsible for their children's use of Internet resources at home.

c. Offering advice to parents is good practice and schools should therefore advise parents that they provide filtered and monitored access to the Internet for pupils, and consider drawing to their attention appropriate guidance and advice on its use which they might find helpful at home.

d. Such guidance and advice should include the following:

- parents should discuss with their children the rules for using the Internet and decide together when, how long, and what comprises appropriate use;
- parents should get to know the sites their children visit, and talk to them about what they are learning;
- parents should ensure that they give their agreement before their children give out personal identifying information in any electronic communication on the Internet, such as a picture, an address, a phone number, the school name, or financial information such as credit card or bank details. In this way they can protect their children (and themselves) from unwanted or unacceptable overtures from strangers, from unplanned expenditure and from fraud;
- parents should encourage their children not to respond to any unwelcome, unpleasant or abusive messages, and to tell them if they receive any such messages or images. If the message comes from an Internet service connection provided by the school or by NINE Connect, they should immediately inform the school.

## **Background to the Policy for the Acceptable Use of the Internet in Schools, Useful Addresses and Acknowledgements**

### **1. Introduction**

a. The importance of drawing up and implementing a policy on the acceptable use of the Internet cannot be emphasised too strongly. The consequences of not having an effective policy in place can vary from the clogging of networks and the financial drain resulting from, for example, unsupervised surfing, to the viewing, downloading and distribution of unsuitable and offensive material. This policy, produced by the Education Technology Strategic Management Group, (ET SMG), consists of core provisions which schools should adopt as a minimum standard, and which they may adapt, expand and personalise to suit their own circumstances.

b. All schools have been provided with the necessary hardware, software and line connections (either new or appropriately upgraded) for the "NINE Connect" services, which will provide access to the Northern Ireland Network for Education (NINE) and the Internet. Schools' ability to access the Internet, and use it in classroom teaching, will be greatly enhanced when Classroom 2000, the systems and hardware managed service for all the Province's schools, starts to roll out in early 2000. In relation to this development, training in basic Information and Communications Technology skills is being provided by the education and library boards: and a 2-3 year programme training in the subject-specific use of ICT, financed by the New Opportunities Fund, will commence in September 1999.

c. NINE Connect will operate a filtering mechanism on both Internet searches and Internet mail. But a filtering service, no matter how thorough, can never be totally secure, and it is essential that Internet use is complemented by a well-understood policy on acceptable use.

d. It must be noted that if a school chooses to access the Internet through alternative or additional service providers, it is responsible for ensuring that effective filtering and monitoring mechanisms are put in place. All users should be made aware that their use of the Internet is monitored and that action will be taken to counter any abuse.

### **2. The Internet**

The Internet is an electronic information highway connecting many thousands of computers all over the world and millions of individual subscribers. This global "network of networks" is not governed by any entity. This means that there are no limits or checks on the kind of information that is maintained by, and accessible to, Internet users. The educational value of appropriate information on the Internet is substantial. Because, however, the Internet is composed of information from a vast array of sources world-wide, it includes some material that is not of educational value in the context of the school. This material includes information which may be inaccurate, abusive, profane, sexually oriented, racist or illegal. In order to guard young people from any inherent dangers, it is the joint responsibility of school staff and the parent or guardian of each pupil to educate the pupil about his or her responsibility when using the Internet.

### **3. The NINE Connect Service**

All schools in Northern Ireland have been provided with access to the Internet, electronic mail and on-line computer conferencing through "NINE Connect" (the provision of hardware, software and connectivity). NINE Connect comprises a public web site and on-line computer conferencing and a private Intranet across the province which provides email and electronic data interchange for the secure exchange of data. In order to maximise the benefits of the service and to help minimise any risks which might arise from Internet use, NINE Connect has installed filtering software which operates by blocking thousands of inappropriate web sites and by barring inappropriate items, terms and searches in both the Internet and email. Nonetheless, no filtering service can be completely foolproof, and the only sure way to ensure that users behave in a responsible manner is for schools and other users to provide education in acceptable use of these resources, backed by clear policy guidelines.

### **4. Advice for Parents**

Free advice for parents is available from the following sources:

Parents' Information Network, PIN, PO Box 16394, London SE1 3ZP  
(<http://www.pin-parents.com>) Tel: 0891 633 644

Schools can order, in bulk and for the cost of delivery, free independent PIN guides to distribute to parents on the topics of buying computers, software and the Internet, and using computers at home to support homework.

NCH Action for Children: Central Office, NCH Action for Children, 85 Highbury Park, London N5 1UD (<http://www.nchaafc.org.uk/internet/index.html>) Tel: 0171 226 2033

### **5. Acknowledgements**

The ET SMG wishes to thank the following organisations for their assistance in drawing up this policy guidance document.

1. British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (BECTa) ([www.becta.org.uk](http://www.becta.org.uk)).
2. National Association for Co-ordinators and Teachers of IT (ACITT) ([www.acitt.org.uk/aup.html](http://www.acitt.org.uk/aup.html)).
3. Northern Ireland IT Advisers Group.
4. Bellingham Public Schools, USA ([www.bham.wednet.edu/permis2.hmt](http://www.bham.wednet.edu/permis2.hmt)).
5. Boulder Valley Schools, USA ([bvsd.k12.co.us/aup/TC.html](http://bvsd.k12.co.us/aup/TC.html)).
6. Child Safety on the Information Highway. National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, 1994.

