Guidelines

Note The sites listed below are not under the control of this department and no responsibility can be taken for any material contained therein

Browsing the World Wide Web

Setting up content

- Preview or evaluate websites and internal links before providing student access
- Alternatively, use an education web portal such as ScoilNet as a means of sourcing websites that have been previewed and approved by educators
- Ensure online learning is directed and task-oriented. Consider the use of WebQuests (see below) or curriculum-focused websites such as TeachNet Ireland
- Bookmark websites and encourage student to locate websites in this way
- Consider offline browsing (see below) or the implementation of a virtual learning environment such as DigitalBrain for controlled access to the Internet

Administration

- Ensure pupils do not have the master Internet password of their Internet service account
- Place computer in an area of the class where the monitor is clearly visible
- Have the ICT co-ordinator regularly monitor all Internet usage
- Set time limits for Internet use to discourage aimless surfing
- Keep a record of which students are allocated to each pc and how long they have been online. This can be done automatically or by employing specialised applications

Student awareness

- Encourage any student who accidentally encounters illegal material to switch off their monitor immediately and report it to their teacher
- Teach students how to evaluate websites as part of improving literacy skills
- Ask students to ignore or close marketing banners that appear on certain websites
- Remind students of any aspect of the school policy and sanctions that relate to browsing the Internet

Offline browsing

As mentioned above, offline browsing can be an alternative to browsing the internet using a live connection. The main advantage of this is that it reduces the inconvenience of heavy traffic, broken network connections and sites that no longer exist. A download manager or Internet agent such as WebWhacker can facilitate the process of downloading an entire website, including text, graphics and HTML links directly to a hard drive. It is important to note that current copyright law is, generally, in favour of limiting the use of downloaded materials to classroom and student use. It is, however, advisable to check if copyright law relates specifically to downloading entire websites from the Internet.

WebQuests

A WebQuest is a discovery-based activity that presents student groups with one or more problem-solving tasks on a given topic. It usually takes the form of a website which is published by students or teachers and which contains links to online resources on various aspects of that topic. Students begin the WebQuest by learning some common background knowledge, then dividing into groups and taking on individual roles and tasks. The idea is that individuals effectively become experts on one aspect of the topic.

Finally, students combine their learning by completing a summarising activity, for example, presenting their analysis to real world experts.

Virtual learning environments

Virtual learning environments (VLEs) are web-based interfaces that assist learning and teaching by providing and integrating online resources and tools. Although mainly used for distance education and at third level, virtual learning environments are increasingly being explored and tested by schools at primary and post primary level. There are many commercial products on the market, including DigitalBrain,TopClass, LearningSpace and WebCT. However, there is no reason to presume that independent tools could not be combined to create an online learning environment. In general, virtual learning environments contain the following features:

- A facility for the delivery of materials
- A file upload area for teachers and students
- A tool for timetabling, posting to notice boards and using a calendar.
- A communication mechanism, i.e., one to one, one to many, synchronous and asynchronous (chat rooms, email, newsgroups etc)
- Password based access
- Conferencing tools
- Multimedia resources
- An administration tool for student tracking and compiling progress records
- Class lists and student homepages
- A self-testing tool

Useful links
http://www.teachnet.ie
http://webquest.sdsu.edu/index.html
http://www.digitalbrain.com
http://www.sitesforteachers.com
http://cws.internet.com/agents.html

Be Wise on the Net Checklist

The Internet hosts a wide range of websites - personal, commercial, educational and so on. However, the credibility of some websites or organisations may be questionable, therefore presenting a risk to children's online safety. The following **Be Wise on the Net Checklist** may be used as a starting point for teachers or students to assess the safety components offered by websites.

Website title:
URL:
This website contains the following safety features:

- A Privacy Statement is automatically provided.
- The site is updated on a regular basis.
- The website title is indicative of its content.
- Icons, images and text that link externally to other websites can be easily identified.
- The copyright status of the information contained on the website is such that information can be reproduced for educational purposes.
- The author has indicated the source of their materials where necessary to do so.

This website contains a chat room with the following safety features:

- An ignore button. (Allows you to ignore a particular chat user.)
- Facilitated/supervised chat sessions.
- A reporting facility (This is useful if material is or users are offensive.)
- A facility to save chat conversations.

Other safety considerations include:

- The name of the author is clearly stated. TIP - The author's name is usually near the top or the bottom of the page. If you can't find a name, check for a copyright credit (©) or link to an organisation.
- The name of the organisation can be clearly TIP - Check the domain name of the identified. organisation (i.e., .com, .org, .edu, .gov, .net) as the type of organisation behind a website can give an indication of its credibility.
- There is information about the author's TIP - Look for biographical information or the credentials. author's affiliations (university department, organisation, corporate title, etc.).

- There is a physical contact phone number, TIP - Check for biographical information email address and postal address for the author's affiliations (university author and/or organisation. department, organisation, corporate title, etc.).

Searching the World Wide Web

Below is a list of guidelines that may be useful in ensuring that (a) independent searching of the Internet during a lesson is effective and (b) the risk of accessing irrelevant or inappropriate material is minimised for students.

- Consider using search engines that have been designed for students with Internet safety in mind. These include: http://www.ajkids.com/index.asp, http://www.yahooligans.com, http://www.onekey.com/live/index.htm, http://www.education-world.com, http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/KidsClick!
- Agree with students on what is considered as targeted or relevant information and what is seen as distractions to the task at hand
- Some children in Special Education may need to be directed to use certain key words, and have proper spelling of them provided.
- Be clear about your search topic and related concepts. For example, you may wish to search for 'children's websites?
- Develop a list of search terms, for example, synonyms or alternative spellings for each concept, for example, ?kids sites'
- To search for derivatives of a word, consider using a 'wild card' or 'truncation' symbol such as an asterisk* at the end of a word. This will retrieve all words that begin with that root.
- Refine the search by putting three words inside quotation marks, for example, 'Internet lesson plan'. This will return only pages, which have all three words next to each other.
- To connect terms, most computer systems use logical connectors (known as Boolean operators) such as **AND, OR** and **NOT. AND** ensures that ALL search terms are present. OR ensures that ANY one search term is present. NOT excludes unwanted terms.

Other Considerations
Some teachers may also prefer to:

- Preview and select suitable websites before students begin their own searches.
- Test results of child-friendly search engines for the age appropriateness of content.
- Use education indexes such as www.thegateway.org to locate specific education material.
- Finally, if students are to benefit from searching the Internet independently, they will require instruction, guidance and assistance. This will allow them to develop and refine their searching and evaluation techniques, learning skills which may be considered valuable and lifelong.

Useful links
http://www.landmark-project.com/workshops/boolean.html
http://www.ncsu.edu/midlink/tutorial/web.search.strat.html

Downloading

- Install and update anti-virus software. This, in conjunction with good housekeeping, can greatly reduce the threat caused by computer viruses.
- All floppy disks should remain within the confines of the computer room. It is not advisable to let students bring them home or return with them to school
- When the sender of an email is unknown to the recipient, avoid clicking on attachments containing an executable file.
- Check if spyware is present by consulting a database of spyware products such as http://www.spychecker.com. The most popular and more effective anti spyware tools such as Windows Defender (formerly Microsoft Antispyware) http://microsoft.com/athome/security/spyware/software/default.mspx , Adware http://www.lavasoftusa.com/software/adaware , Spybot http://www.safer-networking.org/en/index.html
- Websites may be downloaded for offline use using programs such as WebWhacker,WebFerret etc.
- Teachers and students are advised to be informed about copyright issues when using digital material downloaded from the Internet for inclusion in school websites or educational multimedia programs.
- It is considered to good practice to seek permission from a website author or designer before reproducing material for educational use.

Other Considerations
Inform students of the benefits and risks of freeware, shareware, clipart and public information.

Useful links
http://www.cai.ie

http://www.copyright.gov/circs/circ1.html
http://cws.internet.com/agents.html

Email

- Consider using class-based email addresses such as rangultan@scoil.ie whereby students have a degree of anonymity.
- Educate students to resist forwarding chain mail as it clogs the network and increases the downloading time of legitimate emails.
- Advise students not to open email attachments when the sender is unknown to them as such attachments may contain a virus.
- Ensure that students are aware of reporting procedures in relation to receiving illegal or harmful material.
- Never click on 'remove email from mailing list' as this validates your email address and ensures future spamming.
- Consider implementing filtering software that offers a facility to filter email. (A web-based tool such as http://www.mail2web.com will allow you to check all emails on your server before downloading. This enables you to manually delete spam or inappropriate material.)

Useful links
http://www.freedownloadscenter.com/Email_Tools/Anti-SPAM_Tools
http://www.cloudmark.com/products

Chat rooms

Listed below are guidelines designed to help teachers use chat rooms as effectively and safely as possible.

Physical environment

- Allocate a computer or group of computers for chat room use, where chat can be easily monitored.
- Position the computer so that the monitor faces outward.
- Always ensure that chat room usage is supervised by a teacher who is familiar with chat rooms.
- Set time limits and prepare material relevant to the subject for discussion.

Choice of chat rooms

- Use educational chat rooms that are 'age and/or ability appropriate'.
- Ensure that there is a facility in the chat room that allows conversations to be saved.
- Ensure that there is a facility to report offensive chat room users.
- Check if there is an 'ignore' facility in the chat room.
- Consider the use of usernames.

Student awareness

- Nominate a student in each class/group to chat as part of an organised activity and report information gathered to the class.
- Inform students of the risks associated with chat rooms.
- Remind students of how the school AUP addresses chat room use.
- Stress that any online bullying or receipt of illegal material should be reported immediately to the teacher supervising the chat session.
- Educate students to stay in the public area of a chat room. Children are often invited to 'whisper' which means to leave the public area of the chat room and engage in one to one communication.
- Advise students to practise netiquette, i.e., etiquette on the Internet.

Other considerations
The school needs to consider how to address the likelihood of a student revealing their true identity or personal details in a chat room, either by accident or deliberately. It is advised that this type of scenario be covered in the school AUP. Some schools may operate a policy whereby they alert parents to any instance relating to disclosure of identity. Finally, teachers shouldn't be afraid to utilise chat rooms in a controlled way in their teaching as this can create many educational possibilities. However, unmonitored, unstructured access is not advised.

Useful links
http://www.gridclub.com is an example of an educational chat room aimed at 7-11 year olds.

Publishing a school website

Publishing a school or class website presents a wide range of learning opportunities for both teachers and students. Often, as students with advanced technology skills become project leaders, teachers take on a new role as either facilitator or learner. Through this activity, curricular resources can be shared, collaborative projects can be undertaken and the school can be promoted within the wider community.

- Identify the purpose and structure of the website.
- Define what is considered appropriate for publication on the school website. This should be included in the school policy.
- Consider who has access to the server aside from the IT Co-ordinator.
- Assign roles and responsibilities to those classes or teachers who manage information on the web server.
- Never publish class lists.
- Photographs of children should focus on the activity they are engaged in.
- Never publish a student's name beside their photograph.
- Permission to publish student work, photographs, video or audio clips should be sought from parents either as part of the school policy or independently.
- Reference student work by username.
- Consider copyright laws, privacy rights and data protection regulations.

Other considerations

Consider the need for editorial responsibility. In the context of the Internet, identifying editorial responsibility and accountability can be very difficult. There is no legal requirement that material published on the Internet have an identified editor. However, if it is possible to identify the editor of online content then that person, or persons, may be held liable for their involvement. In respect of large websites, different parts of a site may have different editors and this will most likely be the case with schools.

To avoid online plagiarism, seek permission to use copyrighted content from the website author. A permission template available from http://www.landmark-project.com/permission1.php can be used for this task.

Useful links
http://www.ncte.ie/ICTAdviceSupport/AdviceSheets/SchoolWebsites
http://www.lightlink.com/tjweber/Springboard/#Download
http://www.landmark-project.com/permission1.php

Newsgroups/discussion forums

Newsgroups, discussion forums and message boards are electronic forums where ideas and knowledge can be exchanged. The term 'Usenet' refers to a collection of newsgroups. Currently there are thousands of newsgroups covering a range of different topics. Unlike chat rooms, newsgroups, discussion forums and message boards do not function in live or 'real' time.

- Check if a licensing agreement or additional newsreader software such as 'Free Agent' is necessary.
- Consider which forums are provided by the school's ISP (Internet Service Provider).
- Are there any forums in general that are relevant to the needs of the school and the delivery of the curriculum?
- Be informed about how the school intends to monitor the use of newsgroups of each class.
- Stress to students the importance of reporting inappropriate material and online harassment to teachers and relevant organisations.
- Consider downloading a free discussion board forum from the Internet and incorporating it into the school website or intranet.

Useful links
http://www.myforum.net
http://www.ezboard.com.
http://teachers.net/chatboard

Netiquette

The term 'netiquette' is a compound of the words 'network' and 'etiquette'. It refers to maintaining good manners when interacting with others while online. The following are basic guidelines for netiquette with regard to email, chat rooms, discussion boards and newsgroups. Teachers may find these useful when fostering standards of Internet behaviour among students.

Email netiquette

- Use proper spelling, grammar and capital letters, even if this isn't always the standard in email.
- Seek permission of the original sender before forwarding their email or it may be perceived as an invasion of privacy.
- Use humour and sarcasm with care, as messages can easily be misinterpreted.
- Consider using 'smileys' (emoticons) if you need to indicate to the reader that you are joking. Keep in mind that overuse of emotions can be viewed as annoying.

:-D Laughing
:-(Sad
:-e Disappointed
:-) Happy
:-@ Screaming
:-I Indifferent
:-o Surprised
:-< Mad
;-) Winking

- When replying to a message, copy and paste the content of that message and include your response to each part of the original message.
- Use acronyms (for example: IMHO = in my humble opinion, BTW = by the way) sparingly, as readers may not know what they mean.
- Never send a message that you wouldn't want to be shown to others.
- It is considered impolite to use capitals in your subject line or in your message as it is viewed as the equivalent of SHOUTING! To make a point, try using *asterisks* or _underscores_ around the word or phrase you wish to stress.
- Prior to sending very large files, seek permission from the intended recipient. Some people may have slower connections and therefore this may impede the downloading process.
- Check with recipients before emailing 'carbon copies' of jokes. Some people do not appreciate this type of use of email.

Chat room/discussion boards/newsgroup netiquette

- Visit a discussion board prior to allowing student access, as it will enable you to get an insight into the type of messages and responses that are posted.
- Keep messages relevant to the group.
- Use meaningful subject headers.
- Include a notation in your subject line, for example long message] if you are posting something that's particularly lengthy.