

## Protecting Children Online: Teachers' Perspectives on E-safety

### Aims

NFER was commissioned by Vital to carry out a survey of teachers in England in order to establish their views about different aspects of e-safety. The report was used to inform Vital's communications about teachers' professional development and content for courses.

### Key Findings

- **E-safety issues**

The survey data showed that the majority of teachers can confidently deal with most e-safety issues and support their pupils to do so. Many teachers acknowledged that technology can be useful to their pupils, for example they felt mobile phones are good for emergencies and social networking sites can facilitate pupils' communication with their friends. However, our findings also showed that technology is creating challenges for teachers. This is in relation to issues around e-safety and cyberbullying as well as managing pupils' usage of particular technologies, such as smartphones and social networking sites. Teachers are therefore likely to welcome advice and communication around these areas.

- **E-safety policies in schools**

Given the pace at which new technologies are being developed, and pupils' enthusiasm for using them, having a regularly updated e-safety policy that provides a clear framework for guiding and managing pupils' use of technology is important. 87% of teachers said that their school has an e-safety policy, but only 72% indicated that it is reviewed regularly, suggesting that more work needs to be done with schools in this area. This is particularly the case in secondary schools, where the proportion of teachers responding that their school has an e-safety policy was lower.

- **Pupil knowledge**

Encouragingly, the vast majority of teachers felt that their pupils have the skills and knowledge to use the internet safely at school. However, only 58% of teachers felt that pupils were similarly equipped to use the internet safely at *home*. This suggests that pupils need more education and support to address this outside school, where there is less supervision and potentially more online freedom. Communication with teachers and parents about how best to support this learning would be useful.

- **E-safety training in schools**

77% of primary teachers and 54% of secondary teachers felt that staff had received adequate e-safety training. Indeed, most teachers felt confident about advising pupils on different aspects of e-safety. The safe use of social networking sites was the area of e-safety that proportionally fewest teachers were confident to advise pupils on. These findings imply that a significant minority of teachers, particularly within the secondary phase of education, want or need more training on e-safety. We would expect this to result in greater proportions of teachers feeling confident in giving advice to pupils on all facets on e-safety.

- **Smartphone use**

Given the growing ownership of smartphones, the survey investigated teachers' views of mobile phones. 85% of secondary teachers said that many of their pupils carried mobile phones with internet access, compared with only 7% of primary teachers. Given this variation, it is unsurprising that while secondary teachers were proportionally more likely than primary teachers to see the benefit of pupils having a mobile phone for emergencies, they were also much more inclined to agree that mobile phone use within school is problematic. More than nine in ten secondary teachers thought that controlling mobile phone use within school was difficult. This suggests that this group would particularly welcome advice on managing pupils' use of mobile phones within school.

- **Social Networking**

59% of teachers have a social networking profile themselves, and less than 1% have experienced pupils leaving inappropriate comments on their profile. Teachers do not encourage pupils to contact them via social networking sites, with only 1% being happy for their pupils to contact them in this way. 33% of primary teachers and 78% of secondary teachers felt that many of their pupils spend too much time on such sites. Across both phases of education, most teachers felt that access to these sites should be banned during the school day. Teachers are therefore likely to find advice on how to manage pupils' attraction to social networking sites useful and relevant.

- **Cyberbullying**

The results gave a clear indication that Vital's communication with teachers should focus on both bullying of teachers and pupils, particularly in the secondary phase of education. While only 3% of teachers said that they had been cyberbullied by pupils, a third of secondary and 7% of primary respondents said that one of their colleagues had been. The picture amongst pupils was markedly worse, with 91% of secondary teachers and 52% of primary teachers reporting that pupils at their school have experienced cyberbullying. By far the most common form of cyberbullying was via social networking sites, irrespective of whether teachers or pupils were the intended victims, suggesting that cyberbullying advice should explicitly consider the use of this technology.

### Background

Schools have an important role to play in introducing children and young people to technology, and teaching them to navigate it and capitalise on the opportunities it offers in a safe way. As the use of technology increases – and use of the internet and smartphones (among 12-15 year olds) has increased since 2010 according to OFCOM<sup>1</sup> – it becomes ever more important to ensure that teachers are equipped to teach e-safety skills to pupils. Vital, funded by the Department for Education, aims to help educational establishments use IT to add value to lessons and find new ways to engage learners, as well as support teachers in extending and sharing their expertise, and re-taking ownership of teaching as a discipline. An area that Vital was particularly interested in developing and understanding further was around safe use of the Internet. Vital's website [www.vital.ac.uk](http://www.vital.ac.uk) launched several helpful tools for teachers to use aligned with Safer Internet day in February 2012.

### Methodology

Using NFER's [Teacher Voice](#) Panel, NFER surveyed 1315 practising teachers from 1051 mainstream schools. This nationally representative sample covered of a full range of roles from headteachers to newly qualified teachers, and respondents were from both primary (54%) and secondary (46%) school teachers. The survey was carried out between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> January, 2012.

Source <http://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/95001/> (full report and summary)

For more information about VITAL: [www.vital.ac.uk](http://www.vital.ac.uk)

For more information about NFER: [www.nfer.ac.uk](http://www.nfer.ac.uk)

Teacher Voice: [www.nfer.ac.uk/teachervoices](http://www.nfer.ac.uk/teachervoices)

**Research Team** NFER

**Contact information** Bernadetta Brzyska ([b.brzyska@nfer.ac.uk](mailto:b.brzyska@nfer.ac.uk)) or Helen Aston ([h.aston@nfer.ac.uk](mailto:h.aston@nfer.ac.uk))

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<sup>1</sup> Ofcom (2011) *Children and parents: media use and attitudes report*. Ofcom.