



## Pupils using e-mail

### Pupils using e-mail at Budehaven Community Secondary School, North Cornwall

When Budehaven Community School in Bude, North Cornwall (<http://www.budehaven.cornwall.sch.uk>), decided to give each one of its students an e-mail address, staff considered the risks as well as the benefits. Headteacher John Ward agrees that, there are issues to do with appropriate use - or not - by students but, he says, "e-mail is potentially an important educational tool, so every student has their own address."

Users' names are publicly available on the school's web site, and it is theoretically possible that strangers could work out how to contact them and go on to make inappropriate electronic advances. However, Ward feels that the problems with personal e-mail are actually more likely to come from misbehaviour within the institution, such as pupils sending each other abusive messages, rather than from outside.

However, the school minimises the risk by automatically monitoring messages so, Ward explains, staff can quickly pick up if the system is being abused, externally or internally.

In the case of e-mail, Ward relates one particular incident where a student was accused of sending abusive messages. The individual claimed not to have been in school at the time, says Ward, but the monitoring system indicated otherwise. Having independent evidence of the student's presence enabled staff to take action.

In fact, the school has a strict but straightforward policy on use of the Internet in general - no offensive material and educational use only in lesson time - but along with e-mail monitoring it also employs a filtering system on its network to block access to unsuitable web sites. Students who attempt to access banned sites will find that their password, and thus their access to the ICT facilities, is swiftly taken away.





## Pupils using e-mail at Ambleside Primary School, Cumbria

Ambleside Primary School in Cumbria (<http://www.ambleside.schoolzone.co.uk/ambleweb/index.htm>), which was highly commended in this years ICT in Practice Awards (<http://www.becta.org.uk/news/practiceawards/index.html>), provides one e-mail address for each class.

Teaching staff believe this improves security, making it easier to supervise children and that the lack of individual addresses has not hindered pupils from making full use of the Internet on a variety of online projects such as communicating with individual penpals from around the world, contributing to the schools award-winning web site, and whole classes working with classes at schools in other countries.

The school has developed its 'own set of rules' (<http://www.ambleside.schoolzone.co.uk/ambleweb/ourrules.htm>) to ensure the privacy and safety of pupils when using e-mail, the Internet and the World Wide Web.

These rules stipulate that children are not allowed to engage in conversation or dialogue with others on the Internet without permission or supervision from their teacher. All e-mails to classes are moderated by the class teacher.

Children are also taught never to reveal personal details, such as home addresses and telephone numbers, when they are communicating with other Internet users. If they ever receive a message that makes them feel uncomfortable or upset, they are told to report it to a teacher.

As a further precaution, downloading of files is restricted to staff (or children under supervision) and children have no access to newsgroups.

Any other school that wishes to obtain an individual class or staff e-mail address must first contact Amblesides ICT co-ordinator.

Parents are encouraged to take similar precautions and invest in security software when using the Internet at home with their children.

Amblesides Internet service provider (ISP) is Schoolzone (<http://www.schoolzone-internet.co.uk/>) which offers a variety of packages and security features including filtering.

## Pupils using e-mail at Bliss Charity Primary School, Northamptonshire

A primary school in Northamptonshire is able to provide individual e-mail addresses to pupils through an educational portal service which allows them to be part of a secure and controlled online learning community.

The Bliss Charity School (<http://www.bliss-school.uk.org/>) has joined Schoolmaster.net (<http://www.schoolmaster.net>) through which children can only communicate with other schools around the world who are also members.

Separate e-mail boxes give students their own password-controlled personal learning spaces which they use for mastering basic ICT skills and working on collaborative projects with other schools. Pupils have also used the Efriends service to find pen pals with similar interests.

Schoolmaster.net's web-based e-mail system offers automatic filtering, virus checking and other security features. Age-appropriate content is carefully selected and access to interactive areas is based on peer groups. Schools can also impose further restrictions on who their children can e-mail within the community (pupils at Bliss Charity do not participate in chat rooms).

At the Bliss Charity School, pupils are only allowed to send and receive e-mails under supervision. Using their password, pupils can also log on from their home computers and parents are encouraged to take a close interest. Pupils are taught never to reveal personal details in messages and to report anything that upsets them.

Teaching staff have access to all passwords and regularly monitor e-mails sent and received from both school and home. Pupils e-mail addresses incorporate the child's first name only and the schools domain name.

Schools can join Schoolmaster.net for free but managed services are chargeable; the package to which the Bliss Charity School subscribes costs £1.50 per pupil per year.

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## Pupils using e-mail in school, Powys ICT Centre

"If there's one thing I think we've had real success with," states Martin Williams, "It's cracking down on the sort of electronic bullying and mailbombing that can actually be really unpleasant." "If you behave like that using a school e-mail account then we can track you and stop you, but not if its coming from a Hotmail address, so we opted to ban all free webmail accounts."

Historically speaking, free web-based e-mail has been a working solution for individuals and even some schools without access to a mail server, their own domain name or a higher level network infrastructure. However, when Williams took on responsibility for connectivity across the board in Powys, he decided abusive behaviour over his networks was something he could tackle. "It wasn't popular but we had to say, 'get them moved over because we're shutting them down.' In this instance, I feel vindicated."

Williams is in charge of developing e-mail access in approximately 80 schools in Powys. "I remember the moment that 'Connecting the Learning Society' came out and I just thought 'Yes!'" he laughs. Although the county had been using e-mail at a corporate level since 1992, extending it into the educational sector was made possible by NGfL funding and a commitment to offering the highest possible speeds at the lowest possible costs. "Every teacher and approaching 50% of pupils have an e-mail address, although this depends to a large extent on individual school set-ups and access to machines."

All secondary students are required to subscribe to an Acceptable Use Policy (AUP). (An example of an AUP is contained within this pack.) At primary level this is left to the discretion of the individual school or teacher, although parents may be asked to sign on their child's behalf. The document contains the usual guidelines on language and sending offensive, racist or sexist material – and if you break the rules, you can be barred from the system.

Blacklisting and the filtering of web-based material happens at a central server level as a matter of course, and teachers can request that specific sites are blocked or made accessible with one call to the Powys ICT Centre. However, Williams admits to having real anxieties about privacy issues and the monitoring of e-mail. On a policy level, he insists that if this is happening locally then all parties must be informed but, he says, there is

really no substitute for supervised access or, as some secondary schools have done, install CCTV on the screens.

Martin Williams believes it is essential to give people ownership of their own ICT solutions and to this end he has implemented a web-based e-mail management system for schools, which is often administered by the ICT co-ordinator or, more usually, the school secretary. "I think sometimes school secretaries are the most overlooked and undervalued members of staff in a school," he asserts, "but as long as you can type your own name, you can set it up." Using this system is as simple as sending an e-mail – but just make sure you mind your language and try NOT TO SHOUT!



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## Pupils using e-mail in school, The Technology Colleges Trust

The Technology Colleges Trust (<http://www.tctrust.org.uk/>), which manages the Specialist Schools Programme on behalf of the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), believes that educating children on e-safety should form part of a schools Internet policy just as much as technical solutions.

The Trust, which encourages secondary schools to provide individual e-mail addresses for students, operates the Supergrid (<http://www.tctrust.net/tctnet.htm>), a national broadband wide area network for affiliated schools, in partnership with NTL and ICL.

The network (also known as TCTRUST.net) provides schools with direct broadband interconnection as well as the gateway to the wider Internet community (acting as an Internet service provider - ISP) and provides a comprehensive range of services including automatic filtering and protection from unsuitable Internet sites.

But rather than just relying on security measures, schools are also advised to adopt an Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) detailing ways the Internet can and cannot be used, and who students can and cannot e-mail.

These guidelines should be accompanied by procedures for dealing with students who break the rules and likely penalties (such as letters to parents and removing Internet access) should be made clear.

AUPs need to be signed by both students and their parents, guardians or carers who should be encouraged to teach their children to be equally sensible and responsible when they use the Internet from home.

The basic Supergrid package which gives access to a range of services for an unlimited number of computers within a school– costs £3,750 per annum (though services and charges are currently under review). Connections costs vary according to the method of connection.

Optional upgrades include enhanced e-mail provision from a number of suppliers. There are also a large number of pilots running on the Supergrid, involving a wide range of content

and service partners, taking advantage of an existing service that already offers the infrastructure that the NGfL and its Regional Broadband initiatives aim to provide in the near future.

Supergrid services are only available to the 900-plus schools currently affiliated to the Trust.