Online Safety and IT Policy

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1. Aims

The purpose of this policy statement is to:
- ensure the safety and wellbeing of children and young people is paramount when adults, young people or children are using the internet, social media or mobile devices
- provide staff and volunteers with the overarching principles that guide our approach to online safety
- ensure that, as an organisation, we operate in line with our values and within the law in terms of how we use online devices.

2. Online Safety

All Things SEN:
- Have robust processes in place to ensure the online safety of learners and staff
- Deliver an effective approach to online safety, which empowers us to protect and educate learners and staff in its use of technology, including mobile and smart technology (which we refer to as 'mobile phones')
- Establish clear mechanisms to identify, intervene and escalate an incident, where appropriate

The 4 key categories of risk
Our approach to online safety is based on addressing the following categories of risk:
- Content – being exposed to illegal, inappropriate or harmful content, such as pornography, fake news, racism, misogyny, self-harm, suicide, anti-Semitism, radicalisation and extremism
- Contact – being subjected to harmful online interaction with other users, such as peer-to-peer pressure, commercial advertising and adults posing as children or young adults with the intention to groom or exploit them for sexual, criminal, financial or other purposes
- Conduct – personal online behaviour that increases the likelihood of, or causes, harm, such as making, sending and receiving explicit images (e.g. consensual and non-consensual sharing of nudes and semi-nudes, deep fake pornography and/or pornography), sharing other explicit images and online bullying; and
- Commerce – risks such as online gambling, inappropriate advertising, phishing and/or financial scam

Legislation and guidance

This policy is based on the Department for Education's (DfE) statutory safeguarding guidance, Keeping Children Safe in Education, and its advice for schools on:
Teaching online safety in schools
Preventing and tackling bullying and cyber-bullying: advice for headteachers and school staff
Relationships and sex education
Searching, screening and confiscation
It also refers to the DfE's guidance on protecting children from radicalisation.

It reflects existing legislation, including but not limited to the Education Act 1996 (as amended), the Education and Inspections Act 2006 and the Equality Act 2010. In addition, it reflects the Education Act 2011, which has given teachers stronger powers to tackle cyber-bullying by, if necessary, searching for and deleting inappropriate images or files on learners' electronic devices where they believe there is a 'good reason' to do so.

3. Filtering and Monitoring

Why do we need a filtering and monitoring system?
In many schools the internet is used daily and has become fundamental. All Things SEN does not subscribe to this approach and uses screen-based learning far more sparingly, favouring instead 'real world' learning, hands-on activity, and direct human interaction. However, it is sometimes important that older learners access the internet if only to learn how to use is safely.

At All Things SEN we use filtering and monitoring to ensure that learners do not access unsuitable/inappropriate content. One example is around radicalisation. The Prevent Duty is a statutory obligation for schools to keep children safe from the risk of radicalisation and extremism. As an educational organisation we are aware of the risks posed by the online activity of extremist groups, and how social media is being used to encourage young people to travel to certain countries.

Content filtering works by applying specific parameters to content retrieved via the internet, restricting access to certain materials on websites, Apps, emails or other suspicious items. It can be a hardware or software solution and can often be part of a firewall setting.

Monitoring combined with content filtering alerts for any activities that need to be acted upon, but the information is also used to determine which sites and keywords need to be filtered out. For example, if a new craze appears, the monitoring and filtering system will help us know what associated terms the learners are searching for, and what websites they are accessing.

To safeguard and promote the welfare of our learners, we provide them with a safe environment in which they can learn and flourish, by ensuring that they are not exposed to any online risks associated with using the internet. We have comprehensive filtering and monitoring systems in place for all devices used at The Quay, and regularly review their effectiveness.

Parents can be reassured that at All Things SEN we employ the highest quality Filtering and Monitoring systems to mitigate the risks of our learners' online safety. We use Microsoft Defender which works alongside Windows Firewall to filter online content and protect against malware, phishing etc. Crucially though, all internet use is additionally monitored by a mentor or tutor in real time – learners are not left alone with laptops or internet access at any time, and all personal devices are disallowed.

This should provide parents and carers with confidence that their children's experience of the online world is safe and backed up by a broad curriculum of online safety guidance.

Where IT skills are part of the curricular provision, learners will be asked to explore an increasingly wide range of websites and digital content and will be required to use search engines to develop their skills as a digital citizen - using our systems of filtering and monitoring we feel secure in exploring the online world, giving us opportunities to learn about online risks.

We also use the Government recommended online safety review tool 360 Safe, to assess wider online safety policy and practice.

Please remember to apply appropriate settings to children's devices when they are using the internet at home or on mobile devices. Please refer to advice and guidance to ensure children's devices are appropriately managed.

5. Use of the Internet and Screen-Based Learning at All Things SEN

5.1 An increasing amount of scientific evidence is highlighting links between excessive screen use and aspects of ADHD and challenging behaviour (eg. Wallace, J., Boers, E., Ouellet, J. et al. *Screen time, impulsivity, neuropsychological functions and their relationship to growth in adolescent attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder symptoms.* Sci Rep13, 18108 (2023)). Certainly it has been our frequent experience in working with youngsters struggling to access classroom learning, that an over-reliance in IT tends to play into tendencies for obsessive-compulsive behaviour, an expressed disinterest in a great number of healthy learning activities that do not involve (or in any way require) IT, and reduced peer and community involvement. As such, All Things SEN uses screen-based learning judiciously, and only when there is a clear and definable learning outcome. It is **never** used to 'pass the time', to entertain or distract learners, or to offset the duty of tutors and mentors in delivering educational content. We believe that learning is the deepest interpersonal skill, and within the interpersonal aspect lies great therapeutic benefit especially for children and young people who are socially isolated in some way, or struggle with understanding social rules and communication.

IT will however be utilised:

- Where it can provide an educational resource superior to any other available in a specific instance (eg. In talking about life in another country, videos of that country are invaluable; where trying to ascertain the name of a local tree or plant, using the PictureThis app).

- Where it allows or enables improved communication (verbal or written) or is recommended by a Speech and Language Therapist

- Where a learner is conducting active and meaningful research into a particular subject

- Where online safety is being taught as part of the SMSC curriculum

- Where it applies most readily to clear objectives within the maths and English curriculum

For more information on how to monitor and use filtering at home, click on the links below that discuss parental controls:
NSPCC
Think U Know - CEOP
Safer Internet