

Teaching matters

Articles and opinions on primary teaching, with tips and ideas for the classroom

Internet safety in primary school

Has cyber bullying crossed the threshold of your classroom?

The internet has become an integral resource for every classroom. There are marvellous teaching resources available online and students are inspired and empowered when they realise they can partake in their own research at the click of a button.

For informal everyday communication, there is definite peer pressure among children to establish a social media presence, even though Facebook and Twitter are strictly speaking for over 13s. Birthdates are easily manipulated and children could have a Facebook page set up in minutes simply by making their online persona a few years older than their offline alter ego.

Unfortunately, not every online interaction is a positive one. Cyber bullying is a phrase we are hearing quite a lot these days. Until quite recently, parents and teachers assumed that children at primary level were not really affected by this nasty phenomenon, but this is no longer the case. With handheld devices and smartphones becoming the norm among all strands of the population, our children are online a huge amount of the time. An EU Kids Online survey tells us that up to 25 percent of 9-16 year olds have experienced some form of bullying (online or offline) in Ireland, with four percent of that group having been victim to cyber bullies.

What exactly is cyber bullying?

While the classroom and playground bullies still exist, the practice has evolved with the growth of the internet. Victims of cyber bullying can find that they receive mean or threatening text messages, emails or social media interactions. They may find that

embarrassing photos or video clips have been posted to social networking sites or discover their accounts have been accessed by someone else deliberately to make trouble online.

How does the online world overlap with the everyday world of school life?

Maybe a child has become marginalised from former friends and is more quiet and introverted than normal. Perhaps there is a standoff in the yard at break time between those children who have shared an in-joke online and those who have not yet ventured into the world of social media.

How should cyber bullying be tackled in the classroom?

The recent (September 2013) *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools* outline how schools can tackle incidents of bullying. It recommended that all schools should have an effective anti-bullying policy in place which fosters a positive school culture and environment and which explicitly addresses the issue of cyber bullying. Part of the policy should be to encourage students to develop an understanding of what bullying is and the impact it can have on others. Often a 'catch them being good' attitude can be very beneficial towards instilling the tenets of what constitutes respectful interactions with others.

Through school wide information awareness and discussion of all aspects of bullying, children should be aware that bullying behaviour, whether it takes place during school hours or on the internet, will not be tolerated in any way. There are



four golden rules that can be shared with pupils who find themselves on the receiving end of unwelcome messages or contact on the internet:

- ✘ Don't reply.
- ✘ Keep the messages (take a screenshot).
- ✘ Block the sender.
- ✘ Report problems to a trusted adult.

Online teaching resources

For more information on internet safety and what apps and platforms are being used by young people, visit webwise.ie.

Specific explainer guides covering apps like *Snapchat*, *Ask.fm* and *Tumblr* are available on the site along with a dedicated Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) teaching resource. The *Webwise Primary Teachers' Handbook* was distributed to all schools and an online version is also available. To request extra copies of this resource, send an email with your details and school roll number.

Email: internetsafety@pdst.ie

Website: webwise.ie/WebwisePrimaryProgramme.shtm

Compiled by GABRIELLE FARRELLY, PDST Technology

New course – Using tablets for literacy and numeracy

PDST Technology in Education has adapted one of its summer courses to make two short courses available to teachers during term-time. *Using Tablets for Literacy and Numeracy* – basic and intermediate levels – are now being scheduled and made available through the education centre network. They are for iPad users specifically on this occasion. Each

course is 7.5 hrs in duration (three evenings).

These courses are very practical and rooted in active learning methodologies, using tablets with various apps to support literacy and numeracy in teaching, learning, assessment and inclusion.

Both courses are particularly suitable as whole school training for those schools who

have already purchased iPads – participants must have their own (or their school's) activated iPad. See the course schedule on the PDST Technology in Education website or contact your local education centre for details.

Website: www.pdsttechnologyineducation.ie/courseschedule

