

School Web Sites



Transition year students have developed a school Web site containing teachers' notes for each subject area, student resources and links to project work in other schools. Both teachers and students have begun to use the interactive activities to make learning a more valuable experience, both in class and at home.

Why Create a School Web Site?

One of the most exciting aspects of the Internet is the fact that it gives schools the ability to publish material 'globally'. School Web pages can be created without difficulty using user-friendly software, and both teachers and students can publish and share their work with their peers. In addition, a Web site can help promote the school within the wider community by publishing information on school activities, policies and events.

Possible Educational Uses

- To improve student motivation.
- To create collaborative project ventures.
- To encourage teamwork experiences.
- To share curricular resources.
- To promote the school and its activities within the wider community.

What Content should be published on a School Web Site?

There are no real limits as to what a school can publish on its Web site — any type of information or work done by the pupils and staff would be suitable for publication. Ideally, the content being presented should be curriculum-centred and, where possible, focus on the work of students. Rather than creating new or additional work, current projects and assignments could be carried out on a computer and then incorporated into Web pages.

It is recommended that all classes are involved in the design and creation of the Web site, with teachers handling the more technical aspects of pushing the site live. It is important to ensure that the design of the Web site is both inclusive of all students, e.g., special needs students, and accessible to all potential users of the site. For instance, some people may need to use special technologies in order to access your site. (Guidelines on developing accessible Web sites are available on the NCTE Web site.)

Schools should also be realistic when outlining the scope of their Web site first time round. One of the greatest pitfalls in Web publishing is the tendency to attempt to create a 'super' site – this may lead to difficulties in completing, updating and managing the Web site.

Before commencing work on a Web site, consider the following questions:

- Why is the school publishing a Web site?
- What content will be included?
- What target audience is the content aimed at?
- What tools are required to create the content?
- Who is going to perform the tasks involved?

Technical Considerations

Hardware

The only hardware required to create a Web site is a computer with a modem or network connection allowing access to the Internet. The following peripherals would be very useful as they extend the range of assets available for use on the Web site, but they are not essential:

- **Scanner**
A scanner facilitates the inclusion of non-digital resources, such as photographs or printed materials, on the Web site. Scanners are discussed in more detail in Advice Sheet 11.
- **Digital Camera**
A digital camera takes high-quality photographs and stores them in digital format. These digital assets can readily be manipulated for use on a Web site. Digital cameras are discussed in more detail in Advice Sheet 12.

Software

Creating a Web site also involves the use of specific software programs. The following list outlines the key types required:

- A HTML editor or text editing program, e.g., Dreamweaver, Website X5
- Graphics processing software, e.g., Paint Shop Pro
- A Web browser, e.g., Microsoft Internet Explorer or Mozilla Firefox. It is a good idea to have both of these browsers installed, so that all the Web pages created can be previewed and tested on both browsers
- FTP software in order to upload the files from the school computer to an ISP server – FTP is an acronym for file transfer protocol and is the most common means of transferring large files between computers
- For more creative Web sites, specialist software for image mapping, animation or bulletin boards may be required

Child Safety and Web Publishing Policy

A school Web site can generate huge educational and self-esteem benefits for the whole school community. It would be unfortunate if schools were frightened away from the idea of publishing a Web site after reading press reports about the potential dangers of the Internet. It is the school's responsibility to be aware of these dangers, so that it can guard against and prevent them before they occur. Each school must take responsibility for all the content published on its Web site, being particularly cautious of the following:

- Publishing images of children
- Publishing text composed by children
- Providing e-mail or other contact details

It is recommended that schools compile a Web safety policy (see Advice Sheet 24 for further information) before work on the school Web site commences.

Putting a School Web Site on the Internet

When all the files for the Web site are ready, they need to be transferred from the school computer to a Web server. A Web server is a specific type of computer that stores Web files and is connected to the Internet. Most schools will use the Web server of their particular ISP (Internet Service Provider) where they will have space allocated to them. They will also be given their own unique Web site address (URL). Once their files have been copied across, the site will be 'live' and anyone surfing the Web who types in the URL will view the school's Web site. The school Web site should be registered with ScoilNet and with various Web search engines, so that it will be easily found by Web surfers.

Maintaining and Updating a School Web site

After being developed and uploaded on to a server, the Web site needs to be maintained and updated regularly. Ideally, some time should be set aside each week to ensure that the information on the site remains current. The amount of time required for routine maintenance will depend very much on the nature of content on the site.

Relevant Web Sites

Scoilnet

www.scoilnet.ie

The Portal for Irish Education, with lots of links to relevant web sites including school web sites, web site of the week etc.

Teachnet

www.teachnet.ie

TeachNet seeks to improve student learning by helping primary and post primary teachers to integrate web-based resources into their instructional practice. Through TeachNet, teachers have access to curriculum resources, curriculum and technical specialists, grants and a supportive network to further develop their skills.

Webwise

www.webwise.ie

NCTE website on Internet safety in the classroom

A Junior school website

www.woodlands-junior.kent.sch.uk/website/index.htm

Making web sites is a rewarding experience for both students and educators. Anyone can publish on the internet after learning a few basic skills. What you will find on this page are links to basic lessons for web site making together with resources for webmasters. We have also included some of the ways we use the internet at school.

Note: While the advice sheets aim to act as a guide, the inclusion of any products and company names does not imply approval by the NCTE, nor does the exclusion imply the reverse. The NCTE does not accept responsibility for any opinions, advice or recommendations on external web sites linked to the NCTE site.

This Advice Sheet and other relevant information are available at:

www.ncte.ie/ICTAdviceSupport/AdviceSheets