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E-safety for high schools project

Mubina Asaria

Mubina Asaria is a VLE Manager and an E-Safety Co-Ordinator, based at Greenford High School, London, UK.

Abstract

Purpose – Greenford High School has been successful in their bid to John Lyon's Charity for their "E-safety for high schools" project to safeguard and educate young people from the increasing risks emanating from new technologies and the internet. The paper aimed at addressing the significant gap in e-safety provision across schools, the project will enable this school in West London to share and replicate their innovative model of good practice – recently commended by the Ealing Health Improvement Team – with three high schools as part of a three-year training and development programme.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper aims to provide some background to the project and outline its unique holistic and multifaceted approach to managing e-safety and cyberbullying, within the context of a broader social, behavioural and educational model rather than the narrowly defined ICT context within which it is traditionally perceived.

Findings – E-safety is a whole school issue and can only be effectively addressed through collective critical thinking and a social, cultural and educational approach.

Originality/value – This e-safety project is unique in promoting the opportunities afforded by technology through harnessing the positive role of the bystander and addressing e-safety through a broader, social model and multifaceted approach.

Keywords Technology, Cyberbullying, E-safety, Online child protection, Peer support, Peer-mentoring

Paper type Viewpoint

Introduction

With the growing focus on technology, schools have an increased responsibility to safeguard young people from online risks. These risks are summarised in a recent briefing paper by Ofsted (2013) as inappropriate contact, content and conduct and include grooming, cyberbullying and online sexual exploitation. E-safety is about empowering schools and other professionals with the knowledge and resources to safeguard children and young people in this digital world. This requires a whole school approach to educate and protect the wellbeing of all members of the community from online risks – particularly those that are vulnerable – and to provide appropriate intervention and support mechanisms.

Why is this project needed?

Analysis within the borough has highlighted a recognised need for e-safety training, with results from the Health Related Behaviour Survey 2011 identifying several schools. As part of the Ealing Safeguarding Children's Board's e-safety strategy, an audit of e-safety provision in autumn 2012 to provide a snapshot of existing practice in high schools underlined a significant gap in e-safety provision, knowledge and skills, indicating a need for guidance in:

- devising and delivering e-safety education and training for staff, parents and carers;
- student peer support networks;
- developing and signposting curriculum embedded activities for schools; and
- advice on policy formulation and review of acceptable user policies.

The author would like to thank Dr Chris Abbott for inspiring and empowering her to take her master's research forward at Greenford High School. Similarly, the author is grateful to the school's senior leadership team and BeatBullying for their unwavering support and faith in the pilot programme, in particular the Headteacher, Mathew Cramer and Child Protection Officer, Jane Ayshford, who has mentored the author through this pioneering journey. Finally the author would like to extend thanks to Mark Robinson, Karen Gibson and Sonita Pobi from the local authority and Ealing Health Improvement Team, for their ongoing dedication, support and commitment to e-safety.

With digital literacy initiatives primarily in their infancy, it comes as no surprise that these findings have been echoed at a national level, with BeatBullying's Virtual Violence II Report – Progress and Challenges in the Fight Against Cyberbullying, 2012 highlighting the growing risks to adolescent wellbeing and the need for policies and education to reflect the changing issues and behaviours taking place online.

Ofsted's new safeguarding guidelines for e-safety in schools – Inspecting E-safety: Briefing for Section 5 Inspection – similarly draws attention to the vulnerability of children and young people through the use of mobile phones and the internet, indicating the need for e-safety awareness and training across all age levels with particular emphasis for parental awareness, robust reporting mechanisms and policy development.

A whole school approach and cultural shift

This project will adopt a multifaceted approach to e-safety based on Greenford High's tried and tested model, by building sustainable infrastructures and sharing good practice across participating schools. This will be achieved through:

- cultivating e-safety awareness across the whole school community through a bespoke training package for all staff and pupils, parents/carers and governors;
- empowering young people to have a voice through an inclusive and collaborative support system made up of trained students and staff, equipped with the knowledge and skills to identify online risks and access support;
- harnessing the positive role of the bystander and promoting emotional wellbeing and resilience through a volunteering peer-mentoring scheme aimed at developing a trained student taskforce of "cybermentors" to provide peer support to young and vulnerable victims of cyberbullying;
- developing and embedding appropriate policies and practices to reflect changes in technology across schools to report and monitor e-safety incidents; and
- disseminating good practice to the wider community through the establishment of a specialist E-Safety Committee, a train the trainer scheme to cascade training to primary schools, an interactive web site/portal with resources and an e-safety toolkit available nationally.

Participating schools will be identified through needs analysis of data, with each school nominating a designated team of staff as part of a specialist E-Safety Committee, to lead in e-safety and share good practice across departments. The agreement will also stipulate that the high schools offer training to at least one of their primary schools. A bespoke package will be rolled out gradually to staff (including support staff such as teaching assistants, canteen and reception staff who are often overlooked), with specialist training delivered to specific cohorts in order to build a skilled knowledgebase to cascade training through a "Train the Trainer" model. As well as cross-curricular e-safety initiatives, the project will furthermore enable a student taskforce of at least 60 students per school to be trained as peer-mentors by BeatBullying, to provide support, both at school and online via the BeatBullying web site. Follow-up training will ensure that visible systems are put into place to embed good practice, e.g., drop-in sessions, clubs and online support forums, to promote inclusion.

Open parent/carer sessions will also be hosted in participating schools – training for parents/carers is integral to reinforcing good practice at home, as research indicates that young people are less likely to tell a parent if they are threatened online, due to low confidence in their responses, fear of losing their online privileges and a perception that adults are less savvy with technology. Paradoxically, whilst young people may be savvier operating technology, they lack the maturity to manage online risks. Parental awareness is thus vital to fostering communication and bridging the digital divide. In addition to ongoing analysis and evaluation, the model will be externally evaluated, with each school aiming to achieve the nationally accredited "E-Safety Mark".

A sustainable legacy

It is anticipated that the funding will serve to seed-fund the programme, providing each high school with sustainability through:

- a “Train the Trainer” package, ensuring the capacity of a trained staff and student taskforce to cascade training;
- effective infrastructures and systems embedded into each school's development plans;
- ongoing access to e-safety resources, information and good practice via a specially designed e-safety web site/portal;
- continuing expertise of a specialist E-Safety Committee; and
- contributions from the wider community and support from groups with vested interests.

Furthermore, the project aims to host a series of conferences, bringing together experts from online child protection and participating schools to share their findings and showcase good practice with the wider community. Finally, as we strive for a shift in education to empower communities through e-safety initiatives, alongside collaborative opportunities involving young people, educators and trained professionals, we must not lose sight of the vital need for policy makers to collaborate with practitioners and promote good practice at policy level. Only then can educators take an informed and consistent approach in addressing online risk, enabling young people to safely maximise the wealth of opportunities afforded by technology.

Reference

Ofsted (2013), “Inspecting e-safety in schools: briefing for section 5 inspection”, *Briefings and Information for Use During Inspections of Maintained Schools and Academies*, available at: www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/briefings-and-information-for-use-during-inspections-of-maintained-schools-and-academies (accessed 13 February 2014).

About the author

Mubina Asaria is a trained CEOP Ambassador (Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre) and a VLE Manager at Greenford High School. She was recently awarded a masters distinction for her research into cyberbullying, e-safety and peer-mentoring at Kings College London, based on her work developing the e-safety and peer-mentoring programme (cybermentors). She recently featured in an e-safety documentary on Panorama and has delivered a lesson on anti-cyberbullying strategies which was streamed nationally to schools from Google Headquarters in London, in collaboration with TES and BeatBullying. Mubina Asaria can be contacted at: masaria@greenford.ealing.sch.uk

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