GBM Safeguarding in Education

Consumer technologies are changing our lives and the lives of our students. A recent UK report from the Office of National Statistics shows that 99% of households with students have an internet connection[1]. Every year, more and more students take to the internet to search, socialise, and play games. It is now imperative that we teach students how to use the internet safely, ensuring that when they do inevitably engage with technology, they are doing so in a safe manner.

At GBM, we are passionate about embedding technology into the classroom, both supporting the educational needs of students and encouraging them to start their journey with technology as early as possible. Deploying technology for student use goes beyond the provision of a device, to also include the right tools and training, helping teachers keep students safe both in and out of the classroom.

The Challenges

Understanding some of the core activities that students undertake online can help us to build out an effective strategy to inform and educate students about the safe, and responsible way to use technology. We can typically classify these core activities as searching, socialising, and online gaming.

SEARCHING

The ability to perform an effective internet search is incredibly important, both to find content effectively as an individual, but also has applications in the world of work. This could be something basic, like finding the content you were searching for, or something more advanced, like vetting sites to find a reputable source.

Naturally, the risks associated with searching the internet are heavily related to the content that a student can discover. Sometimes an innocent search may lead to highly inappropriate content, while a student's curiosity may also guide them to unsavoury content.

While web filtering provides some defence in monitoring and removing unsafe content, it is by no means exhaustive, and cannot be relied upon as the only weapon in our arsenal to fight. It provides a good firstline defence against accidental searches, and a good last-line defence against those purposefully searching for content, but the challenge is that you cannot filter everything, and not all devices in a child's life will have web filtering enabled.

SOCIALISING

With social media increasingly becoming the norm for communication with todays generation, students are turning to web services and apps to develop their social groups over and above traditional means. Despite the age restrictions put in place, three-quarters of students aged between 10 and 12 have social media accounts[2]. The challenges around social media are multiple, as social websites and apps are often unmonitored, and therefore open students up to risks - such as befriending strangers online.

The greatest challenge, however, is that social media is not something they can simply avoid, and just like content, you can apply filters and controls to devices, but what does happen when students circumvent, or find a device without those restrictions in place?

ONLINE GAMING

Online gaming is another trend that is emerging through the availability of technology. It is estimated that 91% of students play online games[3]. Naturally this can cause challenges when there is a social aspect to the game.

One of the main challenges with online gaming, however, can come with the ecosystems and communities that wrap around it. When massive titles like 'Pokemon GO' hit the Apple App Store, they are typically followed by a raft of other accompanying apps and online communities. In this instance, the surrounding apps put gamers in touch with each other, by sharing their current location on a map, encouraging users to meet strangers, and hunt for Pokemon together.

Keeping Children Safe in Education

We understand that all the of the challenges laid out here are concerning to both schools and parents. So while restrictions, tools, web filters and other technical components are important and should be created, we believer that educating and informing students is the best way to keep them safe.

Teaching students to use technology safely is truly the most impactful way to prepare them for and guide them through the digital world. Having the right safeguarding framework in place can significantly enhance the technology-learning experience for students both in school and when they go home.

GBM have in-house expertise, that can support you in developing and implementing an effective safeguarding strategy in your school. This strategy includes:

- **Forming your safeguarding policy**
- **Working with your teachers to educate students on safeguarding**
- **Creating student peer support roles, such as establishing a 'Digital Guardian' programme**
- **Working with your school to inform and educate parents**
- **Recommending and deploying tech-tools to help you mitigate as much risk as possible for students utilising technology at school**

References:

[1] Internet Access: Households and Individuals - https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/householdcharacteristics/homeinternetandsocialmediausage/bulletins/internetaccesshouseholdsandindividuals/2016

[2] http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/health/children/12147629/Children-ignore-age-limits-by-opening-social-media-accounts.html

[3] 91% of kids play online. Should parents be worried? - http://www.criticalhit.net/entertainment/91-of-kids-play-online-51-of-parents-worried/

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