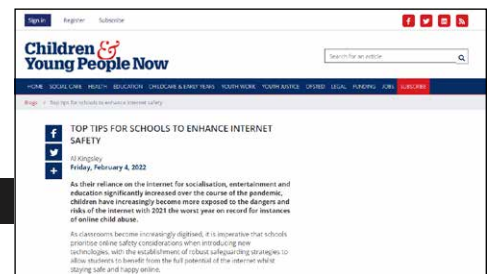# TOP TIPS FOR SCHOOLS TO ENHANCE INTERNET SAFETY

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As their reliance on the internet for socialisation, entertainment and education significantly increased over the course of the pandemic, children have increasingly become more exposed to the dangers and risks of the internet with 2021 the worst year on record for instances of online child abuse.

As classrooms become increasingly digitised, it is imperative that schools prioritise online safety considerations when introducing new technologies, with the establishment of robust safeguarding strategies to allow students to benefit from the full potential of the internet whilst staying safe and happy online.

Safety considerations when introducing new technology

Safeguarding should be a key priority when formulating any digital strategy and procuring tools or solutions. An audit of current eSafety tools will help schools identify new products which meet their specific needs, or which can fill existing provision gaps.

Automatic monitoring features within digital solutions can help reduce staff workloads whilst bolstering safeguarding efforts. Education technology (EdTech) products with integrated online safety toolkits can protect students by automatically assessing concerning activity, identifying at-risk students and reporting online safety trends, whilst informing safeguarding interventions.

Safeguarding systems

The establishment of clear digital safety policies is essential to upholding robust safeguarding standards. Schools should introduce strong procedures and strategies for protecting against potential online risks, including inappropriate content, privacy issues or online abuse. For example, additional features such as web filters can regulate pupils' access to content and help staff identify who is looking at what material.

Schools can also empower staff members to protect students via regular online safety training, keeping them apprised of new issues and instilling them with the confidence and knowledge to respond efficiently when concerned. Resources such as the Department for Education's guidance on online safety in schools and various best practice guides which collate emerging developments can help teachers and school staff stay up to date with evolving risks.

Online safety education

Alongside safeguarding measures, children themselves must learn to behave responsibly and respectfully online. By incorporating digital citizenship skills into curriculums, schools can teach students to protect their own data and recognise online risks. It is also imperative that they are made aware of reporting mechanisms and available support if they are worried about anything they have witnessed or experienced online.

Risk and Reward

Edtech can offer almost limitless advantages for schools looking for new, creative ways to engage students. Unfortunately, these advantages are accompanied by additional exposure of children to the internet's 'dark' side. Schools must establish thorough digital safeguarding policies which educate around online safety, due diligence, and responsive reporting and monitoring protocols if they wish to adequately prioritise student safety and wellbeing in this digital age.