WARRINGTON
Borough Council

Web Filtering for Schools – WBC IT Statement February 2022

Web filtering is a solution that controls what information users can and cannot access over the Internet.

This update is provided to help schools and their stakeholders understand the current solution in place for Schools that purchase WBC's Network Service.

Statutory Guidance on 'Appropriate' Web Filtering

There is statutory guidance on what the UK law deems appropriate for protection of children with relation to internet access:

The Revised Prevent Duty guidance for England and W**ales:**

> *"…to ensure children are safe from terrorist and extremist material when accessing the internet in school, including by establishing appropriate levels of filtering…"*

The DfE's Keeping Children Safe in Education 2021 guidance:

> *"128. Whilst considering their responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and provide them with a safe environment in which to learn, governing bodies and proprietors should be doing all that they reasonably can to limit children's exposure to the above risks from the school's or college's IT system. As part of this process, governing bodies and proprietors should ensure their school or college has appropriate filters and monitoring systems in place."*
>
> *"129. The appropriateness of any filters and monitoring systems are a matter for individual schools and colleges and will be informed in part, by the risk assessment required by the Prevent Duty."*

Ofsted's School Inspection Handbook 2021

> *"72. Ofsted does not require schools to:*
>
> *use a digital platform to monitor pupils' internet use, or have any specific requirements as to how such platforms should operate"*

The Council's Web Filtering Service

The Council's service is provided as part of the Network Service using a 3rd party supplier, Forcepoint. When this service was procured WBC considered the statutory guidance and believe the solution provides 'appropriate web filtering'.

The technology uses a category system to define what type of content each website represents, such as education, business, drugs, malware etc. That category determines whether a school can or cannot access that specific site.

Forcepoint have an Advanced Classification Engine that performs in depth, real-time inspection of content to categorise web sites and protect users from accessing inappropriate content and malware.

Each School has categories deemed potentially harmful and/or inappropriate blocked by default and then can have rules to block or allow certain sites as per their individual requirements.

The service, transparent to the end user, intercepts internet traffic from across the School's Network(s) and is designed to protect staff and learners as much as possible.

Forcepoint have provided a response to the UK Safer Internet Centre's Monitoring Checklist, it can be viewed here.

All internet traffic that passes through the WBC internet connection will be filtered and there is no requirement for specific configuration on the hardware (PCs, laptops, Ipads, Chromebooks etc...).

Industry Standards

The UK Safer Internet Centre States the following:

> "It is important to recognise that no filtering systems can be 100% effective and needs to be supported with good teaching and learning practice and effective supervision."

If a School does find a website that they feel is inappropriate it should be reported to the Council's IT team for investigation, WBC are able to block websites as the need arises and inform Forcepoint so they can take the appropriate categorisation action.

The internet currently contains in excess of 1 billion sites, with an estimate of 250,000 new websites appearing every day. Occasionally things can slip through and be categorised incorrectly. This will occur for any provider offering filtering services. In our experience this does not happen often for Schools with the WBC Network Service.

It would be a danger to allow access to sites that have not yet ben categorised. As a default setting, WBC block any 'uncategorised' sites to minimise this risk.

If a School attempts to access a new site or one that is not known to the database they will find that access is denied. For genuine websites they can log a call with WBC IT and the site will then be categorised appropriately and access will be allowed.

Guidance: Filtering Exceptions & SafeSearch

Exceptions

There are some circumstances where a filtering system does not appear to take any effect, these are:

- Google images
- You tube, or similar video sharing platforms
- Other websites that collect and display clipart and/or images
- Website adverts

Schools have occasionally reported that when using Google images it has brought back an image that was considered inappropriate. This is because:

- WBC allow access to Google as a website.
- Google is actually a search engine and searches the internet, creating links to any sites and/or media found regardless of actual content.

- So when you search in Google you can receive a very wide response from seemingly innocent search words.

SafeSearch

The search function within Google does have something called "SafeSearch" and we enforced this by default.

Google's statement around the "SafeSearch" service is as follows

> *"You can filter explicit search results on Google, like pornography, with the SafeSearch setting. SafeSearch isn't 100% accurate. But it can help you avoid explicit and inappropriate search results on your phone, tablet, or computer."*

Google then go onto state:

> *"We do our best to keep the SafeSearch filter as thorough as possible, but sometimes explicit content, like porn or nudity, makes it through. If you have SafeSearch turned on, but still see inappropriate sites or images, let us know."*

They then provide instructions on how to report inappropriate content to them. Google also provide additional disclaimers about content that may be accessible via their website.

The Council's web filtering system allows access to Google and to Google images, but does not filter the images or content viewed directly within the site, as this is controlled directly by Google.

Google also own You Tube and offers similar advice relating to videos. As with Google images, the Council's web filtering service controls if you can or cannot access You Tube. SafeSearch is enabled by default, but occasionally inappropriate videos can appear.

Outside of Google images, there are other websites that can collect clipart from the internet and display it for you. These sites are potentially higher risk as they do not operate under the Google SafeSearch option and provide little to no way of reporting back inappropriate content.

Advertising

Many websites carry adverts for other websites. Sometimes the adverts are trying to sell you something. Just as often they are "clickbait" and if you click on the link the content you see isn't related to the advert.

These adverts may use inappropriate imagery in order to attract people to click on the link. The web filter is unable to block these adverts. The only action WBC could take for schools is to block the website showing the advert but in practice this is not proportional. So many sites contain adverts you could end up blocking half of the internet.

The blocking in itself may be in itself inappropriate as the guidelines warn against over blocking.

A statement from the Safer Internet Centre says:

> *"schools will need to "be careful" that "over blocking" does not lead to unreasonable restrictions as to what children can be taught with regards to online teaching and safeguarding."*

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Recommendations for Schools

WBC have taken the necessary steps to procure, provide and support a web filtering solution appropriate for Schools. However, each School also has responsibilities to ensure their Networks and IT provisions are as safe as possible.

The following are WBC's recommendations for schools:

- School leaders should regularly review which websites (like You Tube, etc.) the School wishes to be blocked by default and inform WBC so that the correct policies can be applied to the School.

- If a School user finds a website they feel is inappropriate, report it to WBC.

- If the School's IT Network is supported by another supplier / member of staff then the School should ensure they implement the advised proxy and DNS settings. This will ensure Google SafeSearch is enabled across the School. (Every School has been sent the settings to share with their IT provider).

- The School should have robust policies in place for dealing with any instances where a user accesses inappropriate material.

- Schools should ensure staff are aware of how the web filtering service works.

- Teaching staff should exercise care when planning lessons that use the internet. Appropriate levels of supervision should be exercised.