

The St Michael Steiner School

Media and E-Safety Policy & Procedure

Aims of this policy

This policy is supplementary to our Child Protection and Health and Safety policies and aims to provide guidance for staff, parents and students in the use of electronic media and safe use of the internet.

Steiner Waldorf Education

Steiner Waldorf Education develops children's capacities for imagination, healthy feeling, independent thinking, and an active will. It is now widely recognised that media, including television, movies, video games and computers, can have a debilitating effect on the development of these capacities.

The young child

We ask that parents withdraw media exposure of all kinds from the daily experience of the young child. In this context, 'the young child' means the child under 9. We cannot over-emphasise how important this is and can offer advice to parents about how to implement changes in this direction.

Older children and students

While it is important to be aware that exposure to and use of electronic media always has an effect on the capacities mentioned above, even in adults, we recognise and value the fact that information technology, for entertainment, research and communication, is available to everyone, and that older children will use it. However, the internet is an unmanaged, open communications channel, most of the content is published for an adult audience and much is unsuitable for children. This is an area of life that changes rapidly and many parents do not keep up with the changes, do not monitor their older children's online activity or the effect it has on them, and are only vaguely aware of what they are exposed to.

Examples of e-safety issues include:

- Exposure to inappropriate material, such as pornography, violence, 'hate' and lifestyle websites (e.g. sites which promote self harm)
- Bullying via texts and social networks
- Vulnerability to identity theft
- Copyright issues (e.g. through illegally downloading music, images or films)
- The danger of unknowingly making contact with predatory people via chat rooms and social networking sites and becoming vulnerable to sexting or grooming.
- Social networking simulates true human connection and builds a false social context that can replace real social interaction and leave children isolated.
- Many teenagers use online gaming excessively and this leads to exhaustion, inability to sleep and to think clearly, lack of concentration and, as a result, frequent absence from school and illness.¹

¹ http://www.helpguide.org/mental/internet_cybersex_addiction.htm, and <https://www.netaddictionrecovery.com/the-problem/signs-and-symptoms.html> These internet sites describe some of the symptoms of internet addiction: feeling more comfortable with your online friends than your real ones, inability to control behaviour, losing track of time, restlessness, depression, feeling a sense of euphoria when engaged in internet activities, isolation from family and friends, difficulty sleeping.

This article on the school website examines these issues in more depth: http://stmichaelsteiner.hounslow.sch.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Screens_and_Teens_article.pdf

It is strongly recommended that parental guidance and careful vigilance be exercised in monitoring older children's activity on the Internet and we advise parents to discuss these issues regularly with their children's teachers and with other parents.

Procedures

1. While we offer guidance to parents about use of electronic media outside school, we cannot enforce this.
2. We provide information to parents, so that they are aware of the dangers and to equip them with tools to guard their children against exposure to the damaging effects of these media. This e-Safety Policy is available on the school website and parents' attention is drawn to it from time to time via the school newsletter.
3. Articles on our FaceBook page and website address the issues that arise from children's use of electronic media.
4. From Kindergarten onwards, the use of electronic media is a regular topic in Parents' evenings.
5. As soon as teachers are aware that children in their classes have unsupervised access to electronic media, they will initiate regular conversations with parents and with the children, about the safe use of media and such things as privacy and bullying via electronic media.
6. From Class 7 onwards, students have a programme of weekly lessons throughout the year to address 'Global Issues' including media, the internet and e-safety.
7. Children in the Lower and Middle School who travel to school by themselves are allowed to bring mobile phones to school with their parents' written permission and must hand them in at reception on arrival at school.
8. Children in the Kindergarten and Lower School (Classes 1 - 5) do not use computers or mobile phones at school.
9. Children in the Middle School (Classes 6, 7 & 8) sometimes use school computers under supervision but are not allowed to bring their own laptops or tablets or to use mobile phones at school.
10. Students in the High School use their own laptops, tablets and mobile phones for research and writing in lessons and have access to the internet via the school wifi in some parts of the school. They are advised about e-safety and internet use is monitored by staff. They are not allowed to use mobile phones on school premises outside their own classrooms.
11. The terms of the school's employment contracts prohibit the inappropriate use of the internet on school premises by any member of staff.
12. Staff may not be 'friends' with pupils on any social networking site.
13. While we take all reasonable precautions to ensure that students, staff and visitors do not access inappropriate material either deliberately or inadvertently, it is not possible to guarantee that unsuitable material will never appear on a screen at school. The school cannot accept liability for material accessed, or any consequences of Internet access.

Managing the changing online world

- Emerging technologies will be examined for educational benefit and a risk assessment will be carried out before use in school is allowed.

- Staff, particularly those of the Middle and High School, will keep abreast of developments in gaming, social networking and any other forms of interactive electronic communication in order to monitor them and address with parents and students any issues that may arise.

Electronically-held personal data

In accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998², we ensure that personal information held electronically is:

- used fairly and lawfully
- used for limited, specifically stated purposes
- used in a way that is adequate, relevant and not excessive
- accurate
- kept for no longer than is absolutely necessary
- handled according to people's data protection rights
- kept safe and secure
- not transferred outside the European Economic Area without adequate protection

Handling e-safety complaints

Complaints of Internet misuse are considered Safeguarding issues and will be dealt with by the designated Safeguarding officers using their usual procedures. (See Safeguarding Policy)

All policies are available from reception or on the school's website at www.stmichaelsteiner.hounslow.sch.uk

² This policy will be updated before new Data Protection law comes into force on 25th May 2018.