



Safeguarding students with Lightspeed Systems

In a bid to protect pupils from burgeoning online threats, schools are faced with a difficult challenge: how to impose strong controls without resorting to the draconian techniques that will constrain important opportunities to learn and interact.

The School

St Mary's School Calne, in Wiltshire is a boarding and day school with 300 girls aged 11-18. Founded in 1873, the school treasures its traditional values whilst delivering the modern curriculum required to develop young women for the 21st century.

The Challenge

However, the modern approach to learning creates new headaches for the school – not least the increasing dangers posed by the Internet, from time wasting in chat rooms during lessons to messaging-led bullying and access to inappropriate content. Matthew Rus, IT Manager at St Mary's school, explains, "Whilst the Internet has become a key tool to support research and learning, it also creates significant threats. With the amount of uncontrolled information now available, schools need to implement significant security measures to protect pupils."

Indeed, parental awareness of pupil's use of the Internet – from instant messaging to social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook – is growing, with many raising concerns about their children's online behaviour both at home and at school. "The ability to demonstrate strong yet fair control over pupils' use of online technology is becoming an important factor for any school – especially independent boarding schools acting in loco parentis outside standard teaching hours," he confirms.

The Solution

The school has implemented Total Traffic Control from Lightspeed Systems to monitor, control and secure both internal wireless networks and Internet connections. The solution covers not only school equipment but also pupils' own laptops which, given the multi-racial nature of the school, spend holidays trawling web sites from China and Japan to Russia.

Rus comments, "To maintain the security of IT systems against spyware and viruses it is very important to manage not only the activity of equipment whilst on school property but also protect against potentially malicious software that could have been downloaded when pupils are at home." Using the Total Traffic Control Security Agent on each machine, the school has a complete list of every executable programme on every machine and a comparison with the authorised software, minimising the risk of exposure to viruses and other malware.

The Benefits

Furthermore, using TTC St Mary's can create a range of access policies that reflect the different needs of pupils within each age group, from 11-18. "It is extremely valuable to be able to segment sites for different age groups – for example only allowing access to YouTube for older pupils," says Rus. In addition, access times are also restricted based on age. Critically, the school has been able to use TTC to restrict access to non educational sites during school hours. "It is too easy for a pupil to be apparently researching information online and actually be on Facebook," he says. "Using TTC to set flexible policies that restrict usage by age and by time of day, St Mary's has imposed control over pupils whilst still allowing appropriate use of social networks and instant messaging that are important in today's culture."

The school is also keen to use TTC to minimise the growing dangers associated with online bullying, a particular concern given the number of boarders with their own laptops. TTC provides a complete log of each pupil's search queries and blocked content. "I have reported back on three occasions about search queries that raised concern about specific pupils," Rus confirms. "And on other occasions, used the email journals to check for bullying suspected by the Head."

This proactive approach to managing Internet usage has already delivered benefits, with TTC blocking far more sites, especially for the younger pupils. Indeed, Rus says, "It is incredibly rare that an inappropriate site slips through. More often St Mary's will choose to allow pupils to access specific blocked sites within teaching hours to support specific educational requirements." Taking a flexible approach that combines excellent real time control with age based policies is proving highly successful. Rus concludes, "Opting for draconian measures such as banning access to all non educational sites will never work, pupils will always find a way around it. Furthermore, restricting access to these tools hampers their growth and creativity. Using TTC, St Mary's can ensure pupils get access to both information and social networking without compromising either their safety or education."

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