Making Sense of the New Online Safety Standards

Online Safety

Ofsted has published the long awaited changes to the way it inspects all early years, education and skills settings, including schools from September 2015. This includes significant changes to how they consider and inspect Online Safety. SWGfL / UK Safer Internet Centre highlights the changes and explains what the implications are.

Earlier this month, Ofsted published their 'far-reaching' changes to the way they will 'inspect early years provision, schools and further education and skills from September 2015'. This represents the introduction of a brand new common inspection framework and significant change across all these remits, in which Online Safety is no exception.

The first point is that the term e-Safety has been replaced with 'Online Safety'. This fundamental change reflects a widening range of issues associated with technology and a user's access to content, contact with others and behavioural issues. The term Cyber bullying has also been replaced with 'Online Bullying'.

Online Safety references are no longer simply statements that are inserted, but occupy significant areas of the new 'Inspecting safeguarding in Early Years, education and skills settings' guidance. Ofsted highlights that 'online safety' specifically is one of the broader aspects of care and education as "safeguarding is not just about protecting children, learners and vulnerable adults from deliberate harm, neglect and failure to act". We suggest this represents that online safety has an increasing priority for inspectors and very clearly an element of safeguarding. We agree that this is exactly where it should be; for too long, schools (in particular) have considered e-safety to be an ICT issue.

Detailed changes around Online Safety in the 'Inspecting safeguarding in early years, education and skills settings' Guidance:

» Page 6, Section 10 - Definition of Safeguarding

Safeguarding action may be needed to protect children and learners from:

- bullying, including online bullying and prejudice-based bullying
- radicalisation and/or extremist behaviour
- child sexual exploitation and trafficking
- the impact of new technologies on sexual behaviour, for example sexting

This is the first mention in an Ofsted document around behavioural practices associated directly with technology. This acknowledges that those who work with children are responsible for issues that arise beyond their own geography and timetable if it impacts on the safety and well-being of a child.

» Page 9, Section 13 - The signs of successful safeguarding arrangements

Adults understand the risks posed by adults or learners who use technology, including the internet, to bully, groom, radicalise or abuse children or learners. They have well-developed strategies in place to keep children and learners safe and to support them to develop their own understanding of these risks and in learning how to keep themselves and others safe. Leaders oversee the safe use of technology when children and learners are in their care and take action immediately if they are concerned about bullying or children's well-being. Leaders of early years settings implement the required policies with regard to the safe use of mobile phones and cameras in settings.

This indication of a successful safeguarding arrangement, centres on clear leadership, effective staff development, intervention mechanisms (including reporting routes) and effective self and peer education. It draws attention to the particular risks in early years settings around the use of digital and mobile technologies to record achievement and progress.

So, what should I be doing?

Ask yourself: "*Do I have online safety policies and acceptable use policies in place? How do I know they are clear, understood and respected by all?*"

» Page 12, Section 18 - Inspectors will want to consider evidence that:

Staff, leaders and managers understand the risks posed by adults or young people who use the internet to bully, groom or abuse children, young people and vulnerable adults; there are well-developed strategies in place to keep learners safe and to support them in learning how to keep themselves safe

This relates to effective staff development. Ofsted concluded in their 'safe use of new technologies' report of 2010 that "the weakest aspect of provision in the schools visited was the extent and quality of training provided for staff". Research from Plymouth University and SWGfL carried out with 5,500 schools also concludes that "*staff training...continues to be weak across many schools*".

So what should I be doing?

Ask yourself: "*How do I ensure that all staff receive appropriate online safety training that is relevant and regularly up to date?*"

» Page 12, Section 18 - Inspectors will want to consider evidence that:

Staff, leaders and managers oversee the safe use of electronic and social media by staff and learners and take action immediately if they are concerned about bullying or risky behaviours

This is a clear reference to staff use of technology in terms of professional standards, both within and beyond the setting and the effectiveness of reporting mechanisms to highlight issues when they arise. This includes active reporting routes such as nominated staff; anonymous reporting mechanisms and peer escalation routes, as well as passive intelligence gathering and alerting tools to monitor issues in the wider school community.

So what should I be doing?

Ask yourself: "*What mechanisms does the school have in place to support young people and staff facing online safety issues?*"

» Page 15, Section 34 - Arriving at Judgements about safeguarding arrangements

Inspectors will make a judgement on the personal development, behaviour and welfare of children and learners by evaluating, where applicable, the extent to which the provision is successfully promoting and supporting children's and learners' safety. In order to make this judgement, inspectors will consider, among other things, children's and learners' understanding of how to keep themselves safe from relevant risks such as exploitation and extremism, including when using the internet and social media. Inspectors should include online safety in their discussions with pupils and learners (covering topics such as online bullying and safe use of the internet and social media). Inspectors should investigate what the school or further education and skills provider does to educate pupils in online safety and how the provider or school deals with issues when they arise.

Here, Ofsted offers clear guidance for inspectors on interviewing children about the prevalence of online risks and how the school prepares them to cope. 'Parent view' , which allows parents to discuss their concerns or opinions of a school will also be a source of information for the inspection into children's safety.

This also links with obligations on statutory agencies to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism (detailed in the statutory guidance for the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015). It is important to note that inspectors are expected to, at least, discuss online safety with children as part of an inspection.

So, what should I be doing?

Ask yourself: "*How do I educate children and young people to build knowledge, skills and capability when it comes to online safety?*"

"*How do I assess its effectiveness?*"

"*How do I educate and support parents and the whole school community with online safety?*"

» Page 16, Section 40 - Inspecting or reporting on safeguarding concerns

Inspectors should ensure that they are aware of information available to the public, reported in the press or accessible on the internet, including that available on the early years setting, school or further education and skills provider's website, if available. This may contain information related to safeguarding. Inspectors should do a check on the internet as part of their pre-inspection planning to see whether there are any safeguarding issues that may need to be followed up during inspection. All evidence that relates to planning for the inspection should be recorded.

The considerations and planning that inspectors should complete in their planning for an inspection now includes the use of technology to build wider contextual information around a setting prior to or during inspection. No longer are considerations limited to Parent View and a review of the setting's website, but wider internet checks.

So what should I be doing?

Ask yourself: "*How is our setting portrayed online? What are your children, parents and staff saying about our setting online? How do I know?*"