



Circular 0038/2018

TO: THE MANAGERIAL AUTHORITIES OF RECOGNISED PRIMARY, SECONDARY, COMMUNITY, AND COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOLS AND THE CHIEF EXECUTIVES OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING BOARDS

CONSULTATION WITH THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY INCLUDING TEACHERS, STUDENTS AND PARENTS ON THE USE OF SMART PHONES AND TABLET DEVICES IN SCHOOLS

Purpose of Circular

The Minister for Education and Skills has decided to request schools to consult with their school community, including teachers, students and parents regarding the use of smart phones, tablets and video recording devices with a view to developing a whole-school policy for their use or updating an existing one.

Background

The promotion of digital technologies for teaching, learning and assessment is a priority of my Department. The Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020 has the following vision: “Realise the potential of digital technologies to enhance teaching, learning and assessment so that Ireland's young people become engaged thinkers, active learners, knowledge constructors and global citizens to participate fully in society and the economy.”

An extensive programme of actions is underway to support the implementation of the Strategy, under the Digital Strategy Action Plan.

Research shows that digital technologies can play a positive role in supporting high quality teaching, learning and assessment. These technologies help promote student engagement and enhance the teaching and learning experience by opening new opportunities for learning, promoting independent learning and providing access to quality online resources. However, their use needs careful consideration and management if they are to have a positive educational impact.

The use of tablet devices and smart phones is now an integral part of the lives of children and young people. While this is a positive development, concerns have been identified including some risks associated with the misuse, abuse and possible overuse of these devices and the various associated technologies.

Children and young people need to be guided and supported to become good digital citizens. In a school setting, using digital technologies mediated by the teacher with the skills to exploit the potential of the technologies can be invaluable in equipping children with the skills to navigate the online world safely.



Need for school policy

Schools are advised that they should have a whole school policy in place covering the use of tablet devices and smartphones in the classroom and during the school day. This policy should complement the use of technology in the classroom for teaching and learning and should be reviewed and updated on a regular basis. It should be developed in an open and inclusive way involving all members of the school community including teachers, students and parents so as to ensure that the policy meets the needs of the individual school and there is a shared understanding of its content.

There may also be changes required to other policies, or the development of other policies may be required, as a consequence of the outcome of the consultation.

Relevant policies may include the following:

- Acceptable Usage Policy (this a document, signed by students and their parents, guardians or carers, detailing the ways in which the Internet enabled devices, mobile phones and related devices can and cannot be used in your school).
- Anti-Bullying policy, to include reference to cyberbullying
- Data Protection Policy, to include reference to the use of images and social media.
- Bring Your Own Device (BYOD), which allows pupils/students to bring their own devices, especially tablets and other suitable personal devices, into classrooms to support improving student learning outcomes. Many BYOD suitable devices may be more capable and up to date than some school computers and can support a more student-centred, active learning approach, with students taking more responsibility for their own learning.
- Wellbeing, to ensure the area of safe and ethical use of the internet is addressed in the context of the whole-school approach to wellbeing.

Consultation process

Schools are required to consult with teachers, student and parents on their views and suggestions on the use of tablet devices and smart phones within the school and during the school day. In this regard, schools should utilise their established local consultative arrangements. It is suggested that schools might use surveys, focus groups and questionnaires to gather information concerning concerns and insights on the use of devices and smartphones.

Issues for consultation with parents

This consultation with teachers, parents and students should include the following matters:

- The appropriate use, if any, of tablet devices and smart phones in school
- The issues governing the use of smart phones and tablet devices with regard to, for example, recording videos, taking photos



- The nature and scope of restrictions that might be applied by the school e.g. age grounds
- If smart phones should be allowed outside of class time i.e. during breaks, on school grounds after school
- Schools should use the opportunity of the consultation process to raise awareness and promote a shared approach regarding the appropriate use of digital technologies in the school and home.

Timeline

The circular should be implemented as soon as possible. It is recognised that schools may already have policies in this area, for example, Acceptable Usage Policy, policies on Bring your own Device/Technology. Where this is the position, schools are advised that these policies be reviewed at the earliest opportunity and updated following the consultation.

Dissemination of circular

A copy of this circular should be provided to members of the Board of Management, Parents Association and other school personnel as appropriate. This circular can be accessed at https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0038_2018.pdf

Further Information

Webwise is an internet safety initiative focused on raising awareness of online safety issues and good practice among students, their parents and teachers. Funded by the Department of Education and Skills, and the EU Safer Internet Programme, developed and managed by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (Technology in Education) to promote the autonomous, effective and safer use of the internet by young people through a sustained information and awareness strategy targeting school leaders, parents and children themselves with consistent and relevant messages.

The School Management is asked to actively promote the use of this Website by teachers when using the on-line environment in classrooms and by parents in their online interactions with their children.

Webwise helps forge the link between home and school through the development of an online Parenting Hub. This provides parents with easy access to practical advice and information to help address their concerns about the various issues facing their children in the online environment.

To find the full suite of awareness and education resources for teachers and parents, visit www.webwise.ie.



Further information regarding matters to be considered in developing policies in this area can be found at: www.webwise.ie and <http://www.pdsttechnologyineducation.ie/en/Technology/Advice-Sheets/Bring-your-own-Device-BYOD-for-Learning.pdf>

www.dataprotectionschools.ie is an information resource for schools to support the development of data protection policies provided by the Education Partners, including the JMB, ACCS, ETBI, among others.

Queries

Queries on this circular should be emailed to the following address:

ictpolicy@education.gov.ie.