



Internet and communications technologies offer exciting new possibilities for teaching and learning, but they also bring new risks and challenges. In the first of two features on cyberbullying, **Elyssa Campbell-Barr** looks at its impact on school staff.

Beating ^{the} cyberbullies

Teachers have always had to endure pupils giving them nasty nicknames, scrawling insulting graffiti, and grumbling about their lessons. But in the 21st century, nicknames are spread not just by word of mouth but by text message and email. Malicious rumours are as likely to appear on a blog or social networking website as a toilet wall. Students' grumbles find their way from the playground to the public domain at sites such as Ratemteachers. And that lesson you'd rather forget could be filmed on a mobile and posted on YouTube, with a potential audience of millions, by the end of the day.

It's hardly surprising, then, that some teaching organisations have called for certain social networking and file-sharing websites to be banned and for mobile phones to be classed as offensive weapons. Hardly surprising, but hardly realistic either. Like them or not, these new technologies are here to stay. And, used effectively, they can bring a new dimension to teaching and learning.

The downside is that these technologies expose teachers and pupils to new risks. Cyberbullying can spread far more rapidly, widely and uncontrollably than other forms of bullying. It's also more invasive, affecting victims in places and at times that were previously personal and 'safe'. Those responsible may attempt to remain anonymous, which can be particularly distressing. But cyberbullies tend to leave 'digital footprints' – the technologies they use provide a trail of evidence in a way that other forms of bullying do not.

Last year a survey of teachers conducted by the Teacher Support Network (TSN) found that one in five (19.3 per cent) had been bullied by phone, email or the internet. The most common problem was upsetting or abusive emails, and the most frequent perpetrators were pupils. Recent news reports have highlighted instances of students setting up hate websites about teachers, posing as teachers in online chat rooms, using mobile phones to take inappropriate pictures and video footage of teachers in class, and threatening teachers by text and email.

Fortunately the government and technology industry are taking the problem seriously. In 2007 the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) established its Cyberbullying Taskforce, an alliance of more than 40 organisations, including the NUT and other teaching unions, phone networks, social networking and video sharing websites, internet service providers, charities, councils and government departments.

Will Gardner is deputy chief executive of Childnet International, one of the charities on the taskforce, and co-writer of the DCSF guidance *Cyberbullying – Safe to Learn: Embedding anti-bullying work in schools*. He says: "Teachers have the right to use and enjoy new technologies just as much as anyone else. There's no reason why they shouldn't be using social networking sites or chat forums. They just need to think carefully about what information they put in the public domain."

Resources

Cyberbullying – Safe to Learn: Embedding anti-bullying work in schools is packed with information about understanding, preventing and responding to cyberbullying. Download it from <http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk> – search for 'cyberbullying'. The guidance is supported by an eight-minute film, briefing sheet, lesson plan and interviews, suitable for use with pupils, parents and staff, all available from www.digizen.org.

The NUT's close colleagues in the Teacher Support Network have produced an advice sheet for teachers experiencing cyberbullying. Download it from www.teachersupport.info – search for 'cyberbullying'.

One in five teachers has been bullied by phone, email or the internet.

Illustration: Neill Cameron

Cyberbullying and the law

Cyberbullying is not in itself a criminal offence in the UK. However, some cyberbullying activities could be classed as offences under a variety of UK laws, for example those covering harassment, malicious communications and obscene publications. In July a British man was awarded £22,000 in damages for defamation and invasion of privacy after a former friend set up a fake profile for him on Facebook, which included false information about his political views, sexual orientation and financial status. The NUT has won settlements for members who suffered cyberbullying as part of sustained campaigns of racist and homophobic abuse.

The Education and Inspections Act 2006 gave teachers and school leaders useful new powers to deal with cyberbullying. It provides a defence for teachers confiscating items such as mobile phones from pupils who use them in a disruptive or bullying way. It also clarifies that staff may search through pupils' phones if the school's behaviour policy specifically allows this.

Worryingly, 39 per cent of respondents in the TSN survey said their school had no procedure or policy to deal with cyberbullying. An additional 52 per cent weren't sure if such a policy existed in their school.

Some schools, however, are taking positive and innovative steps to tackle the issue, for example by:

- organising an e-safety week
- establishing a pupil-led cyberbullying taskforce
- conducting anonymous surveys of pupils' and teachers' experiences of cyberbullying
- holding information evenings for parents
- introducing incident reporting sheets
- working in partnership with their local police force or county council to run training and awareness events.

"Cyberbullying is a whole-school community issue," says Will. "Everyone – staff, parents and learners – needs to recognise what cyberbullying is and that it can have a serious impact. They need to understand that it's unacceptable, and not an inevitable consequence of new technologies."

Top tips for tackling cyberbullying

With new technologies here to stay and the internet crossing all legal jurisdictions, it's very difficult to ban the cyberbullies and impossible to close down the websites they use, even though this might be desirable. Any threat of a ban will always provoke arguments in favour of freedom of speech, even though cyberbullying is universally condemned. Here then are some practical tips for dealing with it.

At school

- Make sure cyberbullying is covered in your school's anti-bullying and IT policies, and that staff and pupils know what constitutes unacceptable behaviour and the steps they can take to deal with it.
- Encourage your school to adopt a zero-tolerance approach to cyberbullying of staff and pupils, and ensure managers and IT staff deal with perpetrators quickly and firmly. Keep records of any cyberbullying incidents.
- Use 'nanny' software to stop pupils accessing inappropriate websites at school, and monitoring software to watch for pupils using offensive language or visiting unsuitable sites.
- Organise internet safety training for all staff who use the web with pupils.

Phone calls, texts and emails

- Don't share personal email addresses, phone numbers or computer passwords with pupils or parents.
- Never reply to bullying emails or text messages, but do keep them as evidence for any investigations.
- If you receive nuisance phone calls, don't hang up – simply walk away. Talking to no-one is boring and expensive for the caller. If the calls persist, contact your phone network.
- Consider blocking the caller's number or sender's email address. Change your own phone number or email address if necessary.
- Make sure your school's policy on mobile phone use is clear and enforced.
- If the calls or messages constitute harassment, include threats of harm or violence, or involve illegal material, pass the details to the police for investigation.

Websites

- Don't accept current or recent pupils as friends on social networking sites. A friendly relationship can quickly turn sour if you have to discipline a pupil or give them a bad mark, and you're in a vulnerable position if they're able to leave comments and pictures on your Facebook or MySpace profile.
- Familiarise yourself with the privacy settings on social networking sites and restrict access to your profile.
- If you come across bullying or offensive material on a social networking or video- or photo-sharing website, report it to the site operator immediately – most have links marked 'report abuse' or 'flag content as inappropriate'. Links to contact details and safety tips are normally on the site's homepage.
- Don't use your real name when writing a blog or using internet chatrooms, forums or message boards. Take care, too, not to post personal information, such as your date of birth, phone number, address or pictures of your family, home or car, on public websites.
- Take 'screen grabs' or print copies of offensive material from websites and chat forums (including the relevant web-page addresses) as these can help the host to locate the content and find those responsible.

General advice

- Familiarise yourself with new technologies and social networking sites so that you are aware of how they work, why they appeal to pupils, and what the potential dangers might be.
- Remember that (as with other forms of bullying) with some low-level cyberbullying, the most effective response may be to ignore it.
- However, if you find inflammatory material about you online, or you receive abusive or upsetting text or email messages, report this to a senior member of staff immediately.

If you are a victim of cyberbullying and feel your school is not doing enough to tackle it, contact your NUT rep for advice and support. If it's really serious and you want advice on possible legal remedies, help is available from NUT regional offices.

Next issue:
Tackling cyberbullying of pupils.



With National Anti-Bullying Week taking place this month, the second of **Elyssa Campbell-Barr's** two articles on cyberbullying looks at its effect on pupils and offers advice for staying safe online.

Resources

There are some excellent online resources dedicated to e-safety and tackling cyberbullying, for example:

www.antibullying.net/cyberbullying1.htm

www.bebo.com/Safety.jsp

www.becta.org.uk (search 'bullying')

www.bullying.co.uk

www.childnet-int.org

www.digizen.org

www.getsafeonline.org

www.hectorsworld.com

www.kidsmart.org.uk

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/cbbcnews/hi/specials/bullying/default.stm>

www.stoptextbully.com

www.teachers.tv/bullying

www.thinkuknow.co.uk

www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/behaviour/tacklingbullying/cyberbullying

www.wiredsafety.org

Anti-Bullying Week 2008 takes place from 17 to 21 November. This year's theme is 'Being Different, Belonging Together'. Find out more at www.antibullyingweek.org.

Beating the cyberbullies

Part 2

Today's schoolchildren have never known life without mobile phones and the internet. Many consider these technologies an essential part of their identities, using them to develop and maintain friendships and interact with the wider world.

Such technologies can be a great asset in the classroom too. They engage and empower pupils in new ways, enable more flexible and personalised learning, and provide increased opportunities for collaborative working within schools and between schools anywhere in the world.

The disadvantage is that these technologies are also open to misuse and abuse. The term 'cyberbullying' began to be

used in the early part of this decade, when it was generally applied to upsetting text and email messages. Now 'web 2.0' technologies, such as social networking, instant messaging (IM) and video sharing websites, have created new forms of cyberbullying, from so-called 'happy slapping' incidents to pupils having their work sabotaged on their school's virtual learning environment.

The Department for Children, Schools and Families defines cyberbullying as 'the use of information and communications technology, particularly mobile phones and the internet, deliberately to upset someone else'. In research conducted as part of the DCSF's 2007 cyberbullying information campaign, 34 per cent of 12 to 15 year olds reported having

about e-safety, which they show to the younger children. We also discuss safe use of chatrooms, webcams, putting pictures online, and so on, and encourage them to talk about their experiences. We've found that some not only use social networking sites such as Bebo [which has a no under-13s rule], but also post quite provocative pictures of themselves on their profiles.

We had a case of cyberbullying via Bebo a while back, and this prompted us to organise an e-safety evening for parents of all age groups. We asked our Year 6 pupils to tell us which sites they regularly visit and gave a list of these to parents, highlighting which ones they're supposed to be 13 to use. We found that a lot of parents were unaware of how to change online safety settings, for example on Google so that children can't search for inappropriate images. Unfortunately there's quite a lot of apathy among Year 6 parents. They think their children are confident and safe online.

Schools' stories

Karen Stanton is ICT co-ordinator at Stukely Meadows primary school in Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire.

We don't want to stop children using the internet, but we want them to be safe when they do, so we start looking at e-safety with them from reception. At that age it's very basic things, such as always asking an adult before using the computer, and good and bad words to use on the internet. In Years 1 and 2 we use the Hector's World website which links with the Key Stage 1 framework. We explain that going on to the internet is like going into a public place such as Tesco; that children should be careful who they talk to and tell their parents if anything makes them feel scared or unhappy.

In Years 3 and 4 our children use the ThinkUKNow cybercafe site. By years 5 and 6 they're quite savvy about what they should and shouldn't do online, so we get them to produce their own PowerPoint presentation



Staying safe online

Young people's behaviour online tends to be less inhibited than in real life, and their natural curiosity causes them to push boundaries. Many ignore the age restrictions on social networking sites or online games, explore adult material, or post sexualised images of themselves.

Their naivety puts them at risk, not just from sexual predators but also from scams and being drawn into unregulated online communities that promote, for example, self-harm, eating disorders or drug use. Peer pressure can also prompt risky behaviour, such as filming dangerous stunts and posting the footage on YouTube.

Publishing her government-commissioned review this spring into the risks posed to children by the internet and video games, Dr Tanya Byron commented that many parents liken surfing the internet to watching television. In fact, she said, it's more like allowing children to play outside unsupervised.

In response to the Byron review, the government has formed the UK Council for Child Internet Safety, an alliance of over 100 public and private sector organisations, including internet giants such as Microsoft, Google and Facebook. The first national child internet safety summit is due to be hosted by the Prime Minister next spring.

Schools have an important role to play in educating pupils about the dangers to themselves and others of engaging in risky or bullying online behaviour. November's Anti-Bullying Week presents an ideal opportunity for raising the issue with the whole school community. Take a look at the case studies, tips and resources on these pages for inspiration.

school. Our police community support officer, Bob Purcell, talks to parents about their children's use of texts and MSN, and will even visit the homes of pupils who have fallen out. It can be difficult to separate what happens outside school from what happens inside, but when something starts to affect pupils' learning we need to deal with it.

At Littlehampton we practise 'restorative justice'. When two pupils fall out, staff who've been trained as restorative justice practitioners meet with each student individually. Both pupils answer the same set of questions, and are asked to look at the situation from the other person's point of view. They agree on measures to resolve the issue and both sign a contract. We've done a couple of hundred restorative justice cases over the past four years, including some between teachers and pupils, and I would say it's 99.9 per cent effective.

been cyberbullied. A 2005 study by Goldsmiths college found that girls were significantly more likely to be cyberbullied than boys and that more cyberbullying took place out of school than in school. According to an MSN report, 74 per cent of teenagers didn't seek help from anyone when they were last cyberbullied.

Surveys repeatedly show that young people believe cyberbullying to be worse than traditional physical or verbal bullying. Incidents can be difficult to contain because mobile phones, email and the internet enable bullies to spread offensive material very widely, very quickly. Bullies can also reach their victims in places and at times previously considered private and safe, for example on holiday or in a bedroom in the middle of the night.

But, as explained in the last edition of *The Teacher*, cyberbullies leave a trail of digital evidence. Text messages, emails and saved web pages can all help to pinpoint the date, time and type of bullying and locate the perpetrator, helping schools tackle the issue without having to rely on the word of one pupil against another.

Susan Gwinnell-Smith is assistant head of Littlehampton community school in West Sussex.

We have a Bullybusters website where pupils can send an email if they're being bullied but don't feel able to talk to a member of staff about it. Our student council had been focusing on bullying and came up with all the ideas for the site. We've also trained groups of students as peer mediators. Fortunately there's not a huge amount of demand for either service – I think that's because we take issues between pupils seriously and nip any problems in the bud as soon as they start.

We've found that cyberbullying normally starts with girls gossiping by text message or on MSN Messenger. They get carried away and things escalate more than if they were talking face-to-face. The girls fall out and get emotional, and this can make them disruptive in

Top tips for tackling cyberbullying

- Involve pupils in developing policies covering cyberbullying, mobile phone and internet use in school, perhaps through the school council or by setting up a cybersafety taskforce.
- Regularly review your school's existing anti-bullying and behaviour policies to ensure they cover the latest technologies and trends. The policies should encompass off-site cyberbullying incidents that have an impact on school life.
- Ensure that everyone in the school community (pupils, teachers, support staff, parents and governors) knows what constitutes cyberbullying, how to report incidents, and the consequences of being a perpetrator.
- Integrate anti-cyberbullying work into your existing citizenship, PSHE and ICT classes.
- Have a dedicated member of staff responsible for monitoring and tackling cyberbullying.
- Get involved in anti-cyberbullying initiatives run by your local police force, safeguarding children board or local authority.
- Keep your school's internet monitoring software and procedures up to date, and publicise them to discourage cyberbullying and other inappropriate internet use at school.
- Place school computers where screens are visible and pupils can be easily supervised.
- Encourage pupils to think about their own cyber-safety, for example not sharing passwords, being careful about what personal information they put in the public domain, and not meeting up with people who have contacted them online.
- Explain to pupils that if they do experience cyberbullying, they should tell someone about it and keep evidence by saving text messages and emails, or taking screenshots and recording website URLs.
- Urge children to take regular breaks from e-communications; to have periods when they are not contactable by phone, email or IM.
- Encourage pupils to develop a healthy scepticism of the internet. Use examples to show that not everything they read is true and that people may not be who they claim to be.
- Emphasise to pupils that when accepting 'friends' on social networking and IM sites, quality is more important than quantity.
- Remember that, as with other forms of bullying, both the victim and the bully may need emotional support.