

HOW SCHOOLS CAN USE TECHNOLOGY TO TACKLE BULLYING

Published by Teach Middle East



School bullying is becoming more prevalent across schools worldwide, including in the United Arab Emirates. In many schools, students have access to technology and the internet constantly throughout the school day, whether this is for learning or personal use. However, not all schools have the correct tools in place to ensure students are using the time they have online positively.

The OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2015 (published in 2017) found that 27% of UAE students reported being bullied in some way 'at least a few times a month'. This is well above the OECD average of 18.7%. The results also found that the UAE is 10th out of 53 countries on the index of frequent exposure to bullying, meaning that UAE students are experiencing bullying much more than those in other countries.

Traditionally, schools have held assemblies or taught lessons about bullying that can help to educate children, but it doesn't solve the problem or monitor what is happening within the school. Creating an environment that encourages student voice or allows for student digital leaders can be a great starting point to gaining their involvement and opening up a dialogue between them and the school. Many schools are also turning to technology to help them monitor behaviour in both supervised and unsupervised environments.

There are now a number of tools available that include safeguarding and monitoring features to help staff combat the problem of bullying within their schools:

Internet Metering

Internet Metering tools can provide a detailed summary of all internet activity by a student, including start and finish times for each URL visited and the active time spent on a page. Naturally, the key to supporting an effective eSafety policy is providing effective controls to help monitor and educate students on positive digital behaviour - and not just to blanket ban everything. In some solutions, internet usage can be fully managed: lists of approved and restricted URLs and/or sub-URLs can be applied centrally, and to specific age groups/departments.

Keyword and Phrase Monitoring

Such tools use a database of pre-supplied safeguarding keywords and phrases covering a range of topics (including bullying) enabling the school network to be constantly monitored. Some providers go a step further and use advanced neurolinguistics to ensure accurate detection and to avoid unnecessary 'false alarms' - and allow keywords and phrases to have individual severity levels (determined by the school). This then controls the outcome on matching the triggered keyword to an action: from a simple logging of the event, through to

capturing a screenshot or a screen video recording when triggered - so schools know the full background to the event. Being able to view the data and filter it is just as important as initially collecting it.

Contextual analysis

A new concept to safeguarding is the use of contextual analysis. It uses variables such as the devices used, time of day, and websites visited (including previous alerts triggered) to create a numerical risk index, based on the context and history of a child's activities. This helps school staff to identify genuine concerns and prioritise accordingly.

Report a concern

Ensuring children can report a concern they might have is key to an effective safeguarding policy. Certain tools include a way for students to report their concerns in confidence to a trusted member of staff. This feature is especially useful for students who feel uncomfortable speaking directly to a staff member. It allows them to share their problems and get help from staff without having to approach them in person. It also allows staff to track any reports and have a record of concerns that have been raised and any evidence provided by the student.

Technology can be a helping hand

Staff can't be everywhere at once and technology can never be a replacement for eyes and ears, yet with the appropriate safeguarding tools in place, together, nothing gets missed and instead concerning activity is flagged, helping staff to identify students who are being bullied and are looking for help online. Once these students have been identified, the school can then take action to help stop the bullying from occurring.