



POLICY STATEMENT A SCHOOL-WIDE APPROACH TO THE INTERNET

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The School Council acknowledges excellence in academic achievement by students through the Chairperson of School Council Awards, and constantly recognises and affirms the hard work and professionalism of the teachers and support staff over the school year.
- 1.2 This program will provide tangible and ongoing support for the teaching and support staff to improve and extend their knowledge, skills and abilities.

2.0 Policy

- 2.1 The educational potential of the Internet to the school curriculum, with particular focus on higher order thinking and learning.

The Internet is a massive source of information, and is widely used in industry and the community. It is important that students learn to use it intelligently and effectively, and this provides a major opportunity for a focus on higher order thinking and learning in the curriculum.

It also provides the opportunity for collaborative learning between students and teachers: students are often more technically adept at information technology than their teachers, but this is balanced by the high level of skill of teachers as information managers.

- 2.2 The ethical dimensions of authorship such as use of information in assignments and acknowledging sources.

Students need to apply the same ethical standards to use of the Internet as they do in other areas of their studies.

- 2.3 Access to controversial material: *It is impossible to control the Internet, so students are given significant levels of trust in their on-line activities.*

- 2.4 Expertise - and hence understanding of the Internet agenda - by teachers, students and parents.

The Internet is now part of the social and educational context in which we live. An understanding of this context is imperative if Hillbrook is to provide relevant and up-to-date learning experiences for students.

- 2.5 Legal Issues: *Due to the inability to control the Internet, legal liabilities are a difficult issue. It is important that these issues be understood, and that the school acts - and is seen to act - to address them.*



3.0 Expectations of Internet Use at Hillbrook

At Hillbrook we agree that it is important for people to behave ethically. Trust is a major element in the life of the school, and in general students handle this expectation very well.

Trust is also a key element in the concept of Hillbrook as a community, where people care for each other and grow together.

Use of the Internet should be a normal learning experience in the school. The world wide web and email are potentially rich resources, and it is a natural extension of this trust to apply it to use of the Internet.

4.0 Rights and Responsibilities of Students Using Hillbrook's Internet Resources

- 4.1** The right to be treated within the bounds of the law and to be protected by it, and the responsibility to respect and observe the law, particularly in its application to Internet use.
- 4.2** The right to have their work protected by the normal conventions and rules that apply to authorship and copyright, and the responsibility to respect and observe those conventions and rules with respect to the work of others. This especially relates to assignment writing and acknowledging sources of information.
- 4.3** The right to receive respectful communications from others, and the responsibility to conduct communications with other people in a respectful way.
- 4.4** The right to use school technology for productive and appropriate educational activities, and the responsibility to refrain from accessing or posting offensive/ dangerous material, or from deliberately interfering with or damaging the school's computers or network.
- 4.5** The right to personal privacy and dignity, and the responsibility to respect the privacy and dignity of other users. It is unacceptable to access or post private information on the Internet, or to use it to harass others.

(Please note that school use of information technology is for educational purposes, not recreational or private use.)

Failure to meet any of these responsibilities will be regarded as a very serious matter, and offending students must expect severe consequences, including the loss of the rights outlined above.

Information is not knowledge nor understanding, nor wisdom.

There is now more information available than at any time in human history, so intelligent and ethical use of the Internet will enhance the ways we use information: just like all effective ways of learning.



THE ISSUES

1.0 Preamble

We currently have a policy statement on acceptable (and unacceptable) use of the Internet by students. The ITAC will continue to review the policy as a natural part of its role.

2.0 The Hillbrook Dimension

Any school policy needs to be a natural extension of the Hillbrook culture: its values, beliefs and norms. To this end, the policy statement, the interpretation(s) of it, and the acting out of its implications need to not only be consistent with this culture, but provide potential to enhance it.

3.0 Educational Issues

- 3.1 The Internet is a great source of information: in terms of quantity it is the greatest information resource the world has known.
- 3.2 The Internet is widely used in the world beyond school, so students need to learn how to use it effectively. Indeed, information technology is now part of the context in which we live, and the Internet is a major element in this.
- 3.3 Due to the great variations in quality and the huge quantity of information available, the need for students to learn higher order research skills and critical use of resources becomes a very high priority for schools.
- 3.4 Ethical issues of authorship (in the formal curriculum); of assessing or posting controversial material and privacy (in the informal curriculum) must be addressed. Students will need to be given trust, balanced with strong consequences if the trust is breached.
- 3.5 This raises the question of trust on the one hand, and censorship, net filters and firewalls on the other. We will need to balance educational issues, privacy issues and legal issues on this matter.
- 3.6 Student use of e-mail is a particularly important issue, as it involves posting material on the Internet: it has exciting educational possibilities but is also in the area of the school's greatest potential legal liability.
- 3.7 The educational potential of the Internet to the school curriculum, with particular focus on higher order thinking and learning.



4.0 The Legal Dimension

- 4.1 Scope for Liability:** There is considerable scope for liability to the school. However, the educational imperative is that on-line information systems have become an essential research tool in all forms of human endeavour. On that basis simply denying access because of potential liability is not an adequate response.

However, in making access available, the school can seek to minimise its risk by being aware of potential risk areas and ensuring a program is in place to manage those risks.

- 4.2 General Internet Law:** In general terms there is no such thing as Internet law. Laws in general purport to regulate the Internet but difficulties arise because most law does not contemplate the existence of the Internet.

Another difficulty is that advice is based on the law in Australia. The Internet ignores geographical boundaries. This increases the risk that students or the school may be exposed to liability in other jurisdictions. However, in general terms if use is limited to accessing material rather than posting material then the risks of breaching international laws are considerably reduced.

4.3 Key Areas of Risk

- 4.3.1 Copyright:** Copyright law generally applies to the Internet. As a general rule care should be taken in copying any material from the Internet. Some argue that the mere fact of posting information contemplates an acceptance that the material can be freely distributed without attribution. However, at best on a strict interpretation of the law, the only right to use is a limited implied licence to view the material on a browser and to permit copying to the extent that it is performed by the browser software.

Students and staff need to carefully consider any copying undertaken. The level of risk may also need to be considered in the context of any licences the school may hold with APRA, CAL or other licence authorities.

- 4.3.2 Privacy:** Under current Australian law the privacy legislation has limited application for independent schools. However, as a precaution to avoid being sued by individuals, distributing personal information should be avoided.

If personal information is stored on a networked computer the school should ensure that appropriate firewalls are in place to ensure that access to that material cannot be gained by students or external users who become aware of the school's Internet connection.



4.3.3 Defamation: Where information about a person is posted or gathered and distributed there is a risk, if that material is damaging to a person's reputation, that defamation proceedings will be commenced. If any material is posted to the Internet, regardless of the means, care should be taken that it does not level personal criticism without prior consideration or advice about the risk of possible defamation.

In terms of the school's potential exposure in relation to defamatory material, liability might only arise where students publish information. This would require material being included on a web page, being posted to a newsgroup or being sent to a wide e-mail distribution list. If these activities are avoided or closely monitored any exposure of the school is minimised.

4.4 'Distributor or Publisher'?: Based on legal precedent in the USA, a 'distributor' is an organisation that does not have editorial control over material on its Internet services and does not therefore face liability for content; a 'publisher' does have editorial control over its database, and is therefore liable.

4.5 Acceptable Use Policy: As a precaution, all schools should generate an acceptable Internet use policy for all students and staff which outlines the behaviour the school expects in relation to the use of the Internet. This document should deal with copyright, defamation and privacy issues as well as an outline about unacceptable material including pornographic or violent material accessed or distributed.

The use policy should also deal with Internet etiquette issues including spamming which may embroil the school in flame wars on newsgroups. At worst, serious and repeated occurrences of spamming could result in Internet users attempting to crash the school's Internet connection through multiple e-mails.

Provided there is a reasonable acceptable use policy in existence and provided the school makes reasonable efforts to ensure that it is complied with, then the school's liability to third parties can be reduced where an activity is undertaken which is contrary to the acceptable use policy.

However care must be taken in the drafting and implementation of an acceptable use policy to ensure that it operates effectively to minimise liability.

5.0 Staff Professional Development

5.1 Staff need to be up-to-date with their understanding of and ability to use the Internet.

5.2 Staff need to understand the legal implications of student use of the Internet, feel comfortable with the policy statement, and know how to be proactive as well as to deal with problems that may arise, particularly in the legal area.



6.0 The Political Agenda

- 6.1 There has always been a difficult political agenda regarding student use of the Internet due to the inability to control what information is on it, and the difficulty of controlling student access. Parents are generally concerned and confused about how schools should deal with the Internet.

This takes on particular significance in the wake of the 1999 tragedy in Columbine High School, Colorado, where a number of writers and commentators have put the Internet on the agenda as a possible element in the actions of the 'trench coat mafia'.

We need to communicate openly with parents on our approach to the student use of the Internet, and be able to answer any concerns they may have. Ultimately we need to have parent support in our approach.

7.0 Our Task

- 7.1 Are all the issues covered?
- 7.2 Does the Policy document cover the issues?
- 7.3 Will the Policy document enable us to act confidently on all the issues?
- 7.4 What processes will need to be put in place to 'launch' the policy with staff, students and parents, and then to administer it?

8.0 Expectations of Internet Use at Hillbrook

- 8.1 At Hillbrook we agree that it is important for people to behave ethically. Trust is a major element in the life of the school, and in general students handle this expectation very well.
- 8.2 Trust is also a key element in the concept of Hillbrook as a community, where people care for each other and grow together.
- 8.3 Use of the Internet should be a normal learning experience in the school. The world wide web and email are potentially rich resources, and it is a natural extension of this trust to apply it to use of the Internet.



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- 2. The right to have their work protected by the normal conventions and rules that apply to authorship and copyright, and the responsibility to respect and observe those conventions and rules with respect to the work of others. This especially relates to assignment writing and acknowledging sources of information.**
- 3. The right to receive respectful communications from others, and the responsibility to conduct communications with other people in a respectful way.**
- 4. The right to use school technology for appropriate educational research and activities, and the responsibility to refrain from accessing obscene, offensive or dangerous material, or to place such materials on the Internet.**
- 5. The right to personal privacy and dignity, and the responsibility to respect the privacy and dignity of other users. It is unacceptable to access or post private information on the Internet, or to use it to harass others.**

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