



How to Make Invisible Digital Risks, Visible

An essential guide for New Zealand schools



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Introduction

When students become vulnerable in their digital lives it can have serious consequences for their safety and wellbeing, even their life.



A child's digital world is commonly off limits to their responsible adults, making risks difficult to spot and therefore difficult to act upon. Written by Linewize's digital safety experts, this document explains how Independent and Catholic schools can break down the invisibility cloak and guide their students to greater awareness and understanding.

If you have any questions about the themes raised in this paper or how to improve the digital safety and wellbeing in your school, please do not hesitate to contact the Linewize team.

We'd be happy to help.

Email: sales@linewize.co.nz

Web: www.linewize.co.nz/contact

Essential reading for:

Principals, senior leadership teams, wellbeing leaders, governors, IT and anyone interested in or responsible for digital safety and wellbeing in an independent school.

Challenges Around Digital Safety and Wellbeing

The internet is an incredible resource which enables students to learn, connect and be creative in a multitude of ways.

However, the digital landscape is always changing. Danger does exist and young people need advice and protection to properly navigate their digital lives in a safe and self-directed manner. Issues that students may encounter on the internet will vary depending on their age and online activities.

Risk factors

A student's digital behaviour can negatively affect their life. Research carried out in 2021 by the Australian eSafety Commissioner showed that just over four in 10 teens had at least one negative online experience in the six months to September 2020 with this increasing to over 50% of those aged 14 to 17.

The Office for National Statistics in the UK has found a **“clear association” between longer time spent on social media and mental health problems** amongst children, including children as young as four.

The top five negative online experiences of teens included:

- Being contacted by a stranger or someone not known to them – 30% (26% of males and 35% of females).
- Being deliberately excluded from events/social groups – 16%.
- Receiving inappropriate, unwanted content such as pornography or violent material – 20%.
- Receiving online threats or abuse – 15% (18% of males compared with 11% of females).
- Having things said online to damage their reputation – also 15%.
- Almost one third (30%) said that their negative online experience related to bullying that occurred at school.

A student's digital behaviour can also reveal concerns in other areas of their lives. What they do, say or share can often uncover mental health concerns, suicide ideation, self-harm or others issues.

Invisible risk - The iceberg effect

When a child becomes vulnerable online there are some indicators that can be seen with eyes and ears alone. Changes in mood, deteriorating academic performance and being withdrawn are some examples. But there are many more indicators that only manifest inside the child's digital life, to which adults often have little if no access, and so are difficult to see, if not invisible.

We call this the Iceberg Effect and it's a very real and serious blindspot in every school in Australia.

In research carried out by Smoothwall 95% of teachers said they had no option but to rely on students to tell them if they were experiencing difficulties in their digital lives. But only 5% of children said they would ever consider telling a teacher if they were in a negative situation. That's an alarming disconnect and a dangerous gap that children can and do fall through.

It is now well documented that unaddressed negative experiences online can impact a child's overall wellbeing. What's more, **by the age of 15, 50% of mental health issues will already have been seeded.**

This is unacceptable for any child and additionally damaging for independent schools who focus heavily on nurturing high performing citizens with high social and emotional wellbeing. Early identification and early intervention are key to significantly reducing this.

Offline risks
you can see



Changes in behaviour. Injuries/bruises, tip offs from peers, absenteeism.

Digital risks
you can't see



Online bullying or conversations about drugs/extremism/being harmed, hidden bruises/injuries, unspoken negative feelings and thoughts.





95% of teachers rely on students to tell them if they are experiencing problems online. Only 5% of children say they would confide in a teacher. That's an alarming disconnect."

Addressing the Challenges

Eyes and Ears vs Technology

Identifying vulnerable students online is a challenge faced by schools and parents everywhere. It's an essential challenge to address as children who are unwilling to speak up will continue to suffer in silence.

Those who are unaware they are in danger, (as is common with online grooming) could escalate and all cases could see a negative and serious impact on learning. There are two ways schools can make invisible risks, visible; **(i) physical eyes and ears alone ii) safeguard technology.**

Eyes and ears

Many schools rely on the eyes, ears and intuition of teachers to determine safe online behaviours amongst students. Though this is vital, the idea that staff can physically supervise pupils' on screen activity is not straightforward and brings unique challenges.

Pupils quickly shut down inappropriate content or conversations when a staff member walks by. That means all screens must be visible to teaching staff simultaneously.

To minimise the number of supervisory staff (and therefore cost) desks must be strategically placed to ensure maximum screen visibility from one vantage point. This precludes round desks and L shaped desk formations which may be impractical in many settings. In the case of tablet devices, physical supervision, unless standing next to the student, is extremely difficult.

It may be concluded that in almost any scenario, it is not possible to properly monitor groups of students with devices using physical supervision alone.

Furthermore, physical monitoring does not easily facilitate pattern building or trends analysis. One minor incident spotted and addressed can be quickly forgotten. But a joining up of seemingly innocent online actions can reveal hitherto invisible dangers.

For example, separate online searches or conversations about healthy eating, exercise and cotton wool may be of little, if any concern. But viewed holistically can indicate a desire for information on appetite suppressants and which could suggest an eating disorder - early stage or otherwise.

Additionally, students moving from room to room during the school day necessitates robust handovers between supervising staff or some form of online incident logging to map such trends. Both have a high potential for error or being forgotten about altogether in a busy working day - despite best intentions.



The role of safeguarding technology

Digital safeguarding technology is designed to sit at the heart of a school’s wellbeing program.

It alerts schools to any student whose digital behaviours are putting them in harm’s way, or indicating a concern in other areas of their lives.

This enables pastoral staff to intervene quickly and appropriately. It also provides genuine insight to inform better education and awareness initiatives and guide students towards safer and more positive online experiences.

Online threats to children are growing so fast some Governments are increasing their statutory requirements. The UK Government for example has required an appropriate level of filtering in schools since 2016. But in 2021 they extended it to digital safeguard technology (monitoring) and in 2022 have now extended ownership to Governors stipulating that they ensure appropriate levels of safeguard monitoring are in place.

How it works

Different safeguarding solutions work in slightly different ways. Advanced solutions usually combine technology and a human moderated service which work together to alert pastoral staff to situations that need their immediate attention.

In the case of our own Linewize Monitor, when a student types, views or shares something in their school device that’s deemed to be of concern, a screen capture is automatically made. Linewize Monitor is not like CCTV which films everything. It is only triggered when a concern is detected.

Advanced solutions like Linewize Monitor will include Artificial Intelligence (AI) to analyse the capture and grade its severity as well as remove false positives. Alerts considered to be more serious are sent to human moderators for analysis.

If the alert is verified as requiring attention, the school’s pastoral team is emailed. If there is a suspected risk to health or life, the school is contacted by phone. Lesser alerts are recorded in a portal for the school to view the next day. This happens in real time and within minutes of the initial event being detected.

In 2021 Linewize Monitor alerted a UK school to a student at serious risk online every 5 minutes, and a child facing a suspected risk to health or life every hour. These are students, their schools believe, without safeguard technology in place, could have gone unnoticed or noticed too late.

Building digital safety culture

Some schools see digital safety and wellbeing as IT driven, isolated elements consisting of a firewall and basic web filtering. While other schools prefer a locking down of networks to restrict or block social media use.

The reality is multifaceted and extends beyond the IT remit. It requires a strong culture which in turn requires a combination of an internet sufficiently open to promote learning and build resilience but with the necessary checks and balances to protect. Providing access to broad, balanced and impactful online safety education is also key.

A strong digital safety culture is driven by 3 factors:

Prevention tools



Filter and firewalls
Classroom management technology

Detection and intervention tools



Digital safeguarding technology
Digital record management

Education and awareness



Evidencing harm and negative behaviours, and using both to guide students and the school community to greater awareness and understanding.

When all tools are integrated a holistic view of each child's wellbeing emerges, providing valuable insight to each member of the community.

Parents

Can see evidence if their child is manifesting unsafe online behaviours, can better understand the problem and help them to have more informed, evidence based discussions with their child.

Teachers

Can control access to the internet in class, minimise distractions and encourage students back on track. Evidence of inappropriate behaviours can be used to inform class discussions and education.

Students

Can learn and grow online in a supportive and positive space. Education and awareness informs them of the consequences of their actions, builds resilience and ensures they stay central to the narrative.

Leadership and governors

Have the evidence needed to better target safer behavioural education and resources. Strengthen their wellbeing provision and better demonstrate a level of excellence to parents and other stakeholders and minimise reputational risk.

IT staff

Have less demands on their time. SLTs and pastoral staff can access reports and data directly from centralised reporting.

Finance

Ensure cost control by avoiding duplicate solutions or investing in technologies with no interoperability or low efficacy.

Solutions in Practice

Case Studies

Northern Education Trust

Northern Education Trust, (NET) is a progressive and highly respected multi-academy trust in the UK. It has a diverse community, consisting of 10 primary schools and 11 secondary schools located across the North of England.

NET's senior leadership team introduced safeguard technology in 2019 with two intentions. 1) To find any vulnerable children they may have been missing; 2) To use the negative behavioural patterns uncovered by the technology to inform better education and guide students to more positive and self-directed digital behaviours.



Mark Osborne from NET's senior leadership team shares their story.



Our safeguard technology is extremely good at picking up serious alerts, but it also produces a wealth of data into other, seemingly lesser concerns from students. A good example is Brexit; we had a number of cases of younger children becoming quite anxious about the implications of this. For example, around whether the nation would run out of food. While these fears may have been irrational to an adult, to the students in question they were very real and so needed to be tackled.

By identifying these concerns, we were then able to address them in the form of support or education across the entire Trust. We can then measure the impact of a particular intervention through the future alerts we receive through our safeguard technology, and, in most cases, see the issue subside.

Regardless of the topic, being able to effectively address these type of issues we need to be able to turn the information from our safeguard technology into some kind of action. And this comes down to having a strong safety and wellbeing culture.

Our Trust acts as a single entity. When our safeguard technology alerts us to an issue in any of our schools, it is addressed immediately on the ground. We then discuss it across the entire organisation in order to decide whether it is part of a broader trend, and if so, what the appropriate action should be. We don't see digital safety and wellbeing as being an IT concern.

For us, it is a Trust-wide responsibility."

Northern Education Trust cont.

IT involvement and impact on workloads



Our IT department's workload has absolutely decreased since the Trust started using safeguard technology. Aside from the initial deployment – which was extremely simple and quick – IT are now out of the loop when it comes to the day-to-day running of the system.

Wellbeing staff are at the heart of things

While web filtering is very much the domain of IT, safeguard technology on the other hand allows for a very joined-up approach between IT, senior leaders and wellbeing staff. The latter are very much at the heart of things, and tell us how easy safeguard technology is to use. It is not a technical product and is incredibly user-friendly, allowing them to quickly and easily identify and manage alerts.”

Gaining the support of stakeholders



As a Trust with strong leadership, we were fortunate enough that the entire team bought into our safeguarding vision. Initially, some of our school Principals felt they were already doing a good job, and they were. But they didn't know what they didn't know. Safeguard technology showed us very quickly that some students were falling under the radar, despite our best efforts. We now have a vital safety net that has transformed our ability to keep children digitally safe and to help them build the resilience they need for their future lives.”

Ofsted, the UK Government's school inspectorate, increased the rating of three of NET's schools on the back of these safeguarding and wellbeing initiatives. And in 2020 NET was awarded the highly prestigious IMPACT award at BETT for its work around integrating safeguard technology into its student wellbeing programs.

Teacher feedback



For many of our teachers, the role of safeguard technology has been eye-opening to say the least, and they have all been very supportive of it. Despite them having great intuition, through no fault of their own, the reality is they simply can't pick up on, or identify every safeguarding risk.

In many cases, children simply don't outwardly express any signs of concern or distress. For example, a child might show no sign of unhappiness at all, and then compose – and delete – a letter, containing some troubling admissions, on a school computer. For a teacher, this would be virtually impossible to pick up on, while traditional firewall-based filtering solutions are unlikely to have identified or flagged the specific content.

However, safeguard technology would pick up on it – in real-time – helping provide fast, appropriate support for the child via our wellbeing team.

For teachers, this provides a huge level of reassurance and support. While of course, a teacher's intuition remains incredibly important, safeguard technology is another system we can put in place to help make their jobs easier, and better ensure the wellbeing of our students.”

Advice to other schools



My advice to other schools is; get it done, and get it done quickly! From a personal perspective, I didn't prioritise this as quickly as I should have. The sooner you are aware of what's really going on, the sooner children can be protected and the more you can support their education around safe online behaviours.

Don't be naive in terms of thinking what you've got in place already is good enough. You don't know what you don't know but safeguard technology will show you.”

South Bound Brook School District

The South Bound Brook School District is a community public school district that serves public school students from preschool through to eighth grade in New Jersey, USA.

Lenny Libitz, Chief Technology Officer shares how his leadership team introduced safeguard technology and the impact it is having.



Our students were having issues with other students. We suspected that cyberbullying was happening on school devices. We needed a tool that would help us document the events, as and when they happened. We needed the evidence but we also needed to understand the situation so we could get the right help to the students who needed it and better educate our students for the future.

If students have no-one they can talk to at home, they will often use their keyboard to type out their feelings and frustrations. That's their voice, their outlet. Safeguard technology allows us to help our most vulnerable students in the community and get them the assistance they need. Without this technology, we could have missed a child that needed help. **That's an absolute."**

Gaining support from stakeholders



Safeguard technology is not new in the US. Our staff were aware of it. Our preferred solution was Linewize Monitor. So it was a case of showing them the software and how it captured incidents. We showed them how it grades alerts and what happens when an alert is so severe someone will actually call us, no matter what time of day or night.

With other solutions we had to be on top of the alerts so we didn't miss anything. That meant going through tons of false positives. We suffered from alert fatigue. We were constantly getting emails and notifications and of course, you have to look at them all. You can't not go through them, in case you miss something serious.

Linewize Monitor has allowed us to step back. It shows us the students who need our assistance. We don't need to go looking for them through hundreds of alerts. It sifts through the most severe and puts them right in your inbox. The alerts are instant and real-time. If an alert is so severe and you happen to not be looking at your mailbox at that time, it's ok because Linewize will call us."

Impact



I feel that without this technology, we would miss students that need our help, absolutely. I'm very grateful that this technology exists. It's peace of mind. Other solutions will just throw alerts at you regardless. With Linewize Monitor we get what we need and nothing we don't. Our school will continue to use Linewize Monitor for as long as we possibly can. It is central to our wellbeing programs.

Advice for other schools



Spend time, train your staff. But don't be overwhelmed at the thought of training though. There isn't a lot of documentation needed. Start a dialogue with your school psychologist and with your school guidance department. Bring them to the table. Bring your school Principals to the table and have a game plan. It's super easy to set up. Fifteen minutes, that's all. And you're going to provide a great service to your student population."

Conclusion

In summary, most children have digital lives that adults are often unaware of. Their online behaviours, including the content they seek, the images they share, the words they type, the conversations they have and with whom can all reveal vital clues around their physical and mental wellbeing.

Without digital safeguarding risks can and do go undetected or noticed too late. Nurturing and encouraging resilient, responsible and happy students and guiding them towards successful adult lives is severely compromised if their digital behaviours are placing them in harm's way, and the school is unaware.

Online risk is increasing. Blindspots caused by schools being unaware of what's happening are increasing. But so too are the technologies and strategies schools can use to address them head on.

Digital safeguarding technology is being adopted at pace by schools and colleges across the UK and USA and is now available in Australia for the first time.

To learn more about digital safeguarding technology, including our 30-day free trial and evidence report, please get in touch with us at sales@linewize.co.nz





Linewize is a unique response to the challenge of today's connected learning environments, supporting the integration of technology, education and engagement to create cyber safe communities where students thrive.

Web: www.linewize.co.nz
Email: sales@linewize.co.nz



Linewize is part of Qoria, a global technology company, dedicated to keeping children safe and well in their digital lives. We harness the power of connection to close the gaps that children fall through, and to seamlessly support them on all sides - at school, at home and everywhere in between.

Find out more
www.qoria.com