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Ed Friday
Bedford High school

Serendipity? Happenstance? It was, you might say, a chance encounter that brought Bedford High School and Policy Central Enterprise together.

Bedford High School was not entirely happy with the e-safety solution currently in place and, recalls Ed Friday, Technical Services Manager, “our filtering software was not versatile enough for our needs.” A visit to the annual BETT (British Education Training and Technology) show in Olympia, London led to a meeting with Forensic Software and the subsequent installation of Policy Central Enterprise (PCE) across the school network.

That was almost a year ago. Since then, PCE has played a significant role in affording the school a level of e-security that allows students to access ICT resources with the knowledge that any breach of accepted protocol will be captured and reported by PCE’s pioneering and innovative software.

Bedford High School, founded in 1882, is a forward-thinking independent school for girls. Students enrol in the Junior School at the age of seven and the Senior School at eleven. A level and International Baccalaureate courses are offered at sixth form level and, according to the school’s online Curriculum Overview, “ICT in the GCSE years is not an option, it is provided for every pupil.” The majority of the school’s 850 students are day attendees but boarding facilities are also offered.

The school’s technical service department, headed by Ed Friday, consists of five staff, four of whom deal with technical issues and a fifth who has sole responsibility for asset and software management and

procurement. This team oversees a network which, Ed explains, supports over 300 machines that run applications such as Microsoft Office and Adobe Creative Suite as well as meeting departmental and administrative needs that include lesson preparation, communications and e-mail correspondence.

Students are able to connect their own machines to the system provided they have been configured by the technical services department. A number of small wireless networks have also been installed throughout the school where using a hard wired solution would be difficult. All network users, Ed explains, “have their own home directory and e-mail accounts and e-mail can be accessed worldwide via our Webmail system.” All in all, a fairly typical school network, with, says Ed, the usual problems, “ensuring that the anti-virus software is up to date, checking for spyware, making sure that all the software is legitimate.”

Bedford High’s e-safety solution is, essentially, a vigorous Acceptable Use Policy – drawn up by the Head teacher and Senior Management Team – reinforced by Policy Central’s monitoring software. Some security features of Windows are also used but, as Ed points out, “Windows security on its own does not provide us with the same ease of accessing information.”

All network users have to agree to the AUP at every logon and students also have to agree again when accessing the internet. This, Ed maintains, seems to deter most students from any sort of wrongdoing or violation. “We have found that once word gets around regarding the level of monitoring, this in itself acts as a deterrent.”

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Policy Central, he believes, copes well with the demands of a network that caters for day students and boarders. “One nice feature of PCE for example, is the ability to automatically turn off restrictions when a machine is not connected to the network - e.g. when used at home. It can be set to record all activity when disconnected, updating the database when re-connected, or this can be disabled. Obviously when a machine belonging to a student is at their home we are not permitted to monitor.” Whilst at school, however, all boarders’ network activity is monitored at each boarding house though they are allowed to carry out private activity as long as it does not breach the AUP

Ed is also impressed by PCE’s, “ability to monitor users and/or machines at a user or a machine level” and points to, “versatility in setting restrictions for different groups of users” as one of the most useful functions of the software.

It’s early days at Bedford High, but Ed is happy to report that the most common screen capture violations so far have been fairly low level, “word violations, mostly in the body of e-mails.” Checking the logs, incidentally, takes no more than 45 minutes each day when using the time-saving Summary Function.

In Ed’s opinion, one of the outstanding features of Forensic Software is its responsiveness to suggestions made by clients. “Most of my feedback comments to Forensic have been, or are being, incorporated into the software.” The support that the Technical Service team receives is, he says, “excellent, and it’s nice to see that the customer is listened to, as the software is constantly being improved using feedback from end-users.”

Parents, Ed suggests, are only too happy to know that their children are being properly protected from the threat of cyber-violation. A small number of parents initially expressed concern regarding ‘civil rights’ but Forensic Software came into school and made a presentation to parents. This was very helpful as they were able to answer concerns directly.

Generally, the Forensic Software team has found that parents’ fears are allayed when it is explained that Policy Central is not some sort of ‘Big Brother’ CCTV that indiscriminately records every activity. Although PCE continuously monitors network behaviour it only ever *records* breaches or violations of an AUP that has been formally accepted by every network user. As such, it operates strictly within human and employee rights legislation.

Asked what he considered the best features of the software, Ed enumerated, “ease of installation, ease of use, price level and versatility, especially in the way you are able to set restrictions, even down to individual user level and ease of configuration.”

It’s a versatility that sits well with recent BECTA (British Educational Communications and Technology Agency) recommendations. One of the findings of the Agency’s recent (2006) report on e-safety was that too much filtering could be as damaging to students’ learning as too little.

Policy Central Enterprise allows schools to fine-tune their ICT filtering in order to maximise the learning and information gathering process while at the same time keeping improper network use to a minimum.



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