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Dan Worthington
Harefield Junior School

Ah, nostalgia; it’s definitely not what it used to be! There was a time – and it seems so long ago – that the only worries parents had when they dropped their children off at the school gates were how the little angels fared in class, what sort of friends they made and how teachers dealt with issues such as bullying and truancy.

Times change, and not always for the better. These days, along with many undoubted benefits, the development of internet and computer technology has brought new concerns into the classroom. At the beginning of the twenty first century, parents want to be reassured that their children are protected from the insidious and real dangers inherent in the use of computer technology. With an estimated 95% of children now having access to the internet in school and 75% at home, e-safety has become one of the most pertinent issues in education.

At Harefield Junior School, a mixed non-denominational school in Bitterne on the outskirts of Southampton, they’ve taken a pro-active approach to computer and internet security and have installed Forensic Software’s Policy Central Enterprise on the school network.

Essentially a sophisticated monitoring software package, Policy Central Enterprise (PCE) is a highly configurable program that enables schools and colleges to introduce and implement an Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) that can be finely tuned to the individual requirements of each institution.

PCE automatically monitors all screen

content and keyboard activity within a network and analyses it against a set of eight customisable parameters that include violations such as profanity, violence, pornography and racism. Additionally, administrators can identify and monitor specific words and phrases.

Any violation of PCE protocol will trigger a screen capture mode, with the data being stored in a secure database for possible evidential use. It should be emphasised, however, that the software only captures and records specific transgressions of an established AUP and fully respects human rights legislation.

Schools Technician Dan Worthington oversees Harefield’s ICT operations. He first heard of PCE from a colleague at educational software installation company XMA. “We’ve now been using the program for two years. We were concerned that the Local Authority’s blocking policy wasn’t strong enough to stop some of the bad language and inappropriate images getting through, so we felt that we had to take matters into our own hands. We did consider using the security features that were built in to our servers but they weren’t considered powerful enough. We also needed a program that didn’t require much in the way of installation and maintenance.”

The school presently has a wireless network with more than 40 laptops connected to the system. These are supported by three servers, one of which has PCE installed. The laptops are in constant demand with a different year group or class using them each afternoon. Pupils log on to the network

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with their own unique user-names which makes it easy for an ICT administrator to identify who is on which machine and at what time.

The school also has four PCs, linked to their own server but these are used exclusively for administrative purposes. The wireless network is the primary system in use, with teaching staff hooking up their own laptops to smartboards which have been installed in each of the eight classrooms.

There are also plans to introduce a home laptop scheme in the future and it is anticipated that those machines will also be subject to Policy Central software and protocol. Parents have been kept fully informed of the monitoring system introduced at Harefield and are, Dan believes, fully supportive of the measures taken.

“There was,” he says, “no ongoing attention or configuration needed once the laptops were set up and installing PCE onto the network wasn’t so bad apart from a little difficulty with SQL server. Support, when needed is excellent with any problem being resolved, quickly and efficiently. I have always had a friendly voice on the other end of the phone and it’s good to have someone who knows what they’re talking about! Forensic Software’s upgrade policy on PCE is also highly commended, I think the new improvements they have made compared to the old system are brilliant.”

Maintenance is minimal, “I log on every morning just to check out if anything has happened. There is a button which takes me straight to the most recent screen captures so I’d estimate that I

spend no more than a couple of minutes a day checking for violations.”

In the two years that PCE has been running at Harefield the program has picked up on instances of pornography, profanity, violent and hateful language and potential child predatory behaviour.

Harefield, in common with most schools has an Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) which delineates correct and decent behaviour while using technology. The guidelines, which the school adheres to, are drawn up by Southampton LEA and sent out to parents. Each time students log on to a computer they click the ‘agree’ tab to accept this policy. Dan is not entirely convinced, however, that many of them read it or, “know exactly why it’s there.” Nor, perhaps would one expect primary school students to fully grasp the significance and potentially unpleasant consequences of inappropriate computer usage. Which is why, of course, monitoring software is so essential.

And the best feature of Policy Central Enterprise? In a word, says Dan, “Stealth. It captures the entire screen and tells you what the violation was. It monitors everything the students type in, even if you haven’t actually seen the words on their monitor screens.” Students are aware that any breach of the AUP will be picked up by the PCE software and that the school can, if necessary, use the software to provide incontrovertible proof of unacceptable behaviour.

Will the school be renewing its contract for PCE? Dan is unequivocal, “Yes, definitely. We find it so useful to help monitor the kids.”



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