

Argyll and Bute Council
Community Services: Education
Policy for school Weblogs (draft)
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1. Why does Argyll and Bute Education promote weblogs in schools?

Education's continued development of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in Argyll and Bute, includes the promotion of modern methods of communication across schools and the wider community.

There are now expectations that parents, the authority and other schools will have online access to a range of information about aspects of the work and life of a school.

Access to online information is usually through a website and this should continue to be the long-term goal for each school where the head teacher wishes to present the widest aspects of the management and work of the school.

The required commitment to a website is substantial, even if the school has commissioned the site through a commercial supplier. Commissioned sites require regular contributions to every area of the site and school-made sites requires a level of ICT skills and commitment from those responsible for its development and management.

A weblog provides an alternative approach that places fewer demands on existing skills and commitment and most importantly provides the opportunity for pupils to be directly involved in its creation and maintenance.

2. What is a weblog?

A weblog, commonly know as a blog, is a form of online diary or journal. The process of creating and maintaining a weblog is known as 'blogging', and authors are known as 'bloggers'. Much like a website, it provides the author(s) with a place where information on any subject or theme can be placed. Normally, blogs contain short, frequently updated posts, arranged chronologically with the most recently posted item appearing at the top of the page. In addition to text, blogs can contain photos, images, sound, archives and related links, and can incorporate comments from visitors.¹

Blogs are made available via web-based publishing tools, meaning that blogs can be quickly and easily created and maintained without the need for technical knowledge or web design expertise. The blogging tools for Argyll and Bute are hosted centrally and are free to use.²

3. What are the benefits of weblogs in schools?

The popularity of blogs has grown remarkably in recent years. Using online blogging tools, anyone can create their own personal web space, adding and updating a variety of information that can be viewed by anyone across the world.

¹ See Section 4 for moderating of received comments.

² Currently, schools use externally hosted blogging facilities. These existing blogs would, over an agreed period be transferred to the internal server.

The biggest benefit of a blog is the ease at which a teacher or pupil can upload content to the web. With very little skill, a teacher or pupil can share information or their work with the wider world.

Schools may want to use a blog as a method of online publishing, perhaps creating class blogs, or using blogs creatively to support a specific school project.

A blog could be established to post pupils reading the poems they have written, and facilitate comment on their work from anyone reading the blog.

By allowing controlled commenting³ on a blog, a teacher can permit others to contribute to their pupils' sense of audience, heightening the childrens' awareness of the impact of online publishing as a means of communicating their ideas worldwide.

4. What should schools do to remove the risks involved in using weblogs?

The risks of using blogs are the same as with any other public website. The promotion of your school should be balanced with wider issues of Internet safety and privacy. Children's safety has to be paramount on the Internet, and your school must ensure that the pupils are not exposed to danger or abuse by publishing personal information about them that could be misused in any way.

You must protect the identity of young people in the following ways:

Do not publish:

- **Personal information**
- **E-mail addresses**
- **Close-up (portrait-size) photographs of individual children**

However you can publish:

- **Individual names without photographs**
- **Group photographs taken at distance without individual names**
- **Contact details for the school**

In the case of school staff and adults associated with the school, you should seek their permission before publishing any information relating to their contributions to school projects and activities.

The communication that blogging facilitates should be closely monitored. Where a blog involves pupils, all posts and comments should be moderated by the teacher, prior to publication. This is achieved during the setup process, where all comments are directed to the teacher's own school email account.

³ See Section 4 regarding controlled commenting.