

Information & Communication Technology

Guide for Parents of Thomas Gainsborough School

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Introduction

This guide is designed to provide TGS parents with information about ICT at TGS and the use and management of ICT in a home environment.

Many parents are very familiar with ICT, are knowledgeable about the issues concerning children and computers and have little need for advice concerning its use by their children at home. Many parents cope well with their child's ICT use while in primary school but struggle when they reach adolescence. Some freely admit that they are novices and are grateful for guidance from school.

Often it is useful for parents to be able to refer to recommendations from school to assist in discussions with their sons about the appropriate use of ICT at home.

Students are set work where the use of a computer and/or access to the internet is essential, sometimes they may choose to do this in school, but most choose to do this at home.

It is easier for parents to agree with their child on a policy of computer use at the start of an academic year than it is to enforce one after things start to go wrong. It is also sensible to have a policy early in their career at TGS, rather than developing one when they are teenagers.

While computers offer great opportunities they have also become the source of significant problems. These problems invariably occur to the students we would least expect.

Our aim with computers is to guide students into becoming efficient and resourceful users of ICT - to support them in their studies and future employment. In doing so we need them to develop a computer world "*Moral Compass*" of what is right and wrong in the use of computers, and the judgement and self-restraint that requires.

Computer Access

The vast majority of our students have access to a COMPUTER with a broadband connection at home. Those who do not have access to a COMPUTER at home, either because they do not possess one or because it is not working, can use our extensive computer network in school when required to use computers for their homework.

All students have access to computers and a printer within TGS from 8am to 4.10pm.

Assessment – Go4Schools

The school uses an external service provider which enables; students, parents and teachers to monitor and track assessments and behaviour for learning. Every student and parent has external access to this service with a user login and password.

Time

The amount of time a young person spends using a digital device at home can be a cause for great concern and arguments. To some extent the answer depends on what they are doing. Homework is the priority in the first instance. We also wish them to exercise a sense of balance in their use in terms of time spent, time spent well, and time not displaced from making strong face to face relationships and engaged in non-computer based activities.

Some parents find it difficult to personally limit the amount of time their child spends using a computer or some particular computer activity - such as playing games. Under these circumstances software can be used to monitor and limit the amount of time spent on particular types of activity.

An example of a software application for limiting the time children spend on a computer is NetNanny. Such software forces all users to logon to the COMPUTER with different names, and limits their use according to settings input by the parent. (N.B. This is a paid-for solution, not endorsed by TGS)

In this way settings can be customised for families that have different aged children. Different days of the week can have different settings – a very useful feature for allowing greater access at the weekend.

Parents can limit the times that a particular person can use the computer, can limit the total amount of time that can be used for playing selected games or for surfing the internet within a day.

Parents can also easily override such limits as situations dictate – for example additional time might be required on the internet for a long homework project if a child uses up all their allocated time surfing for leisure earlier in the day.

Computer Games

Computer game manufacturers are skilled at making their games addictive. Those that are of interest to students can tend to be violent, misogynistic and full of foul language. Opinions differ as to the extent of the effect or damage this does to children.

The age rating systems for computer games that have been accepted and adopted by the games industry work well, and should not be ignored lightly. A game rated 12+ may well be suitable for a mature 11 year old. But a game rated 15 or above would be totally unsuitable for any 11 year old, likewise a game rated 18 would be unsuitable for a 15 year old.

The Internet

The internet is a superb educational resource and can provide immense enjoyment, but it does have a darker side that youngsters find hard to appreciate. Our children need to be protected from dangerous activity on the web, and know how to use the internet wisely without getting into trouble. The internet was not designed for children and the need to monitor and exercise caution is very much prevalent in our society.

When using the TGS computer network students are very well protected from the dangerous and the inappropriate. The network is protected by a firewall and anti-virus software, and all access to the internet is done through a state of the art web-content filtering system. But many of our students go home to use computers that offer little or no protection at all – either by parental supervision or by more technical means.

For a child to rely on a computer connected to the internet at home, the computer is best protected with a firewall, anti-virus software and web-content filtering software. The software needs to be regularly updated – preferably automatically. Anti-virus software that has not been updated for many months will no longer be protecting against the most prevalent viruses of the day. Decisions made about what you will allow your child to see and do on the internet need to be thought about, discussed and the appropriate settings implemented in the software. For firewall, anti-virus and anti-spam protection a product such as Norton Internet Suite is an excellent tool.

For web-content filtering Net Nanny www.netnanny.com are superb. Parents can select from dozens of categories to block – such as pornography, hate or social networking. This software forces all users to logon to the COMPUTER with different names, and limits their use according to settings input by the parent. In this way settings can be customised for families that have different aged children.

Instant Messaging

Many TGS students at home use Instant Messaging technologies. Most of the social networking sites have some form of instant messaging as well. These technologies enable instant contact with other people when online. Like other secondary schools TGS completely blocks and bans the use of all such tools for social “non-educational” use. While Instant Messaging does have its place in the adult world the technical and social problems caused when used for socialising by secondary school students can be immense.

Instant Messaging systems can be used for bullying and are used extensively by online predators to groom young people with a view to eventually meeting and abusing them.

Parents need to judge their child’s maturity, and if allowing access to Instant Messaging services they are strongly advised to monitor closely who they are meeting online.

Social Networking

The use of social networks continues to grow, both by our students, their friends and their families. They can provide enormous benefit, support and enjoyment, especially when extended families are spread around the world.

Many TGS students at home use social networking websites and chat rooms. Examples include Facebook, Twitter, SnapChat and Instagram. Like other secondary schools TGS blocks and bans the use of almost all social networking websites through its network infrastructure. Young people generally adore social networking sites, but they have the potential to cause enormous trouble with those who lack the maturity to use them wisely.

Such sites are the cause of great danger amongst teenagers due to the activities of online predators. Perhaps more importantly for TGS students they enable a form of bullying that is difficult for parents and teachers to detect and is equally as hard to prevent. It is very easy for students to take part in entirely inappropriate conversations, and to display and share inappropriate images and videos. The growth of mobile phones with still and video camera abilities has made it straightforward for students distribute images on the internet that cause distress to others - and when discovered to themselves as well.

If your child experiences any problems please advise our Student Support team.

If behaviour is exhibited which is deemed to bring the school into disrepute, or to be a contravention of school rules, then students must expect the school to pursue the matter.

To maintain appropriate professional relationships students are not allowed to be “Friends” with members of staff on social networking sites.

Parents are often completely unaware that these sites are not meant to be used by children of Lower School age or below. Social Networking websites typically have minimum age requirements for accounts of between 13 and 18 years old.

Mobile Phones

The functional differences between computers and smaller electronic devices like tablets and mobile phones are rapidly decreasing. Mobile phones – especially smartphones - have the potential to provide a superb learning tool. The use of cameras built into phones has great educational value.

We encourage students to exercise the same “*Moral Compass*” with mobiles that they need to use with traditional computers. These devices are to be used appropriately and with teacher direction during lesson time and zero tolerance behaviour is exercised for inappropriate use as illustrated within the school’s behaviour policy.

Home Computers

There is no requirement for TGS students to have access to a computer at home. Those that do, find it useful to have software that is similar to what they use in school. Similar software includes earlier or later versions of the same application and also equivalent alternative applications produced by a competing company.

In some circumstances entirely free alternatives exist. A prime example is Open Office. Downloadable from Open Office www.openoffice.org this is a good alternative to Microsoft Office Professional. Another example is Paint.NET. Downloadable from www.getpaint.net, this is excellent free image editing software. Students have access to cloud storage and online software, that is associated with their school email account. This can be accessed and edited through the use of any computer with a Windows, OSX or Linux derived operating system and computer that has access to the internet through a web browser.

Parents purchasing new software will find that older versions of software quickly become unavailable, and this should not be viewed as a problem since students can easily cope with newer versions at home.

The computer industry changes extremely rapidly. If you would like some guidance about purchasing a computer or software for your child it is best to seek advice from the Head of Computing as and when the need arises.

The TGS Network

Our computer network system is designed specifically for. It includes personal space for each child where they can store files. Students can access their personal files from home via any web browser.

All pupils that do not have broadband access at home are encouraged to use USB flash drives to transport information between school and home. (USB flash drives have a variety of names including: pen drives and UFDs). A flash drive of 8Gb costs less than £3 and is easily adequate. They are a robust, small and convenient way of moving electronic files around, although they are susceptible to loss and therefore need backing up!

Student Remote Access

TGS students have access to online “Cloud” storage and email client, with the use of Google Mail/Drive. This can be accessed both in and outside of school, providing there is a web browser and connection to the internet. No additional software is required and the account remains monitored by the school.

Passwords

Your child will have a password that gives them access to our network, and email to access resources and methods of communicating. All activity on these facilities is logged automatically. Your child therefore needs to keep their password secret and not write it down. Should it become forgotten, IT Technicians, Student Services and any IT teacher have the ability to change passwords.

Printing

Software is used to monitor and control the amount of printing that students can do on the TGS network printers. This helps limit wastage, reducing the financial and environmental cost. The system employed is a largely automated process with little user intervention required. The software distributes a number of “printer credit” units – a type of printing currency – to student network accounts, and these units are topped-up at regular intervals. If all a student’s printer credits are used up they can no longer print. When a student’s printer credits are used up either they can wait until the system automatically tops up their printer credit account or they can ask the appropriate subject teacher to request that additional credits are added manually.

TGS Software

All students can access a wide range of software including the following:

Operating System: Microsoft Windows 7 Professional

Applications: Microsoft Office Professional 2007 (*Word 2007, Excel 2007, PowerPoint 2007, Publisher 2007, Access 2007*)
Serif Suite, Adobe Suite, VLC Media Player, Google Drive, Google Docs, GMail Chrome & (Bespoke software for Subject Areas)

Email

All TGS students have a school email account. This gives them access to an address book that contains all other pupil and staff email addresses. They should use this to communicate by email about school related issues with staff and other pupils, rather than use any private email system. Students access their school email within TGS using Google Mail client software, and from home via a secure web-browser using the Google Mail Web Access interface.

Students should not use their school email account addresses to register for any online service or product unrelated to their work at TGS.

Like other secondary schools that provide pupils with school email systems TGS completely blocks and bans the use of all other email systems. Students are therefore not able to access other web-based email accounts to which you may be giving them access at home such as Windows Live or Gmail.

Acceptable Use Policy

The use of computers by TGS pupils is covered by an Acceptable Use Policy (AUP). The AUP sets out in detail user responsibilities and appropriate behaviour. The AUP is available to view on the school login screen

Further Information – Online Safety

Young people today are immersed in a digital world. The power of digital media to explore, connect, create, and learn is part of our culture. With this power, young people have fantastic opportunities and yet they face many potential pitfalls. As a school, we are proactive in sharing advice and guidance with our school community, illustrating both the positive and negative aspects associated with being digital. We explore the consequences of our actions and the ramifications associated with: cyberbullying, digital cheating, identity, self- image, digital footprint, communication and internet safety. We understand that it is essential for all to have the necessary skills to be able to manage the online world.

These safety and security concerns underpin the need for children and young people to learn digital literacy and citizenship skills and to support pupils to act responsibly and to use the internet in a safe and positive way. Please refer to our website for useful support links and our contributions through parent mail.