

Cyberbullying

ATL is receiving an increasing number of contacts from members who are concerned about comments and/or images held on certain websites, including:

- www.ratemyteachers.com
- www.bebo.com
- www.myspace.com
- www.wikipedia.org
- www.facebook.com
- www.youtube.com.

Our members tell us that these comments and images can be derogatory, abusive and humiliating. Moreover, where images are published they are usually taken without members' consent using a camera/phone.

ATL has been working with the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) as members of the Cyberbullying Taskforce, which was set up to address the issue of cyberbullying in schools. That work has resulted in the production of guidance for schools entitled *Cyberbullying – Supporting School Staff*, which is available to download at www.atl.org.uk/help-and-advice/workplace-bullying/putting-a-stop-to-bullying.asp or from the DCSF website.

ATL had a significant input into the guidance document, which covers cyberbullying from the perspective of a school's responsibility to protect their staff and has information on how they might educate and engage pupils on the subject. It also includes sections on how schools should deal with incidents, how to request inappropriate content be taken down from websites and how school staff should protect themselves. The guidance is a very useful tool for schools when dealing with issues of cyberbullying.

ATL's view

ATL calls upon schools and colleges to use the DCSF guidance to ensure their anti-bullying policies incorporate and include cyberbullying and work with the whole school community to try and prevent cyberbullying.

ATL expects headteachers, principals and other appropriate senior managers to support members when they raise concerns relating to cyberbullying. The school or college management should take all reasonable steps to have offensive material removed from websites on behalf of their staff or fully support members of staff who are required to request that material is removed themselves.

We also call upon website providers to take firmer action to block offensive material. ATL's position is that such websites should be more vigilant when monitoring the appropriateness of student comments and video clips. They must also incorporate easily accessible complaints facilities to allow concerns to be registered and addressed. If sites do not have such complaints procedures, members should inform ATL.

This five-step guide is intended to help members ensure offensive material is quickly removed and that appropriate action is taken against the perpetrators.

Advice to ATL members

Step 1

If you discover that arising from your employment as an education professional a website contains incorrect, inappropriate or inflammatory written material relating to you, or images of you which have been taken and/or which are being used without your permission, then you should immediately report this to a senior manager at your school.

Step 2

The senior manager (which may be your headteacher or principal) should conduct a prompt investigation.

Step 3

If, in the course of his or her investigation, it is found that a pupil or student submitted the material to the website then that pupil should be disciplined in line with the school's disciplinary procedures.

Step 4

Where appropriate, the senior manager should approach the website hosts to ensure the material is either amended or removed as a matter of urgency, ie within 24 hours. If the website requires the individual who is complaining to do so personally the school/college should give their full support and assistance. The DCSF guidance on cyberbullying includes details of the complaints procedures for a number of major websites.

Checks should be carried out to ensure that the requested amendments or removals are made.

If the website(s) will not cooperate, the senior manager should contact the internet service provider (ISP). An ISP has the ability to block access to certain pages and, in exceptional cases, can close down a website.

Even though pages may be removed from a particular website, they are stored (ie 'cached') by search engines and can be retrieved, for example, by carrying out a Google search. Consequently the senior manager should ensure the website takes steps to 'uncache' the offending page(s). Google provides instructions on how to uncache material through the 'webmaster' help service on their home page.

Step 5

If the material is threatening and/or intimidating, then senior management should, with the member's consent, report the matter to the police. Mindful of their health and safety duty of care, management should offer the member of staff support and appropriate stress counselling.

If you find in this situation that your school refuses to support you, contact ATL for assistance as soon as possible.



Need advice?

Your first point of contact is your ATL rep in your school or college. Your local ATL branch is also available to help with queries, or you can contact ATL's member advisers on **020 7930 6441**, email: **info@atl.org.uk** or write to 7 Northumberland Street, London WC2N 5RD. Don't forget you can also get lots of help and advice, as well as download copies of other ATL advice sheets, on our website at **www.atl.org.uk**

© Association of Teachers and Lecturers 2007. All rights reserved. Information on this sheet may be reproduced or quoted with proper acknowledgement to the Association.