



# ICENI ACADEMY NEWSLETTER

**DECEMBER 2024**

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# Principal's Post

Dear parents and carers,

As we approach the end of a wonderfully busy term, I would like to take a moment to reflect on all that we have achieved together over the past few months. This term has been full of learning, growth, and celebration, and it has been truly inspiring to see how our academy community has come together. We have seen our students embody the values to 'Aim High, Work Hard, Be Kind.' They have responded positively to our renewed expectations, helping us to further improve the culture within the academy. It has been especially rewarding to end the term with a non-uniform day to celebrate the progress we've made in this area.

Our students have worked hard not only in their academic studies but also in their extracurricular activities. From educational trips and sports events to various charity initiatives, they have demonstrated remarkable creativity, determination, and kindness. It has been heart-warming to see how much our young people care for one another and for the wider community.

A significant milestone this term was the visit from Ofsted. This long-awaited inspection marks an important step in our journey, and the report, due to be released in January, will help guide our Academy Improvement Plan as we move into 2025.

A heartfelt thank you goes to our dedicated staff, who continue to inspire, nurture, and challenge our students every day. Their passion for teaching and commitment to providing the best educational experience is deeply appreciated. I need to acknowledge and thank the great work of the Local Governing Body which has grown and developed leading to more support and challenge in how we are serving our students and community. I would also like to extend my gratitude to all of our parents and carers for your ongoing support –your involvement in academy life is invaluable.

As we head into the festive season, I hope that you all have the chance to rest, recharge, and enjoy some well-deserved time with your loved ones. Christmas is a time for reflection, and I am proud of the progress we have made as an academy this year, working together to restore Icen Academy as a caring and vibrant academy community.

I look forward to all that we will accomplish in the new year. Wishing you all a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Warmest regards

Mr Rushton  
Principal



# Chair of Governors Post

As we near the end of term, Christmas, and the end of the year, I genuinely don't know where time has gone, but maybe that's an age thing!?

It's fair to say the focus this half term remained on the impending visit of OFSTED. I am so glad for all concerned that the visit came before the Christmas break, and all who had prepared so well can now take a collective sigh of relief, and enjoy a well-deserved break over the Christmas period. Whilst the report will not be with the academy until mid-January, the visit is now done, and I hope the outcome will reflect the position the academy is now in. This is down to the efforts of all the staff, but also the students for their attitude in the academy and you as parents for supporting the academy. Yes, there have been challenges and differences of opinion, but I remain totally convinced that with the continued hard work and commitment of the whole academy community Icenii will become the best it can be, and a place we can all be proud to be a part of.

I have been in the academy a lot this half term for my visits around Safeguarding, attendance and looking at how Mr Pryke and Miss Staniforth are continuing to develop teaching and learning, and as I walk around the corridors the academy feels calm and settled. Classrooms are busy but ordered as I walk around, and this can only continue to provide a stable environment for all the students.

Whilst attending both the Year 11 Progress and SEND Evenings, I got the chance to speak to many parents and students, with the overwhelming response being that the academy, lessons and behaviour are all more consistent, which in turn leads to more quality learning. Year 11 students were pleased that they will now always have an academy teacher, and subject expert teaching them, rather than a supply teacher if gaps need filling. This can only increase their chances of higher attainment, and is something which 12-18 months ago would never have been able to happen.

In the company of Mr Morris I met with the Academy Parliament, and was blown away by their vision, attitude and whole academy approach. They have a real desire to shape and support the academy and all those who attend, and I look forward to continuing to work with them.

In my last message I mentioned a survey. This has been overtaken by a Trust-wide one which will be going out in the New Year to capture staff, student and parent voice. This will provide us as governors and the academy SLT with valuable feedback around academy life for you all, so I encourage as many of you as possible to respond. Further information will be come out in the New Year. Going forward as a Local Governing Body we will publish termly surveys which will be sent out. These will concentrate on current themes and trends in the academy. We hope this will ensure you as parents have the ability to be heard as often as you can, and we as a Governing Body can listen and respond to any concerns, but equally to pass on praise and thanks where things are going well.



Hand in hand with this is attendance. As all the statistics show, when our children are in the academy, they achieve more. Whilst fines can seem harsh, the need to raise attendance is vital in improving the outcomes for students, so we as a governing body fully support the academy in this area.

Finally, at each event where you as parents attend you will now always see at least one of us from the Governing team coming along. Obtaining parent and student voice is key to our role, so please come and speak with us about anything you have to say about the academy, your child's experiences, or areas you feel the academy can improve on, or concerns in general. There is a link on the academy website to contact us via e-mail, so please use this should you have anything you want to raise.

I am truly proud to be the Chair, and am constantly impressed with the hard work and commitment of the staff at Iceni. They in turn should be proud of where the academy is now, and I hope the OFSTED report will vindicate the work that has been done to improve the behaviour and more importantly the culture of the academy. We all play our part in this, and all have the same priority which is to make the academy a place we can be proud of, and where our children feel safe, supported and challenged, and able to achieve the best they can.

Merry Christmas!

Simon Conner  
Chair of Governors for Iceni & The Nicholas Hamond Academies





# Year Team Updates

## Year 7

We have reached the end of our first term in Year 7 and our students continue to go from strength to strength. I have had lots of positive comments from class teachers about what a lovely year group Year 7 are and how they are extremely kind to one another when someone needs a little bit of TLC. Many of our students continue to support activities both in and out of the academy and are experiencing success. Indeed, the most recent event was the Year 7 Football team playing against a team from my old school, and the Icenis team played a great game and won! A bragging point for me with my old colleagues! We have members of Year 7 who are part of the academy choir and are performing on the last day of term to their peers.

We have been busy decorating Christmas card post boxes which are being judged on Friday with the winning team awarded a tub of 'Celebrations'. Each tutor group has also had a naughty Elf for the last three weeks, running amok at form time each day. They have got up to all sorts of trouble - see the photos below!



As we look forward into the new year there are many things to get excited about, from rewards trips to writing competitions within English, not to mention subject trips that are in the pipeline. I remain exceptionally proud of how your children have adjusted to life at Icenis Secondary Academy, and their attitude towards aiming high, working hard and being kind. They are going to make excellent role models for Year 6.

Mrs Thompson



# Year Team Updates

## Year 8

This half term has been exceptionally long and challenging, yet also an incredibly rewarding term for Year 8 as they really settle into the year and are no longer the new pupils in our academy. Attendance has improved this half term with a fantastic forty-five pupils sitting currently on 100% and sixty-two with over 94% attendance (the national average).

I am truly proud of how well so many have adapted to the increased expectations placed upon them and now so many are really taking this on board to meet the challenge placed before them. This half term has brought a new level of challenges, but we have been driven to re-address the rewards system in the academy to enable all to be recognised for their hard work and efforts and I am excited to continue in developing this for Year 8 in the new year!

I would like to wish everyone a wonderful Christmas and hope all are well rested to start again with fresh challenges in January.

Mr McAllister

## Iceni Drama Club

We have recently kicked off rehearsals for *Living with Lady Macbeth* by Rob John, a play in which we see a normally well behaved and quiet student called Lily longing to take the part of Lady Macbeth in Shakespeare's famous play.

There are a few contenders for the part of Lady M, so Lily and her best friend Monica dream of really inventive ways to eliminate the competition!

We're hoping this will go up the week before Easter. It will run for two nights and have a different cast each night.



## Year 9

It feels like this half term has flown by, but I write to you as a proud Head of Year. I am pleased to say as we continue to hold pupils to high account with uniform and equipment, and Year 9 continue to impress with their conduct.

I look forward to my weekly awarding of VIP passes for our most rewarded students. It has been great to see a wider range of pupils accumulate the most positive points each week, as well as to see many embracing the competition to achieve the most. At the time of writing this, with still well over a week until the end of term, almost 60 pupils have won a VIP pass through either positive points or Form Tutor recommendation; well done to all!

Indeed, when I trawl through all of the positive points recorded, I am thrilled to see that 41 pupils have recorded 20 or more positive events in just over 5 weeks: a remarkable number when you consider they need to go above and beyond to have a positive event recorded. On the subject of numbers, it is perhaps equally as impressive that in the same time frame, 65 students have not had any negative entries, including a simple warning, all half term. I hope this trend of positive behaviour continues to grow into the New Year.

A key focus in my role as Head of Year, and for my team of tutors, is to look at supporting attendance improvement. Whilst we have made some small improvement this half term (a tricky half term with lots of colds and flu always around), we still have some work to do here. As a team, we have been inviting parents in for meetings and speaking to pupils. Ultimately, every lesson matters, so I hope you feel able to contact us if there is anything affecting your child's attendance that we could support you with.

As ever, Year 9 continue to contribute to the extra-curricular side of the academy. It has been great to see football, basketball, fitness, bowling and drama have Year 9 students involved. I have also seen many Year 9s sign up for the ski trip, and saw many excited faces when the future rewards trips were initially discussed in Mr Morris' assembly.

A final point to consider when you manage to grab a few 'slower' moments over the Christmas break. Spring will see the launch of the Year 9 options process. It would be great to start conversations with your sons and daughters about what they are interested in pursuing both at GCSE, post 16 and even maybe as a career, so they can start to think about the making the right choices for their future.

Wishing you all a wonderful Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Mr Luke Taylor



## Year 10

I would like to thank all the parents who came to the Year 10 Progress Evening last week. It was really nice to be able to catch up with some of you, as sometimes I do not get the opportunity to do it during the year.

I would also like to thank all the parents who have supported me, the form tutors and the academy with the uniform and the behaviour policy. When visiting classes, it is still a pleasure to see the hard work and engagement that Year 10 students are showing in their studies.

Our current top 10 students who have received the highest number of positives points are: Carley S., Tanzi M., Bailey M., James L., Lexi R., Alfie H., Phoenix M., Ollie G., Leo K. and Tilly B. Congratulations to all of these students and to everyone in the year group as all of them have contributed to our collective number of positive points! They also have completed some great work. I very much look forward to seeing how the Year 10 students will be getting on in the new year.

I am also looking forward to the bowling trip in January to reward those students who have worked really well during the Autumn term.

Thank you as ever to our parents and carers for their continued support.

Have a restful and enjoyable Christmas holiday.

Miss F. Agoudjil

## 100% and 95%+ Attendance Letters

Please be aware that we have published letters to all the parents of students who have achieved outstanding attendance in the year to date.

These can be found on the MyChildAtSchool (MCAS) app in the 'reports' section.

Congratulations, and well done!

Mrs Chuter  
Attendance Officer





# Year 11

Another term come and gone! Well, Year 11 what a great term it has been.

Morning meetings are going very well and are very useful. It has been great to hear feedback from so many of you, saying how much they are helping. These will continue in the spring term, with additional opportunities to have morning meetings in history and geography.

Well done to all those that are using revision sessions provided by departments. These are well attended, and the positive comments I have received from staff about your positive attitude towards these is absolutely a delight to hear.

The latest science PPEs ('mock exams') have been approached with vigour, and the upcoming exams in January I am sure will not be any different.

We have 12 academy weeks until the Easter holidays, and after this the real GCSEs will be in full swing.

Remember: have a great Christmas, give yourself a well-earned break but do not forget to keep up the revision. It will be worth it!

I am very proud of each and every one of you and I know we can continue our hard work in the new year.

Merry Christmas to all have a safe and happy holidays.

Miss Tooze



# SEND News

It has been a busy term for the SEND department. Our newly appointed HLTAs have been working closely with staff to develop interventions for target students. We have maximised the ATT Core SEND offer which has provided the team with access to vital training to support the increasing SEND needs at Icen Academy. We now have additional staff training in Draw and Talk and will soon have two qualified ELSA practitioners to support the social, emotional, mental health needs of our students. Alongside this, staff are completing training in sensory circuits, Beat Dyslexia, LEGO based therapy and speech and language to name a few. There is further training in the spring term which will increase the range of interventions we are able to offer and enable us to embed what we have started to implement this term.

## **SEND assessments**

The team have been super busy this term carrying out a large number of SEND assessments, increasing the range of screening tools we are using in order to gather as much information about the needs of our students as possible. This in turn is helping us to identify what support is needed. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the staff and students who have been involved with this. The students' attitude towards this has been very positive and we are now moving towards a culture where in some cases, students are self-referring as well as referrals being made by staff and parents/ carers.

## **SEND Review Evening**

This term we held our first SEND review evening. Thank you to all for your engagement with this. We are looking forward to reviewing the targets in the spring term and being able to celebrate all the great things our students with SEND are achieving. I am immensely proud of the resilience many of the students are showing and the confidence they are developing. We are seeing this resilience and confidence in all of their successes on a day to day basis, whether that be academically or otherwise.

## **A huge well done**

Congratulations to those students who have been undertaking Read Write Inc Fresh Start Phonics Programme (RWIFS). Your hard work and positive attitude to learning has led to some fantastic progress and improved reading ages. It is not easy having an extra three hours of reading per week, but the commitment from both the staff and students is fantastic. We were proud to show off some of the students during RWIFS sessions when Ofsted visited a few weeks ago. The inspectors commented on how impressed they were with how hard the students were working... well done!



## **Breckland School Games - Panathlon Sports Events**

We have taken part in two events so far this term: the multi-sports event held at Icen Academy, and a Bowling event held at Mr G's in Brandon. These events saw us compete against other academies within the Breckland School Games partnership (Attleborough Academy, Thetford Academy and Wayland Academy) and I am so proud of all of those who were able to take part. Each student received a medal and certificate for their contribution to the team and our successes have ranged from winning in their age group to coming runners up.



I would like to thank our brilliant KS4 Sport Leaders who help to support the running of these events. Without them we would not be able to host such opportunities.

### **SEND Hub**

We are excited to be able to offer a SEND Hub in the spring term. This is in liaison with the local authority. They will be offering parent workshops on topics such as understanding neurodiversity and the teenage brain, as well as understanding children's behaviour. Alongside this, there will be an opportunity for some of our students to undertake a six-week programme of yoga and mindfulness. In some instances, we will also explore how we can combine the SEND Hub with the Family Hub so that parents who would benefit from additional advice will be able to do this in one meeting. More information will be shared once we have finalised dates, but watch this space!

Wishing you all a happy and restful Christmas break.

Miss Turner  
Assistant Principal - SENCO



# Department Updates

## PE

It has been a busy half term in PE, with plenty going on both in and out of lessons!

We have enjoyed seeing pupils progress across a wide variety of activities in lessons, including dance, dodgeball and volleyball, as well as some of the more 'traditional' activities such as football, basketball and table tennis.

The Year 7s have continued to settle well into academy PE routines and have been producing some excellent work in lessons. It was also pleasing to hear that our hard-working Year 7 football team earned their first win of the season against Dereham Northgate. Well done!

Year 8 and 9 continue to work well in their PE lessons, as well as some representing the academy in various fixtures across the last few weeks.

Our Year 10s have performed superbly in their practical assessments in line with their Cambridge Nationals Sports Studies course. Our non-examined Year 10s continue to work well in their core lessons, ensuring they benefit from physical activity as they start their GCSEs away from the department.

Year 11 have been excellent on their chosen pathway in lessons. It is always lovely to see Year 11 making their own choices in PE activities and then working hard to get the most out of these lessons across their final terms with us. We now enter a period of winter choices with pupils, in support of their physical and mental wellbeing during mock exams. Our Cambridge National pupils are busy working hard with Mr Taylor at the helm, guiding them through their final pieces of coursework before exam preparation begins.



***Year 7 Football Squad***

We continue to provide a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities for pupils here at Icen Academy. Pupils have enjoyed fixtures in girls and boys football, with the last few to be squeezed in before we completely lose the light! Fitness and basketball clubs have been well attended after the academy day. New clubs will be offered to pupils in January, these will be indoor activities whilst we await the spring weather!





Our affiliation with fellow ATT academy, The Nicholas Hamond Academy in Swaffham, continues to provide an excellent opportunity for our pupils to be involved in extra-curricular sport. This half term, saw us travel to Swaffham for boys and girls basketball, with some brilliant games being played. We won many of these fixtures, which is always a nice bonus to these Wednesday afternoons! Next half term sees play remain at Hamond's with dodgeball fixtures in Years 7, 8 and 9.

I was lucky enough to take some of our Year 10 Cambridge National girls to a Girls' Leadership Day at the UEA, run by Norfolk School Games. The girls completed several workshops, all designed to assist with their ability to lead sport and activity sessions. Workshops included a disability sport session, a first aid session, a coaching session and an umpiring session. The umpiring session was run by Gary Burgess, international netball umpire, who provided inspiration with roles outside of actually playing. The girls were an absolute joy to spend time with and were a real credit to both themselves and our academy. I look forward to seeing the benefits of these workshops in their future studies.



***Year 10 pupils at the girls' leadership day, UEA***

A busy term to end a busy calendar year! Thanks to pupils for coming to PE and continually meeting our high expectations: this says a lot about you as people. Thank you, as always, to parents and carers for washing kit ready for lessons. Lastly, thank you to the PE team for their unrelenting drive to provide the highest quality PE and extra-curricular activities for our pupils.

A gentle reminder that all jewellery, including retainers, must be removed for lessons, this includes new piercings. We cannot allow piercings to be taped up in lessons and therefore pupils will be expected to remove them. Please encourage pupils to wait until July for new ear piercings. Thank you for your support with this.

I wish you all a peaceful Christmas period and a Happy New Year. Enjoy the festivities and get out and about in the fresh air when you can! It's always refreshing to take an hour or two between the mince pies to get out and enjoy our beautiful part of the world.

See you in January.  
Rebecca Bradley, Specialist Leader of PE



# Department Updates

## Food Technology

The food department has been busy this half term cooking some really tasty dishes.

Year 7 have been looking at the Eat Well guide, alongside learning the workings of a cooker. Heat transfer by radiation was used to cook our tasty pizza toast.

Year 8 have been learning about dairy and protein, and Bolognese was made in response to this theme.

Year 9 have been looking at multicultural dishes, and scotch eggs and Victoria sponges have been on the menu during lessons.

Year 10 have really started their Key Stage 4 GCSEs off well, and they have sat their first exam paper in Food Preparation. I must say, the results were fantastic! They have also been making some lovely smelling dishes, including homemade flaky pastry and sausage rolls.

Year 11 have done amazingly on their coursework and all are doing a fantastic job. The drop down sessions we had were used wisely and many made significant progress with these. Well done and I look forward to the other trials after Christmas and the final push to the practical exams in March.

Have a great Christmas and keep baking.  
Miss Tooze

## Science

Science revision for Year 11 has started really well. We are running sessions at lunchtime and after the academy day, and both have been well attended. Please see the science noticeboard for the dates for next half term along with the topics that we are covering.



# Department Updates

## The Communications Faculty

As the Autumn 2024 term comes to a close, we want to celebrate the hard work and achievements across the Communications Faculty. Here's a brief overview of the term's highlights:

### English Department

This term, students have explored a variety of topics, from Greek myths and *The Time Machine*, to themes of prejudice and courage in *To Kill a Mockingbird* and the complexities of power in *Macbeth*. Alongside this, Year 11 students have been refining their English language skills in preparation for January mocks, and the summer's exams. We are also excited to announce the launch of Icenii's new student newspaper, 'The Muse', giving students a chance to develop their writing and editorial skills.

### Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) Department

Pupils in both French and German have made excellent progress this term. Year 11 students completed their first round of speaking mocks, which are an important part of their GCSE preparation. The department has been focused on building skills in speaking, listening, reading, and writing, helping students strengthen their language abilities ahead of their exams.

### Computer Science Department

This term, students have explored topics ranging from online safety to more advanced Python programming. Students learned how to stay safe online, while the older years tackled Python coding, developing their problem-solving skills and understanding of programming concepts. The department is excited to see students applying their learning to real-world challenges.

### Looking ahead

We want to thank everyone for their hard work this term and look forward to an exciting new year ahead in 2025. Wishing you all a restful holiday, and we look forward to seeing you in the new year!

Best regards,  
The Communications Faculty Team



# Department Updates

## Mathematics

Each half term, all KS3 students sit two times tables challenges.

Students can win the most improved time and the most improved score for their class.

The most improved scores went to:

- Year 7 : Phoebe LC, Riley W, Emily W
- Year 8: Summer T. Evie B
- Year 9: Noah A, Henry B

The most improved times went to:

- Year 7: Trinity W, Millie C
- Year 8: Millicent B, Harry C
- Year 9: Ellena M, Scarlett W

The best performance in each year group went to:

- Year 7: Leyla S
- Year 8: Connor F
- Year 9: Noah C

## Humanities

It's been a busy term in humanities, but students have made an excellent start to the year.

Year 7 have responded brilliantly to the challenges of learning three separate disciplines, developing core skills in geography, having an introduction to Christianity in religious studies and exploring Norman England in history.

Years 8 and 9 have made great progress continuing developing both their knowledge and their skills across all three subjects, whilst students in Year 10 have made a strong start to their GCSEs.

Year 11 religious studies students had the opportunity to visit a synagogue in Cambridge where they had the rare opportunity to meet with the only female Torah scribe in England.





# Year 11 PPEs (mock exams)

Year 11's final PPEs (pre-public examinations) commence after the Christmas break, and students have been working hard to prepare for these important exams. We have been so impressed with how they have conducted themselves in the science papers before Christmas, and know they will maintain this high standard as we begin the rest of the papers.

PPEs are used to prepare students: they help students get used to the exam environment, and they help teachers understand individual students' strengths and areas for development, which in turn helps guide both teaching and revision in the coming months.

As we also are now sadly all too familiar with, the PPEs themselves can also become critical documents to support grading where national disruption is caused to final exams (such as the Coronavirus pandemic).

The dates have been tweaked slightly, with the first exam now taking place on 7th January rather than the previously published 13th January. This is in order to maximise the time after the exams to support student progress towards excellent outcomes in the summer.

As you can see from the timetable overleaf, these are very busy days for students but I know they will rise to the challenge and aim high, work hard and be kind to themselves and others as we embark on the exam series.

To this end, it is crucial that students attend all of their exams, fully equipped and on time. This includes black pens, pencil, ruler, highlighter and, where required for the examination, a maths set (including protractor) and scientific calculator.

I look forward to sharing your child's grades with you before February half term, and seeing you at the final Year 11 Progress Evening on Thursday 6th February.

Miss Staniforth  
Vice Principal



Day	Date	Subject	Exam Start time
Tuesday	07/01/2025	English Language Paper 1	8:45am
		Geography Paper 1	11:30am
		French Listening	2:15pm
		German Listening	2:15pm
Wednesday	08/01/2025	Science - Biology Paper 2	8:45am
		Food Preparation and Nutrition	11:00am
		French Reading	1:45pm
		German Reading	1:45pm
Thursday	09/01/2025	Maths Paper 1	9am
		History Paper 1 - Medicine in Britain	11:30am
Friday	10/01/2025	English Language Paper 2	8:45am
		Creative iMedia	11:30am
		Drama	11:30am

Day	Date	Subject	Exam Start time
Monday	13/01/2024	Science - Chemistry Paper 2	8:45am
		Religious Studies	11:15am
Tuesday	21/01/2024	English Literature	8:45am
		Geography Paper 2	12pm
Wednesday	15/01/2024	Maths Paper 2	9am
		Computer Science	11:30am
		Music	11:30am
Thursday	16/01/2025	Science - Physics Paper 2	9am
		French Writing	11:30am
		German Writing	11:30am
		History Paper 2 - Early Elizabethan England	2pm
Friday	17/01/2025	Maths Paper 3	9am
		History Paper 3 - Weimar and Nazi Germany	11:30am
		Geography Paper 3	2:15pm



# Keeping Children Safe

Keeping Children Safe online over the Christmas Break and beyond.

Students may get new devices over the Christmas break or be spending more time on devices than normal in the holidays. Please see some information to support privacy settings and parental controls to ensure the young people are keeping them safe over the Christmas break.

## **Parental controls & privacy settings guides | Internet Matters**

Keeping children safe online is vital in the academy and at home, so support from parents is key in continuing to education students on the online safety

I have also included two documents which may give you some advice and guidance on keeping you child or children safer online - Guide to setting up apps and using and reviewing parental controls.

We also understand that Christmas can be a difficult time for some students, so if any support is needed whilst school is closed then students can use any of the following resources to support them during this time.

FYI Norfolk <https://www.fyinatorfolk.nhs.uk/emotional-mental-health/>

MAP <https://www.map.uk.net/here-you/mental-health>

Shout Opening times: 24/7 Text SHOUT to 85258

Kooth <https://www.kooth.com>

Any concerns or questions you have please do not hesitate to contact us and we will get back to you in the new year [ICS-safeguarding@attrust.org.uk](mailto:ICS-safeguarding@attrust.org.uk)

Wishing you all a Merry Christmas and happy New Year

The Icenis Safeguarding Team





# 10 Top Tips for Parents and Educators USING AND REVIEWING PARENTAL CONTROLS

Phones and computers are essential parts of children's lives, but with unfettered internet access comes a multitude of risks. While not foolproof, parental controls can help with this; filtering out inappropriate content, limiting the ability to spend real money, capping screen time and generally making devices safer for young people.

## 1 KNOW THE TYPES

While parental control software can apply to an entire device, it also pays to know about options on individual apps and websites. TikTok, for example, has Restricted Mode for limiting unsuitable videos, while Snapchat lets you keep an eye on who a child has been talking to. Check the settings of any new app young users want and review your options.

## 2 COVER ALL DEVICES

Knowing what parental controls cover is crucial, as remaining unaware can run the risk of 'blind spots' in the device's safety measures. Controls on a phone will apply whenever a child's on that device, for instance – but you'll want to ensure that parental controls are set up across any laptops, tablets and potentially other phones, too. Remember, buying a new device may require you to set everything up again.

## 3 DON'T NEGLECT SHARED TECH

While children often have their own devices, if you have a shared family computer or tablet, for example, you'll need to make sure that's not a weak point in your safety measures. Parental controls for your router, that cover everything connected to your Wi-Fi, are one option – or you can just be thorough with each device and online account. Just ensure that unprotected laptops, phones and tablets are password locked.

## 4 CONSIDER TIME CONTROLS

Even safe internet content can be harmful if it's viewed in excess. Not only are certain apps addictive enough to distract from other duties, but late-night usage can badly disrupt sleep, which is vital for adolescent brain development. Most parental controls offer some kind of time limit – either blocking access at certain hours or capping the number of minutes it can be used per day – so be sure to consider these.

## 5 BLOCK APP SPENDING

Seemingly free apps can sometimes include microtransactions: purchases that can be made using real money. While plenty of developers implement these fairly, some companies attempt to manipulate children into paying for additional features or content, which can soon add up to hundreds of pounds if a child gets carried away. Thankfully, iOS and Android's settings allow you to block in-app purchases, preventing any huge bills.

## 6 NO CONTROLS ARE PERFECT

Parental controls can be very useful, but they're far from infallible. Some unpleasant content can and unfortunately will slip through the net, so remember that setting up these measures isn't a substitute for taking an active interest in young people's digital lives. Talk to them, and make sure they're aware of the risks of the internet as well as its benefits.

## 7 MIND THE GAPS

There'll undoubtedly be some gaps in parental controls, no matter how thorough you intend to be. For example, if you use router-level parental controls, bear in mind that these won't cover WiFi outside the home. For that reason, it's important to keep an open dialogue with children about the many unpalatable aspects of social media and the web.

## 8 KEEP THINGS SECURE

Some children can react poorly to parental controls and feel tempted to circumvent them. It's important to ensure that the passwords to these settings remain unknown to children, otherwise they can easily modify the restrictions without you knowing. Similarly, make sure your phone isn't left unlocked and unattended.

## 9 REVIEW CONTROLS REGULARLY

Parental controls shouldn't be a 'set and forget' deal. Not only can parental summaries provide you with a frequent overview of a child's digital life – to let you spot any warning signs – but companies often add new features, and some of these may be useful to enable (or disable). Regularly checking in ensures that if a child has found a way to wiggle out of the controls, you'll be the first to know.

## 10 KNOW WHEN TO LET UP

The parental controls you install on a computer for a seven-year-old probably wouldn't be appropriate for a child of 16 – and as young people approach adulthood, bubble wrapping the internet can do more harm than good. Consider relaxing parental controls as children get older, so they can learn to manage the risks of the internet themselves, without so many training wheels.

## Meet Our Expert

Alan Martin is an experienced technology journalist and the former deputy editor of technology and internet culture website Alphr. Now freelance, he has contributed articles to publications including the New Statesman, CNET, the Evening Standard, Wired, Rock Paper Shotgun, Gizmodo, Pocket Gamer, Stuff, T3, PC Pro, Macworld, TechRadar and Trusted Reviews.



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# What Parents & Carers Need to Know about SETTING UP APPS, GAMES AND SOFTWARE

Millions of new phones, tablets, laptops and games consoles will be nesting under Christmas trees this year. However, even if parents and carers have gone to the trouble of setting up these new devices and enabling the safety features, there are still potential hazards in the apps, games and software that children will want to install and use. Knowing what to look for and discussing those risks with your child may help avoid any nasty surprises this Christmas. Here are our top tips for ensuring that unwrapping this year's presents doesn't unleash any unexpected dangers.

## TAKE NOTE OF AGE RATINGS

Back when most games were bought in shops, checking the age rating was easy: it was on the front of the box. Now that most games are downloaded, it's tougher – but not impossible. All reputable download stores show a game's age rating at the point of purchase, and you can check the suitability of a specific title your child wants to play at [videostandards.org.uk/RatingBoard/games](http://videostandards.org.uk/RatingBoard/games).

## 'FREE' ISN'T ALWAYS FREE

The games market has changed radically in recent years. Many titles are free to download, but then tempt players to pay for cosmetic items (as in Fortnite) or to unlock additional content. There can be huge peer pressure for children to pay for these items. Agree a budget for in-game purchases before the game is downloaded, and make sure children can't authorise in-game purchases by themselves.

## DISABLE IN-APP PURCHASING

It's not wise to leave children with devices that can make in-app purchases without your permission. Ideally, set up computers, consoles and phones so child accounts need an adult's authorisation to buy anything. On shared devices (like iPads, which don't allow user accounts), check the settings to ensure that in-app purchasing requires the account holder's password, fingerprint or face ID.

## APPS ARE AGE RATED, TOO

Like games, apps in the major stores have age ratings, too – so you can see in advance whether an app's appropriate for your child. Additionally, phones' parental control settings allow you to set age limits, preventing young ones from downloading unsuitable apps themselves. These ratings aren't infallible, however: we've seen TV apps featuring adult shows with an age rating of 3, for example.

## CONSIDER STORAGE

Most apps and games will tell you in the online store how much space they need on a device. Check this carefully – especially with games, which can run into hundreds of megabytes and beyond. If you don't have enough free storage on a device to run the game or app, you won't get a refund from the store. You can normally check a device's available storage space through the settings menu.

## WATCH OUT FOR IMITATORS

Even in the official stores, untrustworthy rogue apps can slip through the net. Common tricks are apps or games that have a slightly different name to the genuine article (Fortnite rather than Fortnite, for instance) or use logos which deliberately look very similar to the official app. To avoid downloading these imitations, read the app's description and check who the publisher is listed as.

## LEGAL APPS THAT BREAK THE LAW

There are many apps that are perfectly legal but enable illegal activity – streaming apps which let people watch football matches, say, without paying for Sky or BT Sport. Prosecution for using such apps is rare, but they can lead to risky behaviour like viewing rogue streams on sites teeming with malicious links. Watch for children installing unusual apps with 'TV', 'stream' or 'sport' in the name.

## IN-APP REGISTRATION

It's common for apps and games to ask users to register: entering personal details like email address, date of birth and other information you might not want your child to divulge. Ask them to get your permission before giving any personal info to an app – and consider using your details rather than the child's, so they're not targeted by marketing spam or put at risk of having their data stolen.

## STAY UPDATED

Most games and apps are subject to regular updates, which not only offer new content and features but also provide critical security improvements. Children tend to ignore such updates – usually because they don't understand why they're important, or they simply want to get straight on with gaming. Check your child's devices periodically to make sure these updates are being installed.

## CHECK THE SPECS

To avoid let-downs, check a game's specs before buying – especially for PC or Mac, where games often need a particular graphics chip or processor to work. Sites like [systemrequirementslab.com](http://systemrequirementslab.com) can scan your computer to see if it will run certain games properly. On consoles, make sure you're buying the right version: some newer Xbox or PlayStation games won't play on older consoles.

## MONITOR IN-GAME COMMS

Voice chat with friends is part of the fun of modern gaming – but danger lurks here too. Many titles have open chat systems, meaning that children could speak to strangers or hear adult language and verbal abuse when games get particularly competitive. Using a shared family area (as opposed to alone in bedrooms) for online gaming is a good way to keep an occasional ear on what's being said.

## BE WARY OF GIFTS

Titles like Roblox, Minecraft and Fortnite have in-game currencies, which can be earned through progress in the game – but can also be bought with real money. A common scam is for a young player to be offered currency if they click a link, visit a certain site or contact another user directly. Warn your child about such offers; they should show you if they're in any doubt over an in-game gift.

## Meet Our Expert

Barry Collins has been a technology journalist and editor for more than 20 years, working for titles such as the *Sunday Times*, *Which?*, *PC Pro* and *Computeractive*. He's appeared regularly as a technology pundit on television and radio, including on *Newsnight*, *Radio 5 Live* and *ITV News at Ten*. He has two children and has writes regularly about internet safety issues.



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