

The 'beady eye' principle

Kris Johnstone, president, ALIA National Schools Section.

I seem to have spent this week answering students' questions related to the security of the internet — their information technology assignment is due. No, we don't have any Net Nanny-type filtering software to control access to internet sites — tales of the sometimes humorous results which come from such security are legendary with access being inadvertently denied to almost any, even the most innocent, sites.

The school library is the principal information source within the school and teacher-librarians therefore have a responsibility to provide broad access to current, accurate, relevant and timely information. It is essential to include the internet within this, and library staff have had to familiarise themselves with the internet and all its capabilities. In some instances this has given them an assumed supervisory role, but this misses the essential role. Teacher-librarians are well placed to teach students to access

and organise information successfully and to evaluate the information. Directing staff and students to useful sites — we have books of addresses organised by 'key learning areas' displayed prominently in the library, a websites notice board for senior students, a 'Website of the Week' on the staff notice board, useful sites are bookmarked on computers — is a positive approach to student use of the internet. Training sessions for teachers and the integration of internet sites into information skills teaching also encourages effective use. It is this curriculum link which is crucial — and which should be the focus of the library teaching. This is regulation in the broadest sense.

More direct regulation is in part a response to the fear that adverse publicity may cause more restricted access to the internet. Schools generally, but not universally have 'acceptable user-policies' for students using the internet. It is essential to

have regulated access — procedures covering inappropriate use and abuse, time-wasting, plagiarism, copyright, authority of sites, time-limits on machines, times and extent of access to chat and e-mail, and systems for monitoring these. In our case the 'beady eye' works quite well and often red faces are enough to give away a student who has found a site which they realise may be inappropriate.

It is not so much that teacher-librarians have an assumed supervisory role, but rather that in many schools the library — the resource centre — is where the internet happens and so teacher-librarians have had to put in place policies and procedures which maximise its effective use. Within this framework it is our responsibility to guide student use of the internet with appropriate training for successful searching, retrieval and use of information — as we do with any information resource. ■

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