

Proposals for the use of data in schools

- Schools should produce, and review yearly, a ‘data policy’¹ which describes:
 - What data will be produced, how they will be stored and, in time, erased. It should also detail how they will be used and who will have access to them, particularly where data are passed, sold, or exchanged with agencies outside of the school.
 - Schools should not enter into agreements with external agencies, excepting where the permanent storage of data fulfils a statutory duty, which does not allow for the subject of the data to request the deletion of that data.
 - The approach that will be taken to inform pupils and parents if there are breaches of privacy with respect to data through loss, technology failure or theft.
 - An informal mechanism for pupils to request to view their data and to discuss it with a trusted member of the teaching staff, most commonly a class tutor or year leader.
 - A mediation process which allows a pupil, alone or with a parent, to dispute decisions made on the basis of data which they see as problematic.
- A process for a regular review of how data are displayed in the school which seeks the input of pupils.² Given pupils’ concerns about static displays, compelling reasons should be given to justify displaying individual/identifiable pupil data in what constitutes pupils’ public, working and leisure space. Where data are displayed they should be kept up-to-date.
- Teaching about digital literacy and data privacy should include and not omit discussion of pupil data in schools including data produced through web-based learning platforms.
- Teachers should receive regular training to ensure confidence in the principles and practice of data production and analysis. This should not merely be technical but allow the opportunity to reflect on the emotional, social and psychological effects of data use (for both teachers and pupils) and for discussion of what constitutes ethical practice in relation to data.³
- The concern for accurate data as a basis for assessing pupil learning and planning activities to deepen that learning, is in tension with the imperative to produce data which secure part of a teacher’s pay award and a school’s reputation. If data are to command pupils’, parents’ and wider public confidence it should not be used as the basis for performance-related pay.

¹ One of the early examples of this at university-level is the Open University’s policy: <http://www.open.ac.uk/students/charter/essentialdocuments/ethical-use-student-data-learning-analytics-policy>. It is based around eight principles. Principle 3 is: “Students should not be wholly defined by their visible data or our interpretation of that data.”

² Static displays, particularly those in corridors, were a particular concern both to those who had high levels of progress and those who did not. Pupils expressed concerns for peers who had experienced embarrassment or shame in relation to these.

³ Such training could highlight that as pupils relate to the data made about them in different ways they also experience teachers’ concern about data differently. Attention should be paid to school culture, including the quality assurance processes, which recognise the risk of a culture of fear where the pressure to deliver results in emotional reprisals, as a form of bullying and revenge-taking, that come from a teacher feeling let down by a pupil or a pupil with a teacher.