

5 steps

to a better school website

A Webanywhere Free Guide

In the last five years, there has been a big change in the way schools are run. Now, more than ever, schools are essentially businesses, with budgets, targets and an eye on self-promotion. Schools need to compete for prestige, work hard for outstanding Ofsted results and, ultimately, ensure they fully meet their planned admission level each September.

A key tool in the promotion and success of any school is the website. Your shop front to the world, your school's website will be the first port of call for prospective parents and Ofsted inspectors. It's also an outlet for making parents aware of events, school improvements and pupils' achievements. This means it's the most important communication and marketing tool your school has.

With this in mind, we've put together this free guide: Five Steps To A Better School Website. We'll take you through the process of going from a bare-bones or under-used school website - or no website at all - to having something your school, pupils, parents and community will embrace.

1

Know the purpose of your website

It's important to know how your website will fit into your day to day school life. There will be a number of elements that will have a bearing on whether you can see that purpose through - for example, whether or not you have enough staff to maintain the website as much as you wish.

In order to understand the purpose of your website, we recommend you identify your main audience.

Take into consideration the following:

1. Are you a school that struggles to fill places?

If, year on year, your school is oversubscribed, trying to 'sell' it to prospective parents won't be at the forefront of your plans. However, if you struggle to fill places each September, your website is a vital tool for redressing this issue.

2. Do you want to engage parents more?

Every school wants parents who support their child and play an active part in the school community. However, this isn't something that will just happen - you need to make sure those home-school links are as strong and easily accessible as possible. Your website is perfect for this, particularly if it has a responsive design, allowing it to be viewed on mobile phones.

In particular, your website is one way you can engage with parents who do not bring or collect their children from school.

3. Is homework an issue?

Once your pupils leave the classroom, do you struggle to engage them in their work? When it comes to homework, a VLE can be a vital tool to keep them engaged; however, failing that the school website can be used. For example, using a dedicated page where you can post the homework topics for the week - parents will then know exactly what their child should be doing - and what's coming up.

Think about your school's vision and ethos

Once you've decided what you want the main purpose of your school website to be, it'll be that much easier to start planning what you want to do with it. However, your school's vision and ethos will also play a big part in the direction the website goes.

Remember, for the vast majority of people, the first time they will ever come into contact with your school is via your website - so it's important to make sure they leave your website knowing exactly what your school's all about.

If your school doesn't have strong branding, or vision, it may be useful to write down all the things that you think your school stands for, and the words that come to mind when you think of the school.

What you write down could look like this:

We have strong community links

Passionate about using technology in learning

Positive

Use the words and phrases you write down to inform your content. It may be useful to create a style guide for your school, defining the language you use on your school's website and ensuring that, when new content is uploaded, it reads and feels like everything else on your website. To find out more about creating a style guide, check out this [blog post](#).

Your school's vision and ethos should inform not just the content of the website, but the design, too. If you're opting for a new website, or you're having it redesigned, the company or person you commission to do this can

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Be aware of Ofsted requirements for school websites

Since 2012, Ofsted and the DfE's requirements for school websites have been amended and added to on such a frequent basis, it's understandable that most schools probably aren't even fully aware of what they should be publishing anymore.

As it stands, meeting those requirements is still one of the biggest concerns for many schools, and the sole reason they have a school website. Which is a shame; like we've mentioned above, a school website gives huge potential for generating growth, awareness and connecting with the local community - not to mention aiding pupils' learning.

Ofsted's list is changing all the time (you can keep up to date via the Ofsted website, or by keeping an eye on our Twitter handle - @webanywhere_ltd) but for now, here are some of the most significant points explained:

1. Details of Pupil Premium allocation

Your school website needs to provide details of how you spend your Pupil Premium money.

For the previous year, you'll need to include a breakdown of how the money was divided up (for example, the proportion spent on, say, IT equipment, the proportion of teaching staff, and so on). You'll also need to detail your plans for the current school year.

You'll need to provide information on your website about how your Pupil Premium spending has impacted on attainment. For example, you could show results in English tests from last year, and then the test results from the previous year, before you invested the Pupil Premium allocation. This information needs to be provided so that Ofsted can see your school is spending the money in the right places.

2. Links to Ofsted reports, Ofsted Parent View and achievement & attainment performance data

Your website will need to provide information about how well you performed in your last Ofsted inspection. Ofsted reports are available from [the Ofsted website](#).

3. The New Curriculum

You should be starting to think how you are going to provide information on your website regarding the new curriculum. You will need to provide a breakdown of the subjects by year group. Then, you will need to continuously report reading schemes that you use in your school.

You can find the list of Ofsted requirements for school websites [here](#).

4

Have a strategy for content

It's all well and good starting out with the best intentions, but outstanding school websites are consistently updated with new, engaging content on a regular basis. The key is to be consistent, informative and engaging. Plus, it's important to make sure that, whatever content you're uploading, it's easy for the target audience to find it quickly and easily. For example, parents will not be willing to trawl your website for ten minutes trying to find the homework plans for the week.

Here are four ways to make sure your content is fresh, regularly updated and relevant to the people who will be visiting your website.

1. Assign responsibilities

Many schools will assign one person to keep the website updated. However, if you have the luxury of a few members of staff contributing, assign different people to different areas of the website. For example, your secretary could keep your events pages up to date with the latest open evenings, sports days and school parties, or your pupils could write blog posts for their teacher to upload. If each area or piece of content is assigned to a specific member of staff, it'll be easier to keep all areas of your website up to date.

Also, giving deadlines for when certain content needs to be added - for example, updating of classwork pages every Friday by 3pm - may also help with ensuring content is regularly added.

Assigning responsibilities to other members of staff will mean maintaining an outstanding school website will be a less daunting job!

2. Try different things

You don't want maintaining your website, or creating content for it, to become boring for you and your staff. If you lose interest, so will your website's visitors. So, try new ways of adding content every now and then, and keep your website fresh. Getting the children involved with the school website is a great way to improve their ICT skills - and they'll feel a real part of the school too, both online and offline.

One example of trying something different could be creating a video of the children's class work, narrated by the children, rather than uploading the work itself.

3. Plan ahead

Any website will benefit from planning ahead. Forward-thinking your content will allow you to have a regular stream of information, without any gaps in updates while you wait for something to be written!

Ideally, before your website goes live have two or three months' worth of updates. There are a lot of newsworthy material in schools that be planned quite far ahead - fetes, plays, parents' evenings or exams, for example. You don't need to write hundreds of words, either - updates of 40-80 words will be adequate in most cases.

4. Encourage feedback

There will be no better way to find out if your school website is doing the trick than to ask visitors what they think of it. You could set up a form on your website for feedback - even ask specific questions about the website - and then make any changes according to the information you get back.

You could also widen the net and ask the children themselves what they think to it - or send out a short survey to parents. This way, you can get vital information about things like how regularly the News section should be updated - or whether the website design is appealing enough. Respond to the feedback with what people want - and you'll have visitors coming back to your school's website again and again.

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Make parents, pupils and your local community aware

Ok, so you know what you want to achieve with your website, you know what you want it to look like and how it will convey your school's values and ethos, you're pleasing Ofsted and you've great content populating every page. Where next?

You need to make everyone aware. Remember, in Step 4 we recommended you encourage feedback. Making sure you have as many visitors as possible, especially to begin with, will help you get lots of feedback and therefore fine tune your content.

Parents

Encourage parents to visit your website via newsletters, parents' evenings and any events you may have planned - like plays, fetes or sports days. Parents will visit your website to see how well their child is doing in school and what their latest homework is.

Pupils

You can let pupils know about the new website in class quite easily - and you can encourage them to visit it by uploading their work on a regular basis, and also making it the online location for them to pick up their homework.

Pupil visitors will bring with them parent visitors, and vice versa. You could also set your website as the Home-page on all of your computers in school.

Prospective parents

If someone is looking for a reputable school in your area, they'll likely do a Google search. They'll find your website if your SEO is up to scratch - you can find out more about making sure your website appears high in Google rankings by reading [this white paper](#). In short, it's all about making sure you use the right words on your website - and enough of them.

Teachers

Make your website an online community for your staff. Make them proud of the work your school does, and not only will they be keeping a regular check on latest updates, they'll be telling their friends and family about it too. Some website systems allow you to create password-protected pages - perfect for creating a 'gated community'.

Where next?

If you've read this free guide and you're thinking 'right, now we need a website system,' we've created the perfect tool for building an outstanding website.

School Jotter is the UK's leading primary school website system, and now it can be integrated with all your e-learning.

Choose from a range of apps, including Jotter Learn, an easy-to-use learning sites builder, School Merits, an engaging pupil rewards system, Blog, an intuitive way to get your school blogging, and Forum, where pupils can chat and collaborate on projects.

To find out more about the UK's leading primary school website system, and the full Jotter Suite, email info@webanywhere.co.uk.

About Webanywhere

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