



Technical Strategy Guidance Note 6:

Protecting your school domain name

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Your domain name and who owns it

This guidance explains why schools that are thinking of changing their internet service provider (ISP) need to be careful that they retain ownership of that identity.

Your domain name is your identity on the Internet. For example, Main Town Primary would be maintown.kent.sch.uk or Home Town School could be hometown.sch.uk

All domain names are logged in a register to ensure they are unique. Nominet UK is the central registry for .uk domain names, but there are other registries hosted around the world. In our examples, both schools will be registered with Nominet. The important issue for schools is to check that they are registered as the legal user (better described as the Registrant) of their domain name. A quick check with WHOIS at Nominet¹ shows this to be true for our examples. In order to keep some control, rules prevent just anyone from entering names on a registry. Registries, such as Nominet, will enter agreements with 'Registrars', who will, in turn provide registration services for 'Registrants'.

Formally, the unique user of the domain name is the Registrant and is the school, not the person who made the registration. If you have been receiving your ISP services from your LA or RBC, they will have acted as Registrar for you but will have named the school as the Registrant. A commercial provider should do the same thing.

Domain names and sub domains will identify your school website and as well as other services, such as email. It is likely that your school will always want to keep the main domain name, as it would cause a lot of disruption if changed. Schools need to beware of hosting companies that register themselves as the Registrant (with legal right to use) of your school domain name. The right of use of the domain name is then the property of that company and not yours. In any arrangement schools make for hosting their domain, they should ensure that they maintain the ownership of the use (are the Registrant) of any domains that relate to their school name or that they wish to use as their school domain name.

Not being the Registrant can lead to immediate problems if you have to demonstrate that you own your own domain name (e.g. registering for an SSL certificate). Or problems later on if you decide to change your hosting company and find you cannot transfer your domain name. If that happens, you will have to change your web site address and, possibly, all email addresses and maybe more. Worse, the company could resell your domain name to someone who may wish to pretend to be you or hide behind your respectable reputation.

¹ <http://www.nominet.org.uk/uk-domain-names/about-domain-names/domain-lookup-whois/whois-tool>

Sch.uk domain names

All schools in the UK are eligible to use the domain name sch.uk registered at the fourth level (e.g. st-marys.oxon.sch.uk) whether they are with their local authority or not. If a school is independent from the local authority they can opt to use a geographic third level that best describes their location.

Example: st-marys.oxon.sch.uk could be st-marys.oxford.sch.uk

Individual or consortia of schools can register a new sch.uk domain with Nominet. Full details on how to do this can be found on the Nominet website². Sch.uk domains are controlled. This means that they can only be issued to bona fide schools which are registered with the Department of Education and that the domain is registered for their use. Therefore the problems of ownership described above do not apply to sch.uk domain names. Please note that you will need to provide Nominet with your DfES number and it must correspond to what is registered on EduBase³ under your school.

We strongly recommend that all schools use an sch.uk domain as their primary domain as this provides a high level of protection for the school, together with a high degree of assurance to the web user. It should be noted that the sch.uk domain belongs to the school itself and not to the local authority or other body controlling the school such as an academy trust.

What is the problem with un-controlled domains? (E.g., co.uk, org.uk, org.com)

The problem is that anyone can register any name under these domains so, for example, someone providing private tuition could register yourschool.co.uk or youracademy.org.uk as a domain and get business based on your school name. It is therefore a good idea to register your school name in the .co.uk and .org.uk registers to prevent others using your name.

Domains do not need to be 'live' on the web to do this, or you can make them live but only to redirect people to your official site (the .sch.uk. one).

Academy trusts which are registered as a company at Companies House can register for a controlled domain in the .ltd.uk or .plc.uk space if they wish. Then the trust will have a .ltd.uk for use on its company business, and each trust school will have a .sch.uk for use for the general running of the school.

Guidance Notes explain concisely a particular aspect of the broadband services required by schools to deliver education. The Education Network cannot accept responsibility for the application of these ideas to individual schools and local expert advice should be sought.

Audience: Bursars, Network Managers, Technical Support Staff.

Schools may re-use this material, providing that The Education Network is acknowledged.

For further information and updates, see <http://www.nen.gov.uk>

² <http://www.nominet.org.uk/uk-domain-names/registering-uk-domain/choosing-domain-name/schools>

³ <http://www.education.gov.uk/edubase/home.xhtml>

Sources of further advice and guidance:

WHOIS Search for Domain registration

<http://whois.net/>

Nominet

<http://www.nominet.org.uk/>

NB: the above links are provided for information only; the inclusion of a link in this list does not imply endorsement by the NEN, nor does exclusion imply the reverse.