Children as young as five to be fingerprinted in schools

Guidance: Heads don't need parents' permission to take biometric data

Schools have been given the go-ahead to take fingerprints from children as young as five - without asking their parents first.

Ministers issued guidance allowing heads to collect pupils’ biometric data to use when taking the register, paying for lunch or using the library.

Schools can also take retina and iris scans and record children's voices, face shapes, hand measurements, handwriting and typing patterns.

Civil liberties campaigners are concerned that the data could be given to police or the Government without parents' knowledge - or stolen by identity thieves.

The advice, contained in official guidance published, has infuriated parents' groups.

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* Students get lessons in working in call centres
* Eighty parents a week are shopping teachers who don't come up to scratch

Whitehall officials insisted the data is not stored as fingerprints but unique number streams derived from the prints, rendering it useless to anyone except the school using the system.

However the claims were disputed by campaigners who oppose the use of biometric data in schools. They also said that school computers are not secure enough to keep the data safe from hackers.

An investigation earlier this year found that 285 schools have already introduced fingerprint scanners.

They are used for a range of purposes including tracking children during the day to ensure they are not playing truant.

However, less than a fifth had first sought parental consent, according to a survey by the Liberal Democrats.

LibDem MP Greg Mulholland said: "It is highly disappointing and unsatisfactory that there remains no legal requirement for parental consent before a child's biometric data is collected.

"This is unacceptable. A school would never dream of taking children on a school trip without consent, but collecting their fingerprints is not subject to the same safeguards."

Nick Gibb, Tory schools spokesman, called the guidance "disappointing".

He said: "It is very weak as it neither requires schools to seek parental consent nor recognises the serious issues at stake with schools fingerprinting children simply for administrative convenience."

David Coulter, from the pressure group Leave Them Kids Alone, added that allowing schools to take children's fingerprints without consent was an "infringement of liberty".
He said: "These systems store fingerprint templates, which are used by the police. It leaves children open to identity fraud later on."

Polls by lobby groups suggest as many as 3,500 schools have bought the necessary equipment.

Many heads are said to have been waiting for the official guidance before bringing in the systems, fearing they could be breaching data protection law.

This states that while schools should notify parents they are taking biometric data, they do not have to seek formal consent.

And if pupils are old enough - thought to be around the age of 12 - do not even have to notify parents. They can comply with the law simply by informing the child.

Campaigners wanted ministers to force schools to ensure they had written permission from parents before taking children's fingerprints.

But the guidance merely told heads it was "good practice" to be "clear and open" when introducing biometric technology.

It advises schools to make contingency plans if parents object, for example by keeping a smartcard service running alongside fingerprint scanners.

However there is no requirement for them to do this.

Parents' only option if they are unhappy with the changes is to complain to the Information Commissioner.

Schools Minister Jim Knight insisted: "Biometric data is increasingly being used in schools. This guidance advises schools to fully involve parents in any decision to introduce this new technology.

"I want parents to be fully engaged with every aspect of their children's education - this is at the heart of today's guidance.

"I back every headteacher's right and professional judgment to choose technology to improve their day-to-day running - but it is plain common sense for them to talk to parents about this."

The guidance, issued by the Governmentfunded British Education Communications and Technology Agency, known as Becta, said schools must not pass on the information to outside bodies and should destroy it as soon as the pupil leaves.

However Liberty, the civil rights group, said: "The police have the right to get into any database, private or public."


Re: Children to be Fingerprinted in UK Schools (Or, "Pay for Lunch with Biometri - posted by MSeaman (), on: 2007/7/25

we actually have this kind of system at my place of employment. We have to clock in with our employee number and our fingerprint.

Re: Children to be Fingerprinted in UK Schools (Or, "Pay for Lunch with Biometri, on: 2007/7/25 10:41

LAURA CLARK said

Quote:

-------------------------... children as young as five - without asking their parents first...

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As it is illegal for children to be videoed or photographed without parental consent by any organisation (or individual), thi s article prompted me to call the NSPCC who have a strong interest in child protection, and should have some policy ab out it.
The librarian I spoke to had not heard of it (which is surprising), but is photocopying the article to pass to the relevant member of the national organisation.

I will receive an emailed response when they have investigated.

There is a huge muddy area surrounding police access to children’s information, in that they are a leaky vessel far too of ten, but, legally, they have access and power over which families have no control.

I would like to know how much (if at all) a person’s fingerprint changes, or their iris changes, as they grow up.

Also, if this information is being linked to medical files, where it would be instantly more acceptable, because of the confidentiality surrounding access to them.

Re:, on: 2007/7/25 16:17

Quote:
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I would like to know how much (if at all) a person’s fingerprint changes, or their iris changes, as they grow up.
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Very little.

I find it an interesting coincidence that the biometrics they’re studying are on the face and the hands...

Quote:
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Also, if this information is being linked to medical files, where it would be instantly more acceptable, because of the confidentiality surrounding access to them.
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And just imagine if your child just happened to have the same blood & rh type as some fat mutlibillionaire with kidney failure...

Sure wouldn’t be hard to get access to that information... and then, with the information, your kid’s kidney...

Re:, on: 2007/7/25 16:20

Quote:
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we actually have this kind of system at my place of employment. We have to clock in with our employee number and our fingerprint.
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That freaks me out. I don’t think I could do it.