

## **Internet Matters**

Response to the consultation on  
Relationships education, relationships and sex  
education, and health education

November 2018

## Internet Matters

Since our launch in 2014 we have been striving to help parents keep their children safe online, raising awareness of this important issue and empowering parents through the provision of practical, simple and relevant advice. During this time we have made significant progress. This year we saw a record number of visitors to internetmatters.org. With the help of our growing number of partners our scale and reach has continued to increase and the diversity of our resources means people are viewing more pages of content than ever before.

Almost 3 million Families have heard about Internet Matters

2.3m Video views

Over 1,700 Media mentions

Over 71k Followers on social media...

Over 2.6 million People visited internetmatters.org up from 2m in the last year

....and thanks to our partners we reach an average of 4.4m people every month

Over 6.4m pages of content viewed

We remain committed to working together with industry, sector experts and policy makers, to support families across the UK. We know that parental engagement is a significant factor in keeping children safe online and parents often look to schools for support and advice. Internet Matters equips parents and teachers to have those conversations, about a world they increasingly don't understand and their children know more about than they do.

For more on our insights and credentials, please see our [impact report](#).

## Introduction

We believe that the advancements of modern technology are overwhelmingly positive for children and young people, however we also recognise they present a new set of challenges for children and young people, their parents, carers and teachers. The prevalence of connected devices at an ever younger age creates an environment where children are exposed to a world predominantly designed for adults, with all the challenges, unpleasantness, and risks that creates. Collectively, we have a responsibility to educate our children - helping them develop a range of skills that can help them navigate their digital world safely, and allow them to benefit from the vast array of opportunities that technology affords. We call this digital wellbeing.

Whilst we agree with the Governments' ambition to make the UK to be the safest place in the world to be online, we are concerned that there is more to do than reforming just the curriculum. Parents tell us that for children to be safe online four elements have to be in play. These are:

- **Education of children and young people**

We support the proposal to include online safety into the RE and RSE subject areas and believe that further support and training needs to be given to teachers to effectively support and manage the teaching of online risks and harms. We have a dedicated resource portal on our website that connects education professionals with resources that include policy, training, classroom resources and advice for parents.

- **Education of parents**

Research consistently informs us that parents play a significant influential role in both ensuring digital technology is framed and managed effectively in the home and also developing children's digital wellbeing to enable them to use critical thinking, judgement and the ability to bounce back from challenges they experience online

- **Technology solutions**

Products and services used by children should have their safety, and age appropriateness at the heart of their design, plus they should give parents the ability to use settings and controls to allow children more freedom as they grow. We were pleased to participate in the ICO consultation on age appropriate design and look forward to the outcomes of that process in due course.

- **Recovery services**

Adequate investment should be made into recovery services for children that come to harm, in particular addressing the potential increases to mental health problems associated with the increasingly connected world children live in. As such we were interested in the Chancellor's announcement of additional funding for mental health support in the Budget.

Whilst we recognise that some of these elements are out of scope for this consultation we would urge significant inter-departmental work so that this consultation and the internet safety strategy can be fully integrated – which is the only way to achieve the noble objective to making the UK the safest place in the world to be online.

### **The teaching of online safety**

We remain concerned that the teaching of online safety is being crammed into RE /RSE or ICT lessons. Whilst we understand the need for a subject home for this area, we would urge the government to recognise online safety is a much wider subject than just RE or RSE. If we take the notion that behavioural standards should be the same on and off line, then the flip side of behaviour - online safety - should be integrated into the curriculum just as Maths and English are. Like English and Maths, online safety should be a statutory provision too.

We support the recommendation by the Lords Communication Committee, in its 2017 report *Growing up with the Internet*, that “digital literacy should be the fourth pillar of a child’s education alongside reading, writing and mathematics, and be resourced and taught accordingly”. Furthermore, the *Digital Competence Framework* in Wales puts digital competence alongside literacy and numeracy as a cross-curriculum responsibility from early years and includes topics such as learning about their digital footprint, understanding how digital usage is tracked, how it is used, and guarding against scams.

We would also remind the department of the significant amount of work that went into the UKCCIS Education Groups document: *Education for a Connected World*, which details, by key stage what we could expect a child to know and understand in eight different areas. These are:

1. Self-image and Identity
2. Online relationships
3. Online reputation
4. Online bullying
5. Managing online information
6. Health, wellbeing and lifestyle
7. Privacy and security
8. Copyright and ownership

We would strongly recommend the Department sets this document as the standard for the content to be taught across the key stages. In doing so, the guidance would immediately be more relevant, more timely and more comprehensive than the 'pupils should know' sections within the current guidance.

### **Transition Year – meeting a specific need for Digital Wellbeing**

Whilst the guidance does split into what should be known at primary and secondary school there is no special provision for children transitioning from primary to secondary school. This is a critical time for many families and one that as every family goes through, requires special attention.

Our own research into online safety issues featured highly for parents of children in the transition year. Of course, concern remains around general internet safety issues, which fit the traditional classification of content, conduct and contact such as their children seeing inappropriate content (81%), accessing inappropriate content (76%), talking to strangers online (75%). However, additional concerns have emerged and include: spending too much time online using social media or gaming (75%), as well as a range of issues their child might face as a result of peer pressure e.g. online bullying (78%), pressure to get involved with particular games (75%) or take-part in the latest crazes (73%) etc..

### **Social Media and School**

As children become more active on social media sites, parents often realise their child is not mature enough to deal with the complexities that brings. Parents are also concerned about what might happen - in particular, around 7 in 10 parents with children in year 6 are concerned about their child facing pressures to use particular social media apps (72%), have multiple social accounts (70%), sharing photos or videos with others (72%), using the same apps as everyone else (75%) and how they manage their online friendship groups (68%).

All of this should be covered in the curriculum in year 6, probably under a subject heading in Digital Wellbeing. We are missing a significant opportunity to set our young people up to flourish in their digital world if we do not do this.

We have a significant amount of research on this – which we have included in draft form at the end of this response.

### **Vulnerable Children**

We know that online risk and harm is not spread evenly across the population and those children with vulnerabilities offline are more likely to exhibit risky behaviour online. Adrienne Katz has done a significant piece of work on this for Internet Matters, which is soon to be published. She has determined that current online safety education is not fit for purpose for vulnerable children because currently, online safety education delivers a generic set of rules and warnings without addressing motivation or emotional needs, despite evidence that socially isolated or introverted teens engage in risky online behaviours. She also points out that:

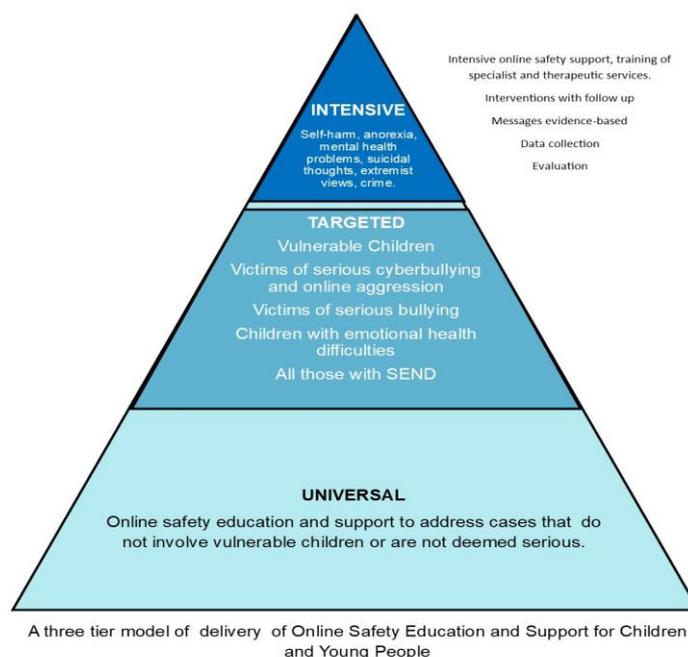
- Adversities are not present in isolation. Vulnerable children tend to live with several difficulties.<sup>i</sup>
- Vulnerable children experience multiple victimisations, polyvictimisation<sup>ii</sup>
- Isolation, weak offline social networks and poor social skills are unlikely to help develop quality friendships online<sup>iii</sup>
- Vulnerable children may lack suitable parental advice on staying safe online<sup>iv</sup>.

Add to this the data from The Good Childhood Report which shows that: 18% of children live with seven or more serious problems, such as fear of crime, domestic violence and emotional neglect. One in five

children do not have stability because of residential transience. More than a quarter live with a parent who has a mental health difficulty while almost 10% act as young carers for someone in their family,<sup>9</sup> then we have to recognise that the provision of quality digital wellbeing education for our most vulnerable children has to be a social justice issue and one that is not adequately covered in the current guidance at all.

We would suggest a ‘one size fits all’ online safety education message will not suit vulnerable children and young people. More differentiation and sensitivity are needed, along with specialised knowledge delivered in this proposed 3 tier model:

**Universal, Targeted and Intensive.**



**Conclusion**

Supporting every child to flourish on the internet has to be both a moral and an economic imperative for the UK. Therefore we would respectfully suggest that whilst the guidance is a good start, there is much more to be done. Every child should have access to good quality education on online safety which should encourage and challenge them to develop the knowledge, skills and attributes to use the internet wisely and well. That means differentiated provision for vulnerable children, and the embedding of the 8 areas of education for a connected world that the UKCCIS working group detail.

Our own research demonstrates that both children and parents are desperate for this information – especially as they transition to secondary school – and for vulnerable children their needs, as so often, are more complex, more challenging and even more important that we meet them.

There is significantly more work to do here -and if Internet Matters can help in any way, we would be delighted to do so.

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<sup>i</sup> The Children's Society, 2003. Hidden from view, young carers.

<sup>ii</sup> Finkelhor, D, Ormrod, R.K. & Turner, H.A. (2007) Poly-victimisation: A neglected Component of Child Victimization. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 31, 479-502. *Crimes Against Children Research Centre. University of New Hampshire.*

<sup>iii</sup> O' Keffe, G.S. & Clarke-Pearson, K. 2011 The Impact of Social Media on Children, Adolescents and Families. *American Academy of Pediatrics Clinical Report Vol 127/Issue 4*

<sup>iv</sup> Katz, A. Cybersurvey 2016: 44% of fifteen year olds received online safety advice from parents/carers

<sup>v</sup> The Children's Society, 2017. The Good Childhood Report.

