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Supporting educators on issues of online safety

New research exploring resource needs

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Foreword



Carolyn Bunting MBE
CEO, Internet Matters

There is a multitude of adults involved in keeping children safe online. This includes parents and carers but also key professionals – most notably schools. This is why Internet Matters is committed to providing greater support to teachers going forward.

To inform our work we set out on this research project with TikTok to look into the current landscape – how confident do teachers feel in this space? What do they currently do to engage their students in online safety, and how do they build up their knowledge? How could they be better supported to fulfil this role?

The findings revealed valuable insights, giving us tangible pointers for ways in which resources can be tailored to meet the needs of this audience. We have since acted on these at Internet Matters.

We know that resources are not enough. Teachers also need time, space and clear direction to make the best use of them – as we set out in this report. But we hope that resources are a valuable starting point and a springboard for discussion of the wider support that teachers need to successfully support the online lives of their students.





Tash Ahmed

Child Safety Public Policy, Europe



Ben Bradley

Public Policy and Government Relations Manager

At TikTok we appreciate the huge responsibility that teachers have to nurture and educate today's young people. As so much of teenagers' time is spent at school and college, teachers play a central role in the lives of their students and we're committed to collaborating with and supporting them in the valuable work they do.

In partnership with online safety experts at Internet Matters, we conducted new research of secondary school teachers around the UK, aimed at better understanding how online safety is currently taught in schools.

The research also explored what challenges teachers face in respect to resources about online safety, so we could develop targeted support to help teachers with their critical work. We're proud to share, that with Internet Matters, we have created an interactive playbook aimed at helping teachers gain a better understanding of the technology students use daily.

This important resource is designed to help people stay up-to-date with the latest information about safeguarding and online issues, master the privacy settings to use to keep them and their students safe in the digital world, and to harness the teaching and learning potential of TikTok.

We want all of our community, young people and teachers alike to feel comfortable and safe to create, share, and discover on TikTok. This report reflects our joint commitment to working with parents, guardians and educators to promote online safety and digital wellbeing, and we look forward to continuing to work across-industry to do this.



1. Introduction: exploring online safety in schools

There is not one single organisation or institution which has sole responsibility for keeping children safe and happy online. Many of us have a role to play, including parents, technology companies and Government. Frontline services which directly support families in daily life also have a key role.

This report focuses on the most important of these services: schools. Most children in England spend more than 30 hours at school per week. Some families look to teachers as a source of support in many aspects of life, educational and non-educational – including online life. When presented with a list of who is responsible for supporting their children to have positive experiences online, schools were the second most chosen (behind parents themselves).¹

Schools are therefore an important avenue for supporting children's online experiences. Yet this depends on teachers having the knowledge and skills they need to provide this support, including knowledge of how particular platforms work and the ability to engage children in constructive conversations on digital issues. We have often heard of the challenges faced by teachers in managing issues that arise for young people online in a world where most students come to school with a mobile phone.

What we wanted to find out

The purpose of this research was to determine how confident teachers feel when it comes to supporting families on issues of online safety, and to identify how they can be better supported to fulfil their role.

We focused our research primarily on the resources teachers have access to, for their own training purposes and to engage with their students. This enables us to address any gaps in the resources available, as one of the country's foremost media literacy providers. The research considered:

- The approach to addressing online safety with students and what resources teachers use to support this
- Opportunities for potential added resources to support teachers, understanding what would be most valuable and impactful, and for whom.

Nevertheless there are many other factors at play, beyond the availability of resources, which determine the ability of teachers' success in this space. These include:

- Clarity on who is responsible for what. In many schools, the Senior Leadership Teams, ICT and pastoral leads are those most heavily involved in shaping school online safety policy. But many members of the wider staff body also play a role on a day-to-day basis, e.g. form tutors, classroom teachers and teaching assistants. Everyone involved needs to be clear on the school's policies and procedures and their role in applying them.

1. Internet Matters Parent tracker – N-2,000 parents (children aged 4-16) nationally representative of the UK, July-22



- Meaningful opportunities to engage with students. Teachers need the time and space to engage with children on these issues. This is challenging given the time-pressed nature of the curriculum and their own workloads. The way in which schools deploy the new RSHE (Relationships, Sex and Health Education) curriculum is a key factor.
- Collaborative relationships with parents. Online behaviour which occurs during the school day spills over into children's home lives, and vice-versa. It is therefore critically important that parents and schools present a united front in supporting children in this space. Parents need to be engaged by schools to understand how they can play their part.

To some extent schools' responsibilities and responses in this space are laid out in legislation and guidance. For example, since the new RSHE curriculum² was deployed in September 2020, all English schoolchildren must now learn about many aspects of online safety and wellbeing, including:

- How to have respectful online relationships
- The nature of online data collection and advertising
- The impact of viewing harmful content.

This aspect of the RSHE curriculum is further supported by non-statutory guidance on best practice in teaching online safety.³

Furthermore, schools' responsibilities to keep children safe are laid out in formal safeguarding guidance,⁴ which extends to keeping children safe in their use of technology. For example, this guidance

requires that all staff receive online safety training at induction and that this training is updated regularly.

However, despite these specific requirements there remains a great deal of discretion in how schools can approach fulfilling their obligations. For example, some schools deliver RSHE in dedicated class-time with specialist teachers, while others fit it into form time with non-specialist staff. This diversity of approaches inevitably impacts upon teachers' abilities to engage with children effectively when it comes to online safety – along with their access to high-quality resources.⁵

What we did

We focused our research on secondary schools.

Five focus groups (75 minutes, four teachers in each group) with teachers and members of Senior Leadership Teams (SLT) were conducted to hear about challenges faced in schools in relation to online safety and digital wellbeing as well as future provisions. This was followed by an online survey to hear directly from secondary school teachers (N-218) about their needs, and to understand more about current and future resources .

This work allowed us to gain a broader view of the online safety landscape in schools and prioritise the importance of concerns raised by secondary school teachers.

At the end of the report are our conclusions on how the resource base for teachers can be improved, including how Internet Matters is responding to what we have found. We also offer our thoughts on how the wider challenges faced by schools in this space can be approached

2. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1090195/Relationships_Education_RSE_and_Health_Education.pdf

3. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teaching-online-safety-in-schools>

4. See 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' (2022) and 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' (2018).

5. The research was conducted by Shift Insight and commissioned by Internet Matters.

2. Findings: current provision and resources towards digital safety in schools

Teachers felt their approach to online safety was too reactive

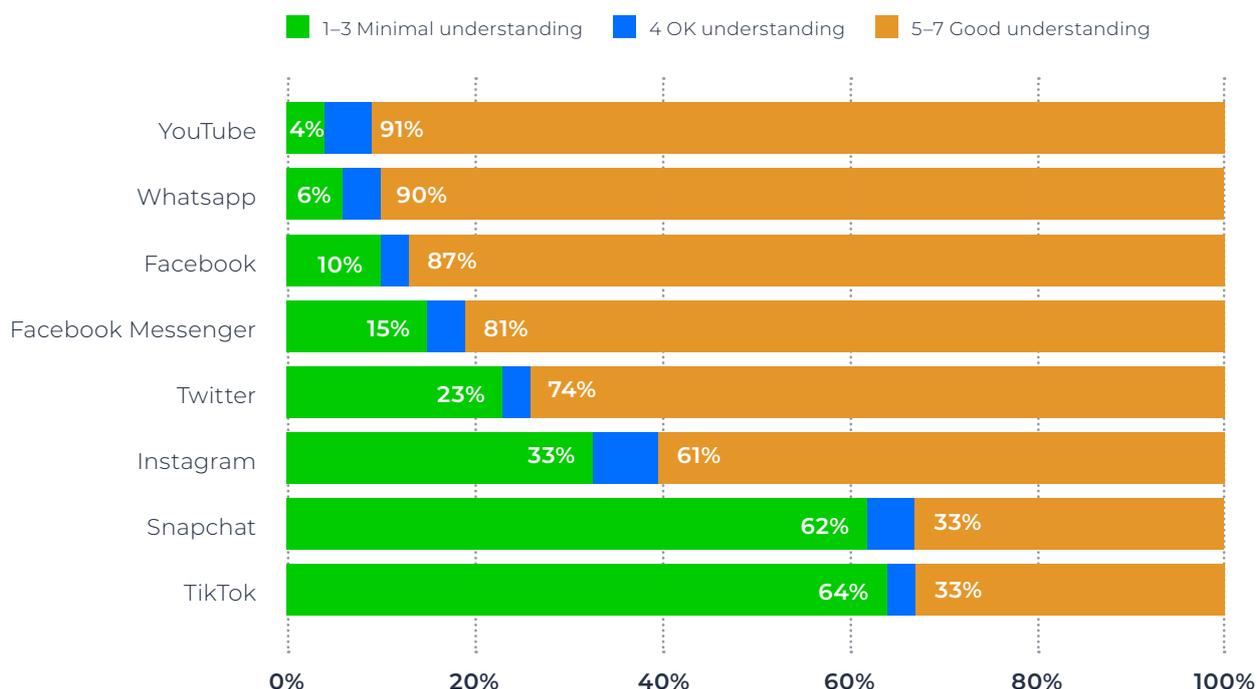
Online safety was consistently highlighted as a key priority for schools. Teachers spoke of being acutely aware of the issues related to online safety within their student body and the importance of addressing these with pupils.

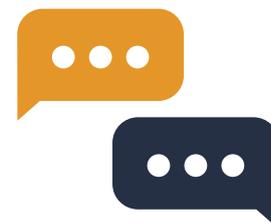
Educators often felt that they had too reactive an approach to tackling online safety issues, based around addressing issues with students as they arose. This raised concerns for teachers, who felt they were constantly on the back foot and found it difficult to give online safety the time it needed to be able to pre-empt issues. A lack of knowledge of online platforms and actions of students also exacerbated this problem for teachers.

"I think the issues we just pick up as a result of online activity, again going back to that point of it really being reactionary because there're so many platforms we as adults don't even know about... We have no choice but to be reactionary if we don't know what's being created in the market at the moment."(SLT, Large school, NW England)

Teachers said they were most commonly dealing with online bullying (81%) and the sharing of inappropriate or sexual images (69%), both of which show a high prevalence of these issues within schools. Around two in five teachers (42%) also said that they struggled to keep up with changes in technology.

Q: How much do you know about each of the following platforms and how they are being used by students





“No one really tells you ‘this is the thing that the kids are using now, this is the social media’. I find PowerPoints really quickly go out of date ... I get it out and it’s referencing something and they’re all like ‘Oh miss no one uses that anymore’, it does go out of date.” (Teacher, Large school, NW England)

When asked which platforms teachers knew best, TikTok and Snapchat were the ones they felt least confident about.

Specific features and content, such as time limits on Snapchat messages and TikTok tools, were areas where there was a notable lack of knowledge. They felt that more in-depth understanding of platforms was needed to inform their school’s approach to issues experienced by students.

Teachers believe they need more training and resources on digital safety

The most common reason respondents gave for their lack of confidence was not having the required training, which was cited by more than half of the teachers (57%) surveyed.

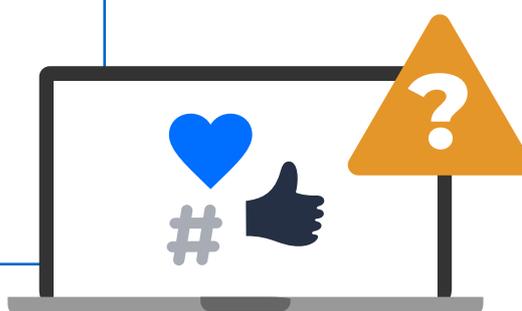
Some teachers stated that they felt comfortable teaching online safety, but they felt less equipped to deal with pastoral issues when they arose. This could be due to uncertainty around what issues fell within the school remit and how to discuss topics such as sexual or violent content in an age-appropriate manner.

Additionally, the constant change within the social media landscape could make it hard to keep up to date. This, combined with the unique nature of most cases, made it difficult to establish school-wide policies to guide their approach.

The top 3 factors affecting confidence were:



“It can be really hard as a teacher... to be always au fait with what is happening, what’s going on, like because it changes quite quickly ... So when you’re trying to get on top of it either to teach it or potentially to do with pastoral issues that have cropped up around stuff that’s happened online, it can be really tricky to understand what has happened.” (Teacher, Small school, SE England)



Current resources are used intermittently and viewed as satisfactory at best

Online support or resources were accessed by most teachers only a few times a year. Resources were most used directly with students, but, even in these circumstances, their use was infrequent, due to the limited dedicated time for online safety.

A large proportion of those that used resources directly with smaller groups of students, used the materials more often – on a termly rather than an annual basis – when compared to their use in classes. This might be attributed to the reactive nature of online safety provision, where pastoral issues experienced by students' prompt more targeted discussions.

The overall quality of current resources was rated as average. This lack of a clear positive response indicates that teachers felt there was room for improvement regarding the quality of resources available to them.

"I think having some possibly constantly updated but certainly some very up-to-date video clips, age appropriate. They don't have to be very long but perhaps British so we're not just using American stuff off YouTube and we have some stuff that's specifically made for our context, a bit more relatable for the students who are going to watch them. Perhaps Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4/Key Stage 5 as two separate sections of that would be helpful too."
(Teacher, Large school, Yorkshire)

Teachers recognise the importance of digital safety as a curriculum necessity but also as a wider social one too. They indicated an obvious need for a teacher facing resource to support digital safety in the classroom that could help inform teachers, but also be used directly with their students.

How online safety is integrated into teaching within schools varies by establishment, as do school policies on acceptable digital use and response to any issues. This means that adaptability and flexibility are critical and key considerations for any such resource being offered to teachers.



3. Findings: types of digital safety resources teachers would find most valuable

Teachers want interactive, short-form content

Video content was by far the most appealing format for a new online safety resource. Teachers stated that they would prefer easily digestible video content explaining any new concerns regarding students' online safety. Video content was felt to be engaging and valuable for teachers, but also particularly engaging and more impactful to use with students.

Educators also found it challenging to find engaging content that is age-appropriate, with relevant and current examples to share with students, and so case studies and real-life examples were the most

sought-after content. The next most popular content focus was information to explain the online platforms students were using, mirroring another key challenge for teachers who often lacked confidence in their knowledge of certain platforms.

“Some sort of crib sheet on what the apps are, what they look like, what they can do, not in any great detail but just so you’ve got a vague overview, because I presume that’s changing all the time. I feel like I’ve got a relatively good handle on it now but in a couple of years’ time who knows what might have come round.”
(Teacher, Large school, Yorkshire)

New resource for teachers



Who for

PSHE, RSE, ICT teachers most in need of support for online resource education



Purpose

To be used in teacher training and for school room usage – dual purpose desired



Content

Up-to-date information and adhering to school policy



Format

Online/digital best. Including short case studies and videos



Multi-purpose content would be preferable for teachers

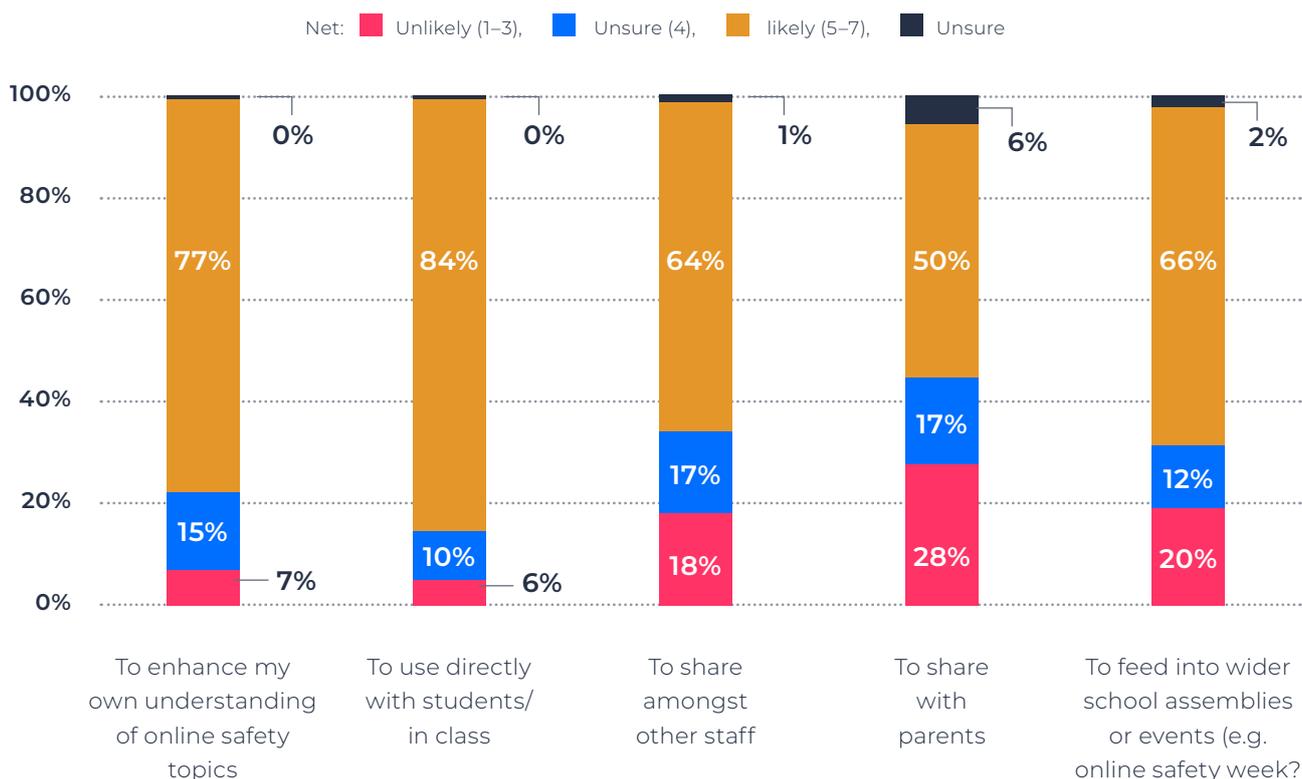
Teachers find it difficult to separate teacher-used from student-facing resources. There was often a desire for resources to have this dual purpose and remove the need for teachers to replicate content for in-class usage – in turn saving teachers time in needing to adapt or replicate resources for use with students. Educators were most likely to want to use a new online safety resource directly with students (84%, 37% of which felt extremely likely to do so).

This was closely followed by using it to enhance their own understanding of online safety topics (77%).

This again highlights the desire from teachers for a resource to be dual-purpose, upskilling them as teachers, but also supporting them in student interactions.

Bridging the gap between home and school in relation to online safety was a struggle for many respondents. Half of them felt they would be likely to use a new resource with parents. Although this had the lowest level of appeal, it shows there is still appetite for a resource to help engage parents and address this challenge.

Q: How likely would you be to use an online safety resource in the following ways?



4. Findings: how best to ensure effective resource distribution to teachers

Teachers want to see resources coming from non-profit organisations

Teachers were asked to rank different providers in terms of their appeal for delivering an online safety resource for teachers.

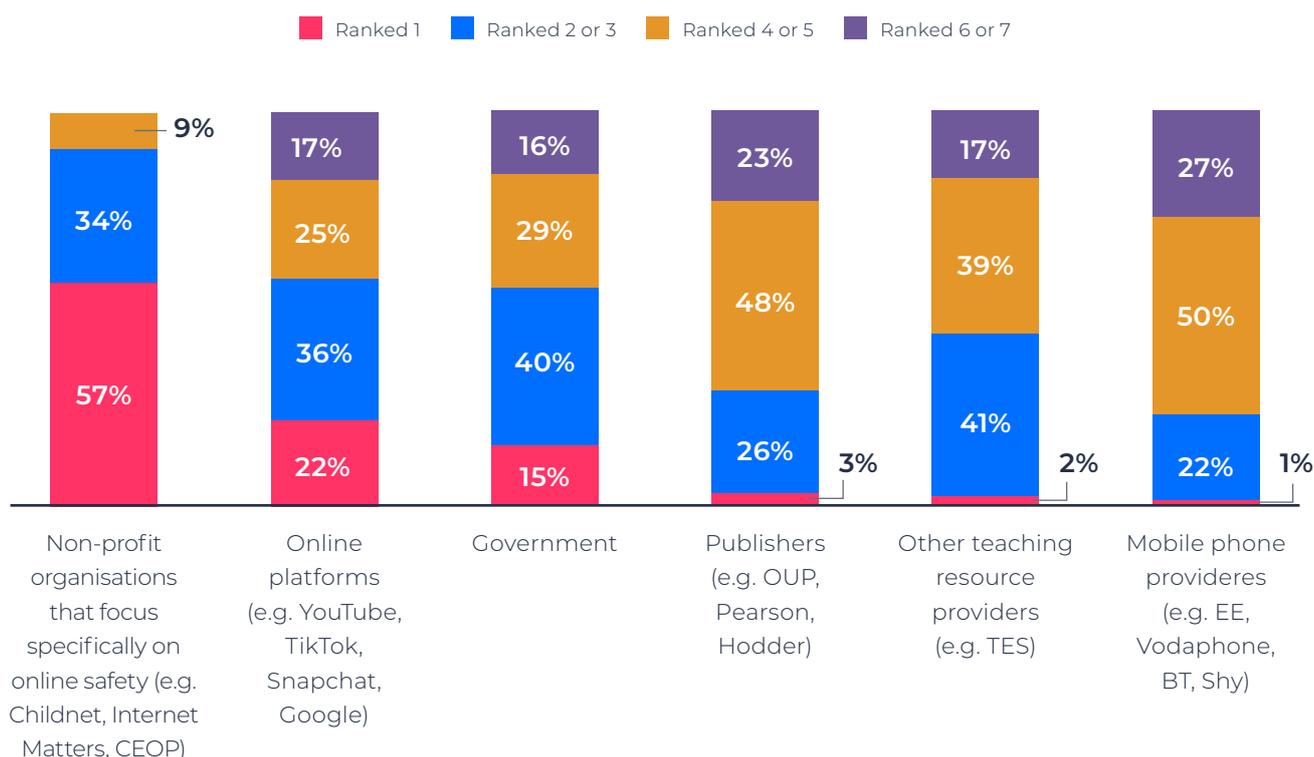
Non-profit organisations with expertise in online safety were a clear provider of preference for resources, with 57% of teachers placing them at the top. These organisations were significantly more likely to be ranked top compared to any other provider type which suggests that online safety resources from a non-profit would be very well received.

Online platforms were ranked lower, but still had the next highest appeal, with 22% ranking this as a top preference.

Results suggest that a resource from a non-profit, supported with information from an online platform, could offer strong appeal for educators.

"I think almost all of this needs backup from the online platforms. If they are bringing up on their advertising and messaging to be aware of this and that, that would be massively helpful for them to reinforce the same message that they get at school." (Teacher, Large school, NW England)

Q: Please rank the following providers in terms of which you would most like to receive support and information from around online safety





Online platforms are well placed to provide support on most online safety topics

Teachers were largely open to an online provider delivering support and resources around most topics related to online safety – perhaps because of the general paucity of current resources accessed and used by teachers.

It was apparent that teachers were highly interested in receiving up-to-date advice and guidance on most topics related to online safety, with this information and training not often made available to the wider staff body.

Over half of the teacher respondents (59%) said they would be likely to use an online safety resource offered by a social media platform. Social platforms were assumed to have the most relevant data on usage and issues encountered on the platform,

and therefore gave a sense of credibility due to the source of the data. It was assumed that social media platforms would also be able to generate more up-to-date information, rather than this needing to be filtered through other sources.

“The companies are best placed to understand the habits of young people, so they can use this information to create a resource to help teachers.”
(Teacher respondent)

Amongst those that wouldn't be likely to use a resource from online platforms (17% of respondents), the main issues were around trust. This would need to be addressed to encourage usage amongst teachers. In open comments in the survey, some mentioned how a partnership with a non-profit could help, with the non-profit bringing the impartiality necessary to alleviate concerns.

To conclude, overall, it seems that teachers are having to regularly deal with wide-ranging issues of online safety that arise or are brought into the school environment. With many other competing priorities, they are struggling to find current online safety information to help them deal with these issues in formats that are digestible, engaging, and informative for staff, students, and their parents. This research gives a clear view of what could be done to give them greater confidence and support, offer better guidance to students and keep them up to date in an ever-changing digital landscape.

5. Acting on the findings

In many ways the findings of this research are encouraging: they show that supporting online safety is a key priority for schools, with teachers wanting to do more to ensure that children have the best possible experiences online. Rather than this being the remit of the SLT or pastoral lead, it was acknowledged that all staff have a role to play.

But the research also shows that teachers feel they currently lack the necessary skills and knowledge to perform their role effectively. Teachers told us that their responses are reactive and that they lack knowledge of certain platforms commonly used by children. They sometimes dip into resources to help aid their understanding, but these could be better tailored to their needs. In particular teachers favour:

- Short form / multimedia formats
- Inclusion of case studies and real-life examples
- Dual or multi-purpose resources to include student facing parts to make them usable in class as well as learning for themselves.
- Age-appropriate resources for different groups and the potential for parent-focused sections.

It was also noted that resources needed to be updated to stay relevant and keep up with the pace of change of children's digital use.

Improving the resource base

Internet Matters is committed to equipping everyone who supports children in their online lives with the support, advice and resources they need to do this effectively. This includes schools and teachers, as well as parents, carers and other professionals.

As a result of the needs identified by this research, Internet Matters developed the **TikTok Playbook**. The Playbook gives teachers an overview of the platform, an indication of the benefits and risks it poses and the tools that can help protect children's safety and privacy. It provides short form content that teachers can use to improve their own understanding of digital as well as be used with students and parents – all of which teachers fed back to us were important factors they'd like to see in a resource.

The Playbook supplements our wider efforts to support teachers in the online safety space. Most notably, since conducting this research we launched **Digital Matters**, our online learning platform for teachers of upper Key Stage 2. The platform provides free interactive lessons and dynamic storytelling to help teachers engage young people in online safety lessons. Responding to the needs identified by this research, the platform makes use of real life scenarios and multimedia formats. Furthermore it will be continually updated to reflect children's changing digital habits and includes a parent-focused section to help bridge the gap between school and home.

Supporting teachers in this space

Resources alone cannot guarantee that schools are able to effectively support children's online safety. As stated in the introduction of this report, a much wider array of factors determine how effectively teachers can fulfil this critical role.

This research highlighted the diversity of ways in which schools act on their safeguarding and curriculum obligations in relation to online safety. In order for schools to be successful, there needs to be adequate time for staff to develop their skills and knowledge in

this space, and for them to pass this on to students. As the implementation of the new RSHE curriculum continues, it is important that agencies including the Department for Education and Ofsted consider how effectively teachers are able to deliver this curriculum, including the online safety component. They should look for a 'whole school approach,' in which policies are set by SLT and pastoral leads, but where all staff are supported to play their role in helping children stay safe online. Furthermore, schools should also look to develop effective partnerships with parents to ensure that they present a united front.

Teachers are some of the most influential figures in children's lives. If they are not properly supported to help keep children stay safe and happy online, then it is a missed opportunity.



Related resources from Internet Matters

[TikTok Playbook](#) – safeguarding guide for teachers

The Playbook helps teachers to recognise potential safeguarding issues and understand the platform's latest privacy and security features.

[Digital Matters](#)

The Digital Matters platform uses free interactive lessons and dynamic storytelling to help teachers engage young people in online safety lessons.

[Back to school online safety guides](#)

Advice and guidance below for how you can help your child make the most of their school year.



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