

The Rt. Hon Andy Burnham MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London, SW1A 2AA

The Rt. Hon Lucy Powell MP
Education Secretary
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Great Smith Street
London, SW1P 3BT

The Rt. Hon Lisa Nandy MP
DCMS Secretary
100 Parliament Street
London, SW1A 2BQ

6th October 2026

Joint letter on children's media literacy

Dear Prime Minister, Secretary of State for Education, and Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport,

We collectively write to urge you to make media literacy a national priority. Media literacy's benefits extend far beyond helping children to stay safe online: it strengthens democratic resilience, powers economic growth and fosters social cohesion.

To realise this potential, the Government must build on existing commitments and take decisive action to establish media literacy as a fundamental life skill throughout education, while giving schools and teachers the support they need to deliver it effectively. By teaching all children to think critically about information, navigate digital spaces safely and create and share content responsibly, we can empower every young person to live a good life online, get the most out of technology and be an active and critically engaged citizen.

Equipping children with these skills is just as important as regulating the online spaces they use: it helps them stay safe today and prepares them to thrive as adults.

With the National Curriculum being revised, new online safety measures being developed and responsibility for media literacy and online safety coming together under the Culture Secretary, the new Government has a rare opportunity to align education and regulation.

It must seize this opportunity to deliver an ambitious step change in media literacy provision.

Recognise that a ban will not protect children on its own

Restricting children's access to certain platforms may change where they spend time online, but it will not eliminate online risks. Children's online lives extend beyond social media to search engines, messaging services, gaming platforms and AI tools, and they often adopt new technologies long before regulation can respond.

Stronger media literacy provision is therefore a crucial accompaniment to a ban, giving children the knowledge and skills to stay safe and seek support wherever they spend time online. It is also a vital defence against a ban's unintended consequences: it helps to mitigate the risk that children who circumvent restrictions may be less likely to disclose what they encounter for fear of repercussions, and prevents a dangerous cliff edge at 16 when teens suddenly gain access to platforms they are less prepared to navigate.

In the months ahead, the Government must communicate clearly to families, schools and children's professionals that new restrictions are not the whole solution, and that education is more important than ever. Parents also need practical guidance and support to understand where risks remain and keep conversations with their children open and supportive.

But media literacy cannot compensate for weak online safety regulation. An effective ban requires meaningful incentives and accountability and must be accompanied by wider action to deliver safety by design across the technology stack. Media literacy should form part of this wider package, without shifting responsibility for online safety onto children and families.

Make media and digital literacy a cornerstone of the curriculum

Every child should be able to thrive in a digital world, but media and digital literacy education is currently inconsistent and unequal. This risks widening existing inequalities, with [research](#) showing that children from lower-income households are less likely to have discussed important topics at school, such as how to use AI responsibly and judge whether online news is true.

Plans in England to embed media and digital literacy across the curriculum, introduce compulsory Citizenship in primary schools and expand relationships, sex and health education provide important foundations for change. This Government must now build on these commitments and go further.

To turn these foundations into a consistent entitlement, media and digital literacy must be treated as a fundamental life skill and embedded progressively from primary school through to post-16 education. With the right support, schools can reach children at scale and ensure that provision does not depend on their background or the support available at home.

The Government should establish a dedicated national media and digital literacy framework that drives best practice and defines what children need to know and be able to do at each stage of education and how all subjects and wider learning opportunities work together.

This must prioritise foundational, transferable skills over an ever-expanding checklist of individual platforms and harms, helping to future-proof learning without placing additional pressure on busy teachers to keep up with a fast-changing digital landscape.

All children should learn to assess information, recognise manipulation and bias, and understand how algorithms, AI and the design of digital environments shape their experiences. They should also learn to protect their privacy, create and share content responsibly and seek help.

These skills will be particularly essential as the Government moves to lower the voting age to 16, helping to improve resilience in the face of mounting threats to national security and democratic engagement, and equipping young people to participate critically and confidently in civic life.

Give schools and families the support they need now

Schools cannot do this alone. Delivering these changes will require investment, a confident and well-trained workforce, and practical support for families. This cannot wait until curriculum changes take effect in September 2028. Government must urgently support schools with:

- Fully-funded training that equips teachers and support staff to deliver media, digital and AI literacy education confidently. This should be part of initial teacher training and continuing professional development.
- Free, accessible and quality-assured resources, suitable for schools with limited access to technology and adaptable for children with special educational needs and disabilities, care-experienced children and others facing additional barriers or unique risks.
- Practical support for schools to engage parents and carers, alongside accessible guidance for families and other professionals working with children.

As parents are children's main source of online safety support, they must also be equipped to reinforce learning and continue informed, supportive conversations at home.

Make media literacy a national priority

Media literacy is an investment in children's safety and their civic, social and economic potential. It is also a vital line of defence for our democratic and national security, strengthening society's resilience to polarisation, extremism and foreign disinformation.

Realising its full value requires leadership at the highest level and stronger coordination across government. Going beyond current arrangements, the Culture Secretary should lead action across the Department for Education, Ofcom and other relevant bodies, underpinned by clear responsibilities and sustained investment. The Government should also work with organisations supporting children, families and schools, drawing on evidence and best practice across the UK.

The choice is not between protecting children and preparing them for the future. We must do both.

We call on the Government to make media literacy a central priority in its online safety and education reforms, ensuring every child has the knowledge, skills and support to navigate the digital world safely, confidently and responsibly.

Yours sincerely,

Internet Matters

Molly Rose Foundation

Media and Information Literacy Alliance

Commission into Countering Online Conspiracies in Schools

Shout Out UK

Childnet

Good Things Foundation

The Guardian Foundation

Digital Poverty Alliance

First News

Beyond

Parent Zone

Marie Collins Foundation

Alliance to Counter Crime Online

Breck Foundation

National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) Gary Thomas, Director of Children and Family Services

Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD)

Catch22

Dignify - YMCA Chiltern Group

Dr Karen Middleton, University of Portsmouth

Online Safety Network

Dr Elinor Carmi, City St. George's, University of London

Dr Diane Levine, University of Leicester

Steve Wood, Former UK Deputy Information Commissioner

Prof Gina Neff, Minderoo Centre for Technology & Democracy

Prof Clare McGlynn, Durham University

Dr Simon P Hammond, University of East Anglia

Professor Bernadka Dubicka, University of York

Dr Paula Bradbury, Child Online Harms Policy Think Tank. UEL

Dr Elly Hanson, Clinical Psychologist

Antisemitism Policy Trust

Ditch the Label

Barnardo's

5Rights

Triple P

The Economist Educational Foundation

Dr Harry T. Dyer, University of East Anglia

The Children's Media Foundation

FlippGen

Professor Olga Jurasz, The Open University

Centre for Protecting Women Online

Mental Health Foundation

Dr Lizzy Winstone, University of Bristol

The Body Happy Organisation CIC

Anti-Bullying Alliance

Association for Citizenship Teaching

Centre for Safeguarding and Digital Practice and Research

End Violence Against Women Coalition (EVAW)

The Children's Society

Coram Kidscape

The Fair Education Alliance

Youthworks Consulting

techUK

Plan International UK

ConnectFutures CIC

Center for Countering Digital Hate

NASUWT, The Teachers' Union

National Children's Bureau (NCB)

The Fair Education Alliance Youth Steering Group

Girlguiding UK

Common Sense Media

nasen (The National Association for Special Educational Needs)

The Minderoo Centre for Technology and Democracy

BCS, The Chartered Institute for IT

Action for Children

Children United

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