



RM Keeping Children Safe Online Research Report 2022

Introduction

The internet plays an integral part in children and young people's lives. And while there are numerous benefits that come with exploring this digital world, there are, of course, ever-present risks.

For young people, being online has been especially important in helping to facilitate a sense of normality during 2020 and 2021. During periods of school disruption and social restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the internet enabled young people to stay connected with friends and has helped them access education.

According to a report by Ofcom, released in April 2021, there was a sharp increase in social media usage amongst 8–11 year olds from 21% (2019) to 44% (2020)¹. The same report also highlighted the growing popularity of video-sharing platforms and a jump in the number of children and young people owning their own devices.

This change in demand for the internet needs to be understood and monitored by educators so that students can navigate the online world safely and securely. As restrictions ease, it is paramount that schools work closely with parents to help support and keep young people safe online, in and outside of school. In addition, senior leaders must ensure they provide school staff with appropriate resources and guidance to navigate the ever-changing risks.

In research undertaken by RM in Spring 2021 and 12 months' later in February 2022, RM surveyed School Leaders (SLT), Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs) and IT Network Managers (NWMs) as well as parents to explore perceptions around the relative importance and confidence of both schools and parents in keeping children safe online. The extent to which school policies and procedures have been adapted due to the pandemic and changes to perceptions over time, compared with an earlier - pre-pandemic - research study by RM in Spring 2019, were also explored.

In February 2022, further qualitative research interviews were conducted with a selection of teachers, school staff and parents to validate the findings of the initial research. We have included some verbatim quotes from these interviews to provide real-life context to the research findings.

¹https://www.ofcom.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0025/217825/children-and-parents-media-use-and-attitudes-report-2020-21.pdf



Executive Summary

Our three key takeaways from this research are:

1. Schools have become more confident about dealing with online risks, but there's still room for improvement

Whilst confidence of school staff in understanding the threats pupils face online remains similar overall to 2019, far fewer DSLs and SLT classed themselves as 'unconfident' this time, particularly those working in primary schools. Many now class themselves as 'somewhat confident', perhaps an acknowledgement that the risks online are ever-changing and not to be underestimated. Less than 1 in 5 staff members at Primary Schools and 1 in 4 at Secondary Schools consider themselves 'very confident' at understanding the threats pupils face online.

Confidence in the school's ability to handle online safety incidents has improved with significantly fewer respondents saying they are 'unconfident' than in 2019. Nevertheless, 1 in 5 still say they are unconfident and the majority selected 'somewhat confident' acknowledging there remains work to do to ensure a robust approach to ever-evolving online threats.

In terms of identifying and handling disclosures or incidents involving online abuse, the proportion of school staff saying they were very confident on how to go about this has increased across the board, with the greatest leaps in Primary School staff compared with 2019, though Secondary School respondents remain more confident overall. Perhaps because they are likely to be experiencing such incidents on a far more regular basis.

2. Far more school staff value the importance of parental influence than parents themselves

There's a startling disparity between teachers' and parents' perceptions when it comes to how influential they consider their respective roles in keeping children safe online.

Some 44% of teachers feel the influence of parents is extremely important in keeping their children safe online, especially since parents are the only ones who have been able to monitor their child's activities in-person during the months of remote learning. Slightly fewer teachers (40%) feel their own influence on children's online safety is on par with parents'.

By contrast, only 23% of parents agreed their role is extremely important in keeping their child safe online. Almost half of parents (43%) felt a teacher's role was extremely important and placed the impact of school staff on their child's online safety much higher than their own. This could be down to parents' lack of confidence when it comes to dealing with the many and varied potential digital harms, or that they simply believe that it is the role of formal education to teach children about online safety.

Whatever the reasoning, the disparity between school staff and parents' views about where the responsibility lies for keeping children safe online needs to be addressed so that there's a clear onus on both groups to help young people navigate the internet safely.

3. Parental concern doesn't always lead to action

There was a significant uplift in the level of parental concern about online safety when lockdown restrictions were in place (from 12% pre-COVID to 23%). In fact, 60% of parents reported having more conversations with their child about online safety during the last year than they ever had done previously.

However, 2 in 5 parents (42%) have not applied any parental controls to the devices that their children have access to, and only 3% of parents are using parental controls on gaming devices. As such, there seems to be no correlation between parental concern and implementing controls accordingly.

Our research also highlighted that only 1 in 10 (12%) teachers were very confident that parents have sufficient knowledge to keep children safe online. As such, there's a clear need to provide more targeted support to break down barriers between having knowledge and taking action.

Interestingly, parents reported feeling less concerned over keeping children safe online after schools had re-opened, reinforcing the importance parents place on schools.



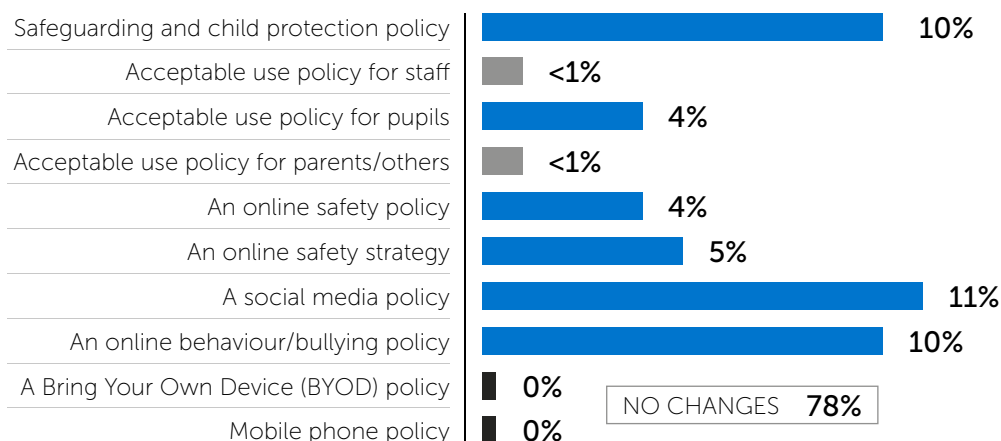
Research findings

Policy Provision

Lockdown restrictions brought many challenges for the education sector. Schools had to respond quickly to remote teaching and learning, alongside staying open for specific cohorts of pupils. Policies and procedures had to be reviewed rapidly, in light of this sudden change in emphasis and reliance on the online world.

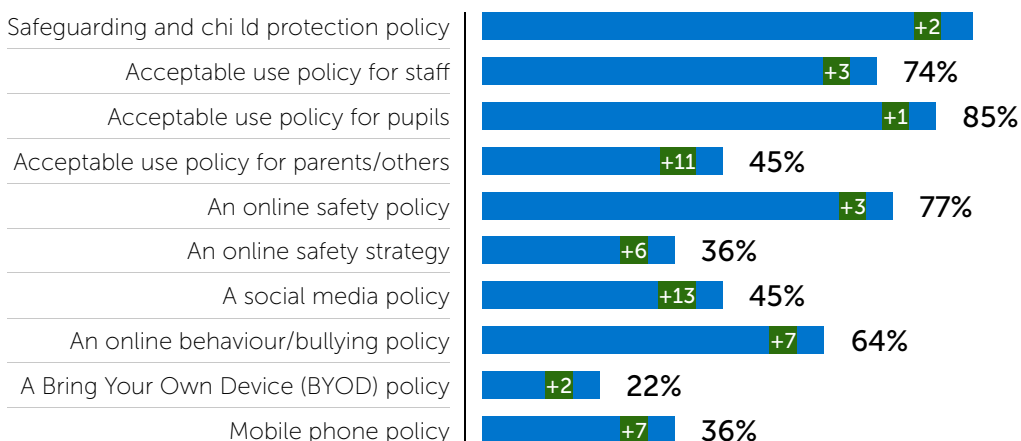
The proportion of schools actually making changes to their existing policies as a direct result of the disruption to teaching and learning during the pandemic is relatively limited, perhaps due to the introduction of a separate remote education policy. Of those that had made changes to existing policies however, social media, online behaviour/bullying and safeguarding/child protection policies were most likely to have been updated.

Which policies had to change as a result of disruption to teaching and learning during 2020?



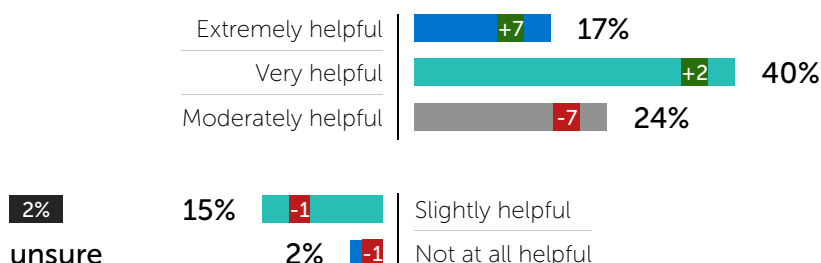
In 2021 we also did see an increase in the number of school policies specifically referencing online safety however, with more than a third of schools saying it is included in 7 or more of the 11 policies we enquired about, compared with only a quarter saying the same in 2019.

Where does your school reference online safety in its policies? 92%

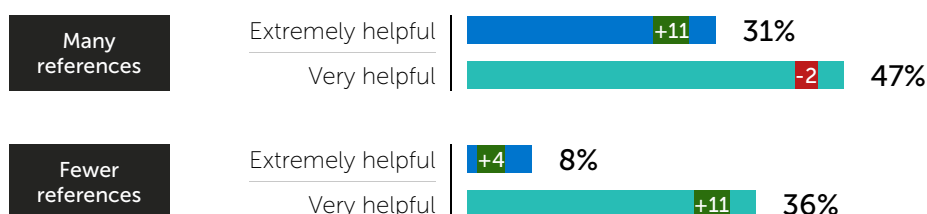


Schools that included references to online safety were significantly more likely to indicate the helpfulness of these policies. In 2019, before the pandemic, the story was much the same – the more online safety was referenced in policy, the greater the confidence of respondents in their school's online safety approach overall. The only change, then, is that since the pandemic policies which include online safety have become more ubiquitous.

How helpful are these policies in better protecting your staff and pupils when they are online?



By comparing the survey responses there is a clear indication that staff at schools where there are many references to online safety in policies and procedures feel more strongly that these are helpful in protecting staff and pupils online.

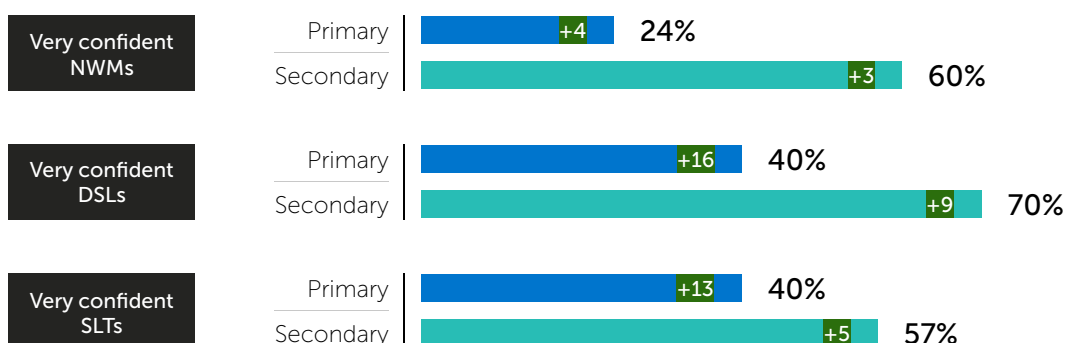


Handling Online Incidents

Our research showed that confidence in handling of online incidents involving disclosures of abuse has increased since 2019, especially in primary schools. Again, this is likely due to the increased demand around online safety information due to the move to online learning.

Note: When surveying school staff we collected responses from IT Network Managers (NWMs), Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs) and Senior Leadership Team members (SLTs).

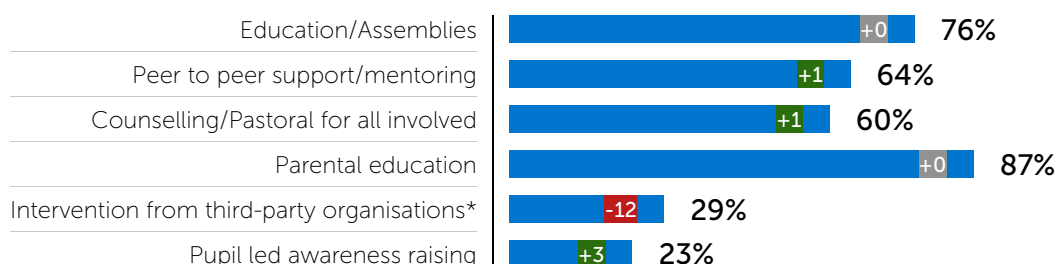
How confident are you identifying and handling disclosures or incidents involving online abuse?



When serious incidents occur, schools turn to parents as a way to support the whole school. Three-quarters of teachers (76%) also look to educate pupils themselves, which may include information delivered during assemblies. Notably, the same number of teachers (76%) looked to educate pupils through assemblies after a serious incident in 2019, showing that school staff – even before the pandemic – understood the importance of protecting against future online incidents.

Interventions from third-party organisations declined during the pandemic, most likely due to school closures and social distancing measures. Pre-pandemic many schools would have utilised the expertise of these organisations to support with online safety education.

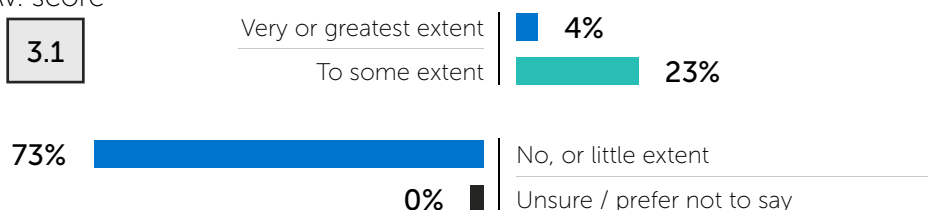
When a serious online incident occurs, how would you support the whole school?



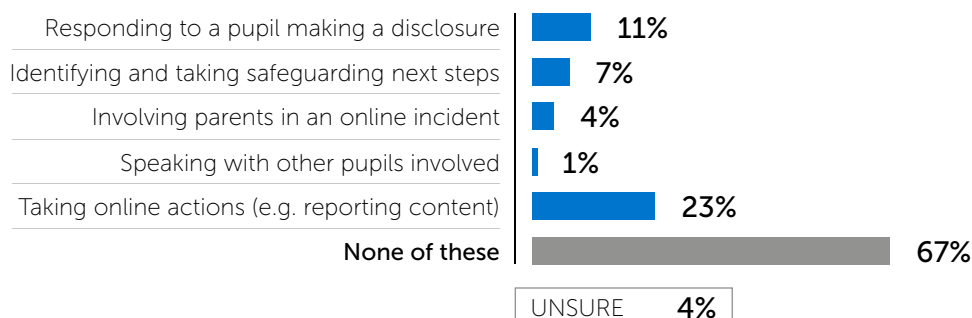
To what extent has your school recorded an increase of online safety instances as a result of pupils being at home for extended periods during 2020?

Av. score

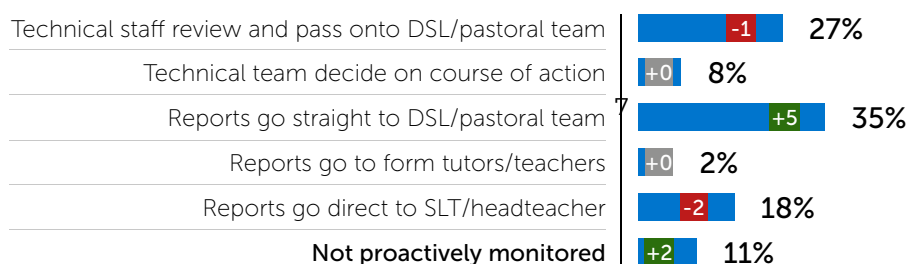
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In which of the following areas do you feel there could be any improvements in the incident process?



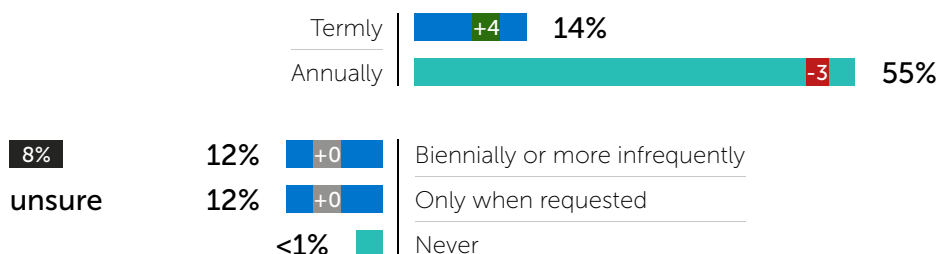
How are reports on pupils' online activity managed and triaged?



Education, Training and Support

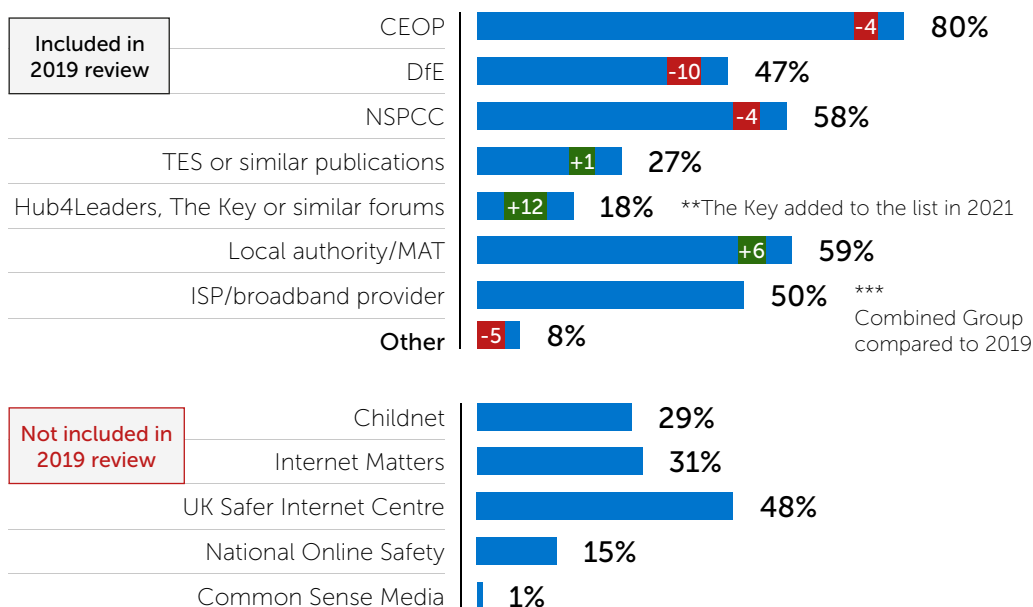
Over half of all schools offer online training to most staff once a year. Our research also showed that there were some early indications that termly training was on the rise and that there was a clear demand for more regular training opportunities for teachers, as well as learning support assistants, lunchtime supervisors and caretakers.

How often do the majority of staff receive online safety training?



Online resources such as newsletters remain a key tool in helping schools keep up to date with the latest online safeguarding information. However, many schools noted the effectiveness of drop-in sessions and individual support for parents and students as a way of relaying information to staff about online safety – even despite social distancing measures being in place.

How do you stay up-to-date with online safety issues?



Training is key to helping empower teaching staff

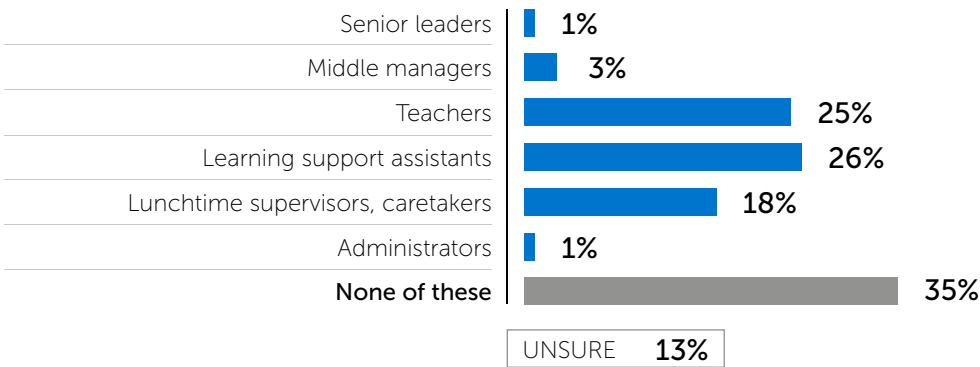
As well as engaging parents, having access to training and practical advice is vital for school staff in keeping children safe online. Currently, 55% of schools ensure teachers receive online safety education annually, while 14% cover online safety each term. Alongside this, teachers stay up to date with online safety issues via CEOP (80%), through their Local Authority or Multi Academy Trust (59%), and child protection charities (58%).

But dealing with online safety can come with added pressure for schools from parents and pupils, so it's important that teaching staff are provided with additional support to handle this.

For the best chance to keep children safe online, training and advice needs to be layered with education and security technologies. While parents and teachers will do their utmost to monitor for any causes for concern, the right technologies can identify issues and alert teachers to risks in real time.

It's this layered approach that cements the gaps between parent and teacher expectations, so that nothing falls through the cracks, and makes sure that a simple *click* doesn't lead to a complicated problem.

Which of the following groups of staff could benefit from more regular online safety training opportunities?

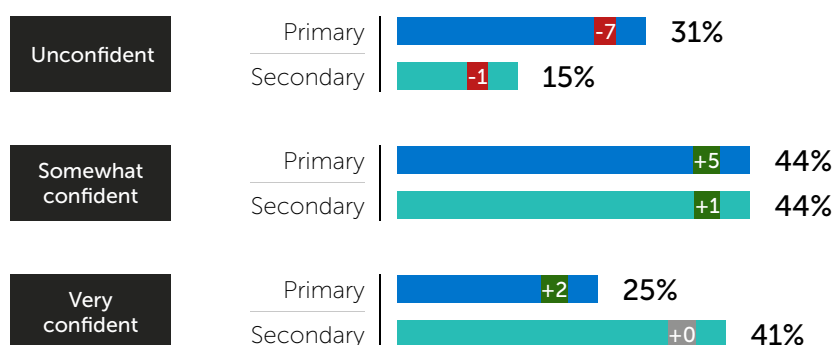


Review and Management

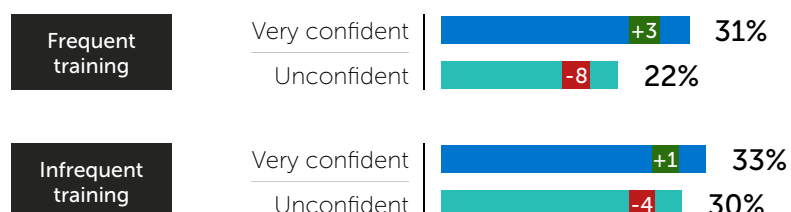
School confidence around online safety

Across all the roles surveyed only a quarter of those in primary schools are very confident in their understanding of the threat pupils face online. More secondary school staff are confident, although a proportion remain unconfident, with no significant change since 2019.

How confident do you feel with your understanding of the threat pupils face when online ?



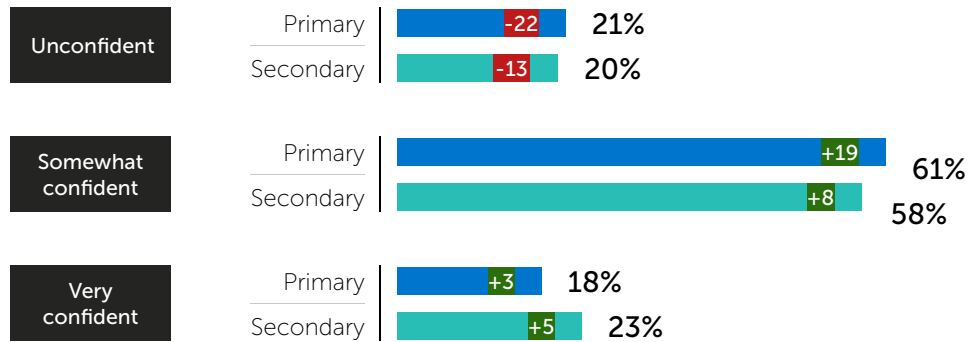
When comparing these responses based on how frequently online safety training is provided by their schools, frequent training (at least annual) appears to reduce the number of school staff feeling 'unconfident' about their understanding of the threat pupils face online, an improvement on the more mixed picture presented in 2019.



Encouragingly, there was also a significant decline overall in the proportion of primary school SLTs and DSLs that classed themselves as unconfident in understanding the threats pupils face online, compared to 2019.

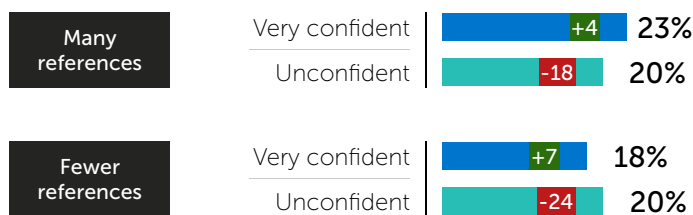
Similarly, in the past two years there has been a significant decline in the lack of confidence respondents feel about their school's approach to online safety. However, the change has not resulted in a significant move to respondents being 'very confident'. This likely reflects an acknowledgement that online threats are constantly evolving, but also provides an opportunity to improve support in order to continue to build staff confidence.

How confident do you feel in your school's approach to online safety?

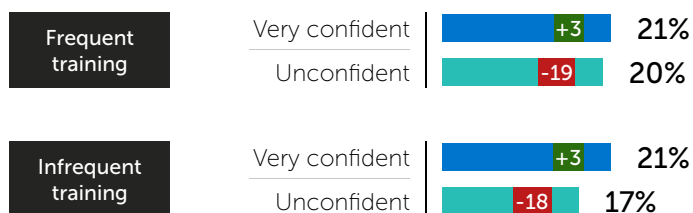


When we looked at how confidence in the school's approach varied between how frequently references to online safety appeared in school policies or how frequently online safety training is provided, we found no statistically significant difference in perception of staff at the schools. More importantly however, the proportion of school staff feeling 'unconfident' in their school's approach to online safety has reduced significantly across the board compared to 2019.

How confident do you feel in your school's approach to online safety?



How confident do you feel in your school's approach to online safety?



Confidence in dealing with the risks

Whilst both parents and teachers acknowledge that their appreciation of the threats from pupils going online is higher today than three years' ago, only a small number place that directly at the door of the pandemic:



"Within our Trust we have always prepared for the worst, so these threats were already understood before the pandemic hit".

CEO, Academy Trust

“I probably know very little and am therefore somewhat naive to the issue”.

Parent, Primary-age children



There is an acceptance – however – that many people were forced to access the internet to communicate and engage with others, in ways that they had never done before. With this came the opportunity for the risks to manifest themselves far more acutely:

“I have always been aware of the issue, but the risk has been heightened since the pandemic with so many people now being online”.

Parent, Primary-age children



“As more people moved to doing things on mobiles and via apps, there has been a big increase in threats – but this is as much about society than the pandemic per se”.

Parent, Primary and Secondary-age children

Encouragingly, most teachers and parents feel their level of confidence in dealing with an online safety incident is reasonably high, although several believe the fast-changing landscape is forcing them to keep ahead of the game:

“An issue can arise when things change – for example the arrival of TikTok – at first we did not know how to react, but once that was understood we had a policy in place very quickly”.

CEO, Academy Trust



“It is a case of the known knowns and the unknown unknowns – I feel fairly confident on dealing with what I know... but I am sure there are many things that I am unaware of that could be out there”.

Parent, Primary and Secondary-age children

Side-issues from the pandemic include lockdown removing a school's opportunity to reinforce some of the dangers online in the way that teachers had previously been able to deliver when students were in the classroom; whilst also giving wrongdoers greater opportunity to target the more vulnerable:

“When they were in school, pupils were fed a constant drip-drip of online safety messages, but when we went into lockdown this stopped – especially for the more disadvantaged. Remember too that the perpetrators were also at home more, giving them more time to target vulnerable young people”.

Online Safety Officer, Academy Trust

This concern about disadvantaged students is reflected elsewhere with the need to recognise that all groups of society are at risk, but some require different approaches to keep them safe:

“I worry about SEND children and parents where English is not their first language – in both cases the way to get the message across is different and needs special effort”.

Online Safety Officer, Academy Trust

“SEND children are more vulnerable for a reason”.

Teacher, Primary School



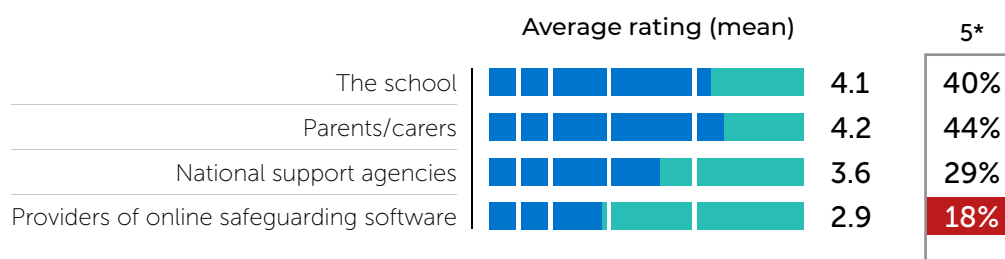
The importance of schools and parents

Schools recognise that both school staff and parents play a key role in helping keep young people safe online believing the parents were more important than the school in influencing the online safety of their child. Strikingly, parents generally felt that the school was significantly more influential than they were themselves in this role.

Least important in influencing keeping children safe online, of the four options given, was providers of online safeguarding software, however nearly 1 in 5 school staff surveyed still felt these providers were 'extremely important' indicating there is a need for all agencies to work together in this.

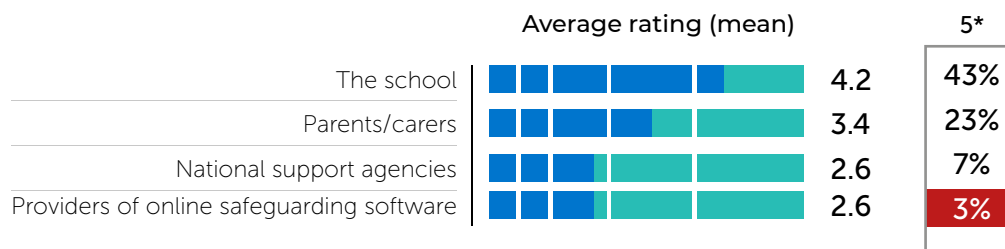
School view

Relative to each other, how important is the influence of each of these groups in keeping children safe online?

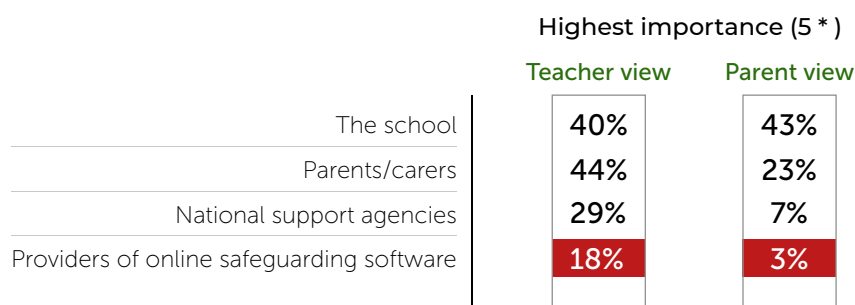


Parent view

Relative to each other, how important is the influence of each of these groups in keeping children safe online?



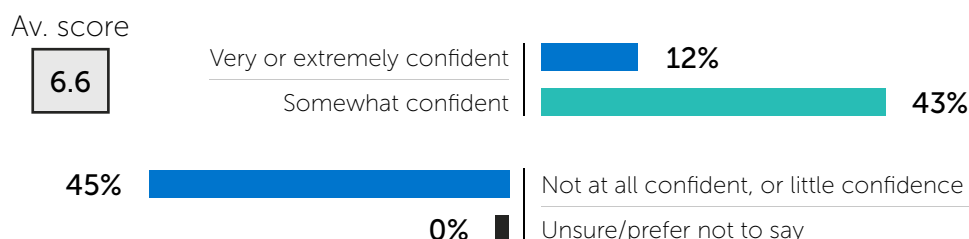
Relative to each other, how important is the influence of each of these groups in keeping children safe online?



However, despite believing in the importance of parental influence, almost half (45%) of school staff surveyed had low confidence that parents have the knowledge to help keep their child safe online, while only 12% had a high level of confidence in parents in this regard.

School view

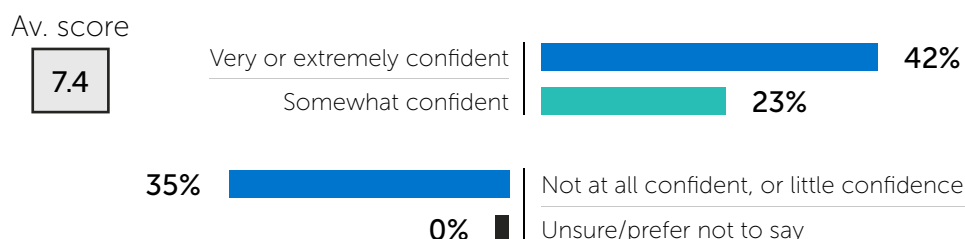
How confident are you that parents/carers have sufficient knowledge to keep their children safe online?



Conversely, parents again demonstrated a higher level of confidence in schools than is reciprocated, with nearly two thirds placing a reasonable or high amount of confidence that schools had the necessary knowledge to keep their young people safe online.

Parent view

How confident are you that schools have sufficient knowledge to keep children safe online during school activities?



The importance of parents

It is clear that teachers do not feel that parents are taking sufficient responsibility for keeping their children safe online – whereas parents feel that they are playing their part – with most acknowledging that accountability should be at least shared (which is what teachers want also, but do not believe is happening):



“Some parents definitely upskilled themselves with the risks associated with online safety, but others just ignored the threats and/or were oblivious to it”.

Online Safety Officer, Academy Trust

“Most of the online safety issues that we have had in our school were because parents had not played their part in following through on the precautions we had put in place. There is very little we can do beyond the school gate”.

Teacher, Primary School



“Parents should take more responsibility, but I am not sure they are close enough to what their children are doing behind their bedroom doors. They are busy, and probably too laid back to truly appreciate what is happening”.

Headteacher, Primary School

“If it is going online whilst in school, the school should be responsible, but if they are going online in my home, I am responsible – even if they are doing schoolwork”.

Parent, Secondary-age children

Parents believe (and teachers do not necessarily disagree) that the school should ensure that their children have the skills to identify the threats that exist...

“School definitely has a responsibility to educate my kids to the risks”.

Parent, Primary and Secondary-age children

...although it is definitely a joint effort...



“We only have their children in school for 6 hours a day – we can set the foundations, but it is critical that parents build on that”.

Online Safety Officer, Academy Trust

...where the two can work in harmony.



"I believe the school is responsible for ensuring that parents are aware. The key for me, is "control" versus "education" – I would much rather educate than lock students down with controls that stop them working".

CEO, Academy Trust

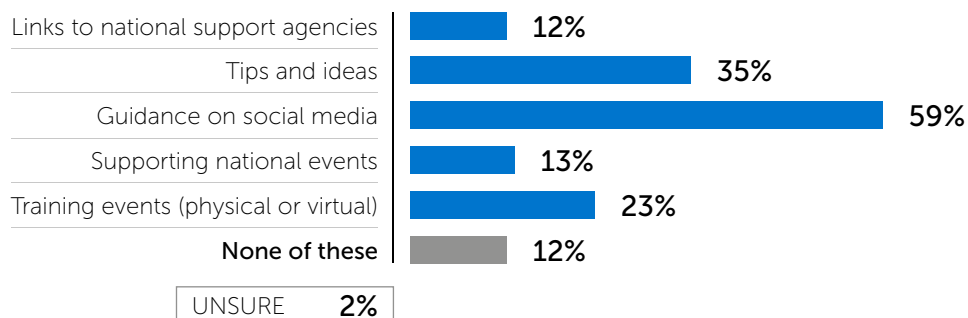
Online safety information isn't reaching parents

Our research found that online safety materials provided by the schools are unlikely to reach the majority of parents, with only a small minority indicating that their child's schools had provided them with resources containing links to external support organisations.

Most schools are providing guidance on social media to parents with links to national support agencies (78%), as well as general tips and ideas (55%). However, our findings demonstrate online safety information isn't getting through to parents with only 59% saying they're aware of social media help, have received tips (35%), or have received links to support agencies (12%).

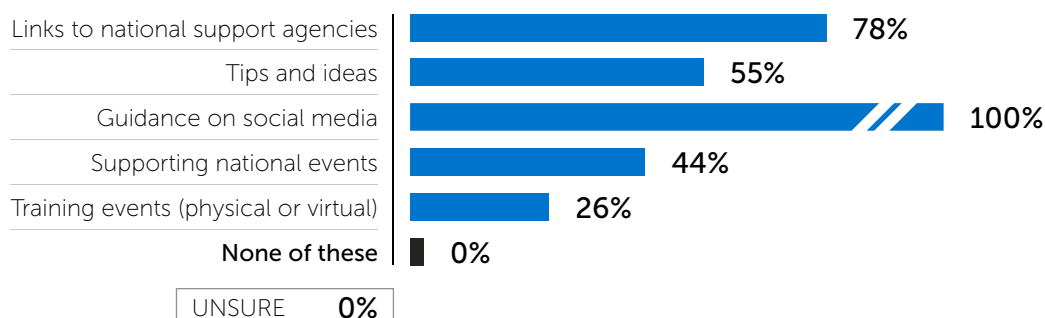
Parent panel response

Which of the following resources does your school provide you with to help keep your child(ren) safe online?



DSL panel response

Which of the following resources does your school provide parents/carers with to help keep their children safe online?

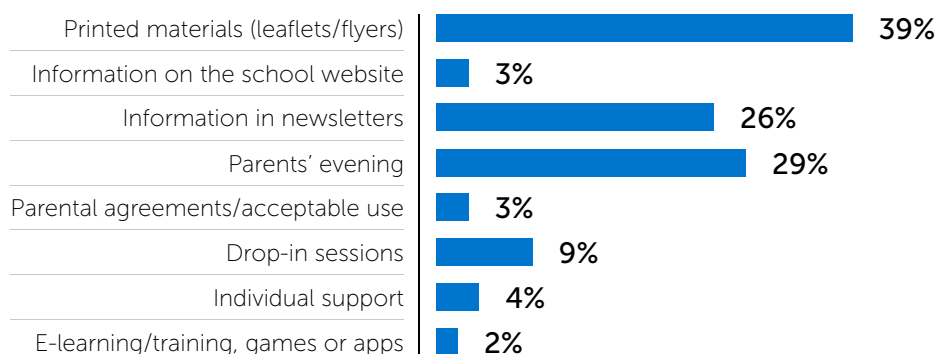


It also highlighted that parents are most likely to engage with printed materials providing information about online safety (39%) and least likely to engage with materials published on the school's website (only 3%).

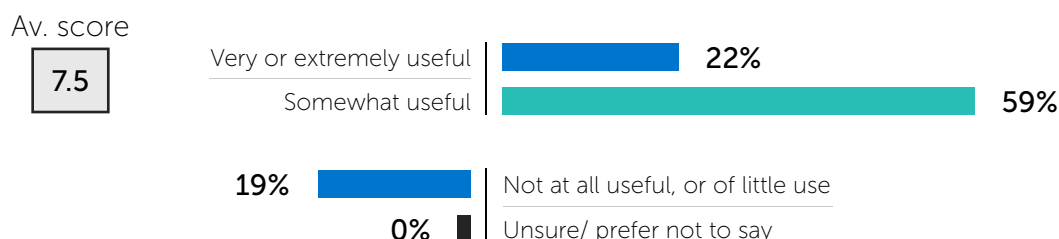
However, a fifth of parents suggest that what the school provides in supporting them keep their children safe online is of limited use in any case. Although most find it somewhat useful, and the remaining fifth find it extremely useful, with no difference noted by school type.

Parent panel response

Which of the following formats are most likely to support your understanding of online safety issues?



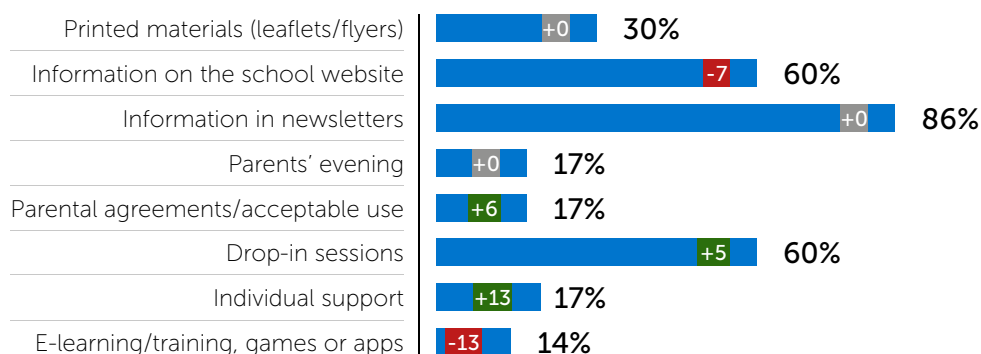
How useful are the resources and activities the school provides in supporting your efforts to help your child(ren) stay safe online?



There were some clear differences in perception between what resources parents felt would help them the most in supporting their understanding of online safety issues and what safeguarding leads (DSLs) at schools felt were helpful. Notably, DSLs had a strong preference to using the school website, newsletters and drop-in sessions to support parent education on this, which parents seemed much less in favour of.

DSL panel response

Which resource formats have, or could have, the most impact in supporting parents' understanding of online safety issues?



Parental knowledge

When it comes to ensuring that parents are aware of the threats – and the mitigations – there appears to be a mismatch between what schools are saying and what parents are hearing, with schools investing a lot of effort sending information home, but few parents admitting to seeing – or at least actioning – it.



“Before the pandemic we used to hold drop-in cafés for parents that would cover topics like this, but they were very poorly attended”.

School Business Manager, Primary School

“The school have run sessions for parents, but they’ve never been at a suitable time for me”.

Parent, Primary and Secondary-age children

“We do parental talks, we put information on the parent portal, but I know they do not read it”.

ICT Coordinator, Independent School

“If the school did share guidance, I would suggest it was done as a stand-alone communication – it is too easy to lose things if part of a wider newsletter of other messages. I get so many emails from the school that all look the same”.

Parent, Secondary-age children

That said, potentially one positive to come out of the pandemic could be in equipping schools with the type of technology that can help with ways to overcome these communication challenges, and to give parents the confidence to use it.

“We always struggled to get parents to come into school for an online safety talk, but since the pandemic we have been using video meetings, and these have a much higher take-up and hence we are much more successful at getting the message across”.

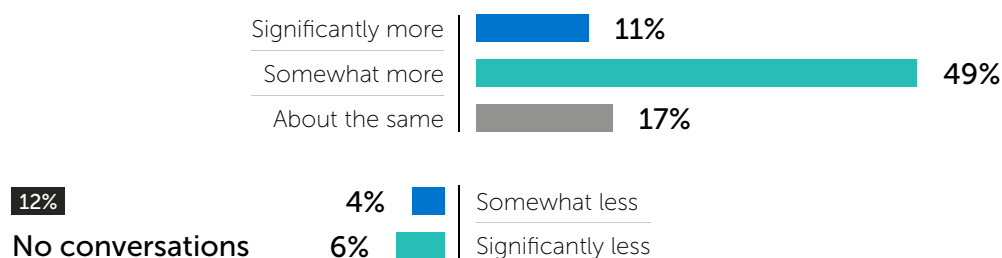
Online Safety Officer, Academy Trust



Concern amongst parents over online safety increased during the pandemic but Parental Controls are often not utilised

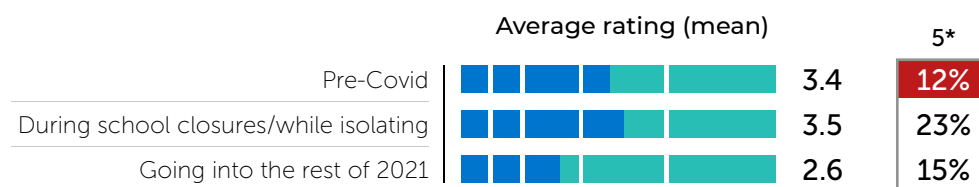
The pandemic saw a rise in parental concern around children being online during school closures/ lockdowns and whilst isolating, especially amongst parents of secondary aged children. Because of this some parents are having more regular conversations with their child about online safety. However, there remains a minority (12%) of parents who are not discussing online safety with their child at all and one in twenty (6%) are having fewer discussions around online safety than they were before the pandemic.

Have conversations with your child(ren) about online safety become more or less frequent during the last year?



Interestingly, at the time of the survey (February 2021) parents reported feeling much less concerned over their child's safety online as they looked to the rest of 2021, compared with how they remembered feeling pre-COVID. Perhaps, due to the increased access to the internet over the last twelve months and subsequent conversations, many parents feel more comfortable tackling the risks posed by the internet.

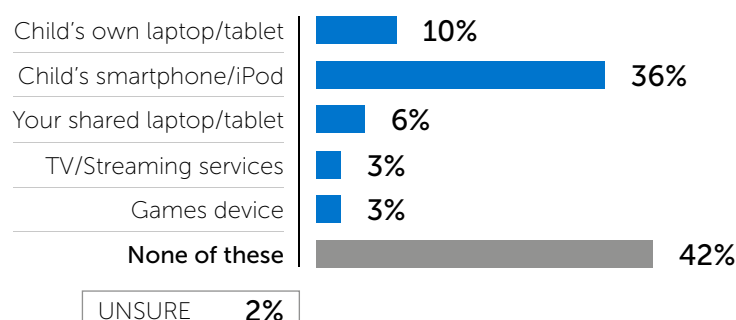
How concerned are you with your child(ren) staying safe online over the following periods?



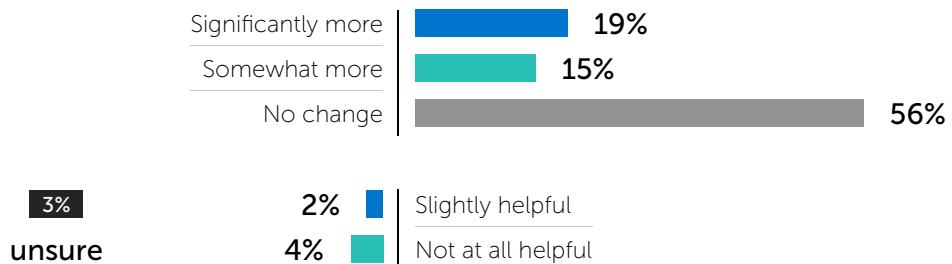
The vast majority of parents and carers with secondary aged children have not interacted with parental controls in the last year. Parents of primary aged children are much more likely to have made changes to parental controls with a third saying they have interacted significantly over the last year.

However, the use of parental controls varies hugely based on the type of device being used, with the research highlighting that while controls on a child's phone are common, it's rare for them to be implemented on TV and gaming devices.

In which devices do you actively engage parental controls or online safety tools?



Have you activated or interacted with parental controls or other tools more frequently since the beginning of the pandemic?



Role of pupils

Many parents admit that they have not taken actions themselves to keep their children safe, in part, because they feel they feel “it would never happen to them” – holding a level of trust with their children that they feel should negate the need to do anything substantial.



“We do not have any parental controls in place, as we simply have not got round to it. We trust our kids and are generally in the same room as them when online, so do not believe the risk is that great – at least at their current age”.

Parent, Primary-age children

“We have not put any controls in place, but rely on a level of trust with our child that they would talk to us about any issues”.

Parent, Primary-age children

“I rely on my kids to tell me what they are doing, and if they encounter anything that feels unsafe, I am sure they would tell me”.

Parent, Secondary-age children



“The key is trust – getting your child to come to you if they are not sure, or they want to do something that has an age limit older than them – we are happy to let them, so long as we know”.

Parent, Primary and Secondary-age children

Whilst to be applauded, this level of trust is certainly bordering on the risky, with teachers – in particular – feeling that is a dangerous approach, potentially reinforcing the earlier perceptions of naivety and denial:



“Kids know much more than their parents, and they are not going to let on what their parents should be doing to limit their freedom”.

ICT Coordinator, Independent School

...which some parents do acknowledge:

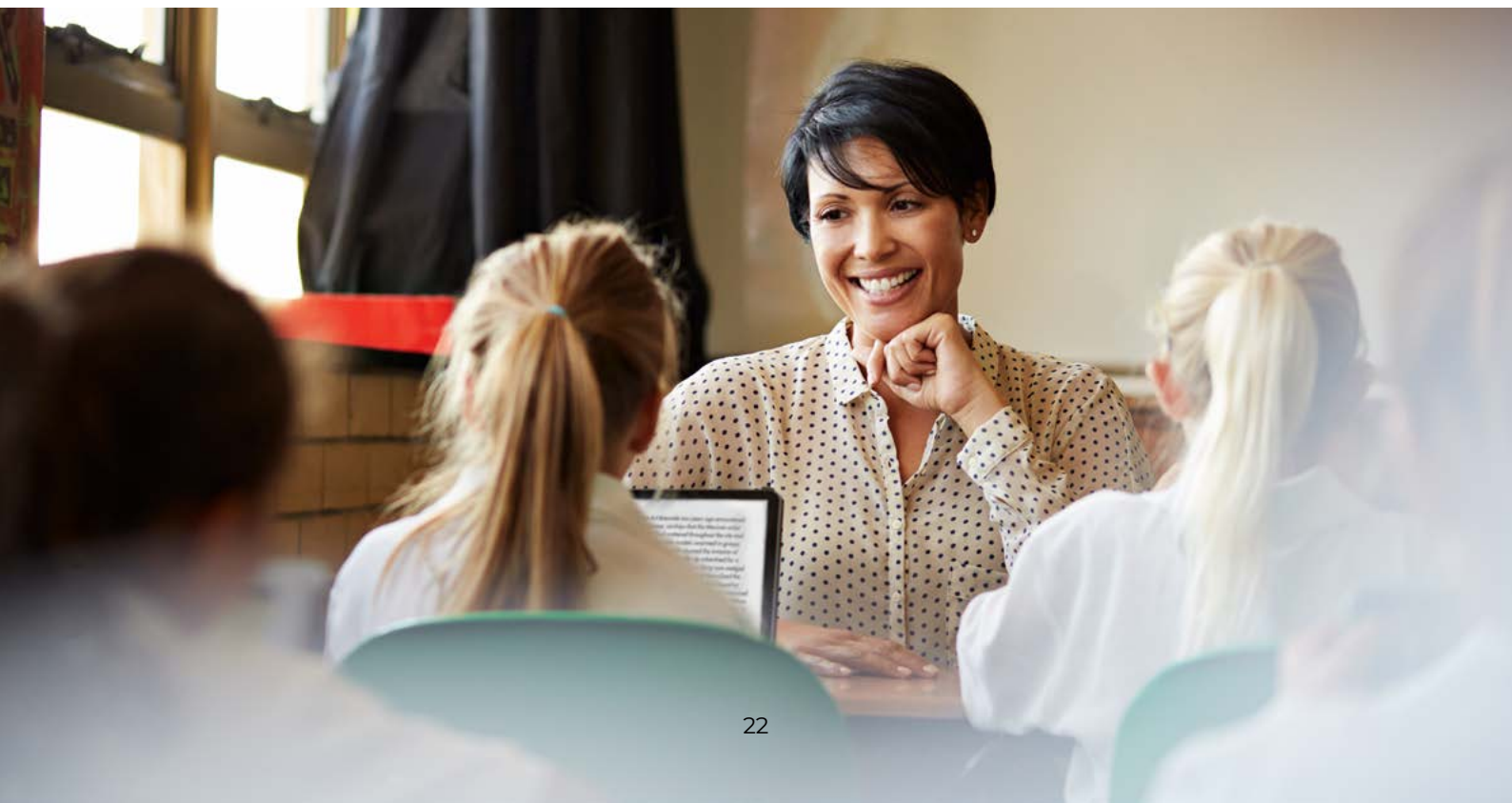
“As children get older, it is harder to keep a track on what they do online – some apps like Snapchat make that impossible”.

Parent, Primary and Secondary-age children

...but remain reluctant to do anything about:

“We have an open relationship, but as they have got older they want more privacy – we need to step away and let them make their own judgements”.

Parent, Secondary-age children



Technology providers have a part to play too

A fifth of school staff surveyed felt that providers of online safeguarding software were 'extremely important' in tackling online safety risks alongside parents and schools, highlighting the growing need for technology solutions to support in these efforts whether that be online filtering and monitoring of content viewed by students or the ability to record and report safeguarding concerns securely in a centralised system in school.

Ultimate responsibility

As with most things, there are no easy answers, and most agree that whilst Central Government has a role to play in getting this important message across to parents, the school is a critical part of the loop, given its proximity to parents, its ability to personalise messages to make them more relevant, and – in some cases – there is a stronger bond of trust between a parent and their school, than a parent and someone in Westminster or Whitehall.

"There is a definite benefit in this being driven top-down by the Government – that way everyone gets the same message and knows where to look for direction. At the moment it feels scattergun".

CEO, Academy Trust



"The key is consistency. The best model is probably for it to be shared at national level (by the DfE) to Local Authorities, for them to cascade it to individual schools".

Parent, Secondary-age children



"In an ideal world it should be the Government's responsibility, but the reality is – especially at the moment – that something from a local school would be much more likely be read and taken seriously than anything that came out nationally".

Headteacher, Primary School

"I am much more likely to take notice of something that the school sends – I relate to what they say and I know it is relevant to me/my children".

Parent, Primary-age children

“The Government could help with bulletins on the risks of things like online scams – they have in the past (with Barclays Bank), so it would be good for the Government to do this again, allowing the school to build on that message locally”.

ICT Coordinator, Independent School

“Whilst I should take notice of the Government, the reality is that I would trust something from my local school much more”.

Parent, Primary and Secondary-age children

Finally, there is a growing acceptance that the online platforms themselves – Facebook, Instagram and TikTok – have a role to play – albeit recognising the potential conflict of interest that exists.

“Social media platforms should play their role – is it any different to the betting companies who promote “Gamble Aware” in all of their adverts – why shouldn’t Facebook and TikTok also promote Online Safety in their own promotions?”.

Online Safety Officer, Academy Trust

“I worry that social media platforms have a vested interest, so I am not sure I would trust what they have to say. Maybe it is something for more “trusted sources” – such as my internet provider or mobile phone company?”.

Parent, Primary and Secondary-age children





How can we help?

Online filtering and monitoring can be set up on school devices where used in the school and at home with **RM SafetyNet** and **RM SafetyNet Go**. RM also works with schools to ensure connectivity and networks are secure and reliable, with cyber-security top of mind across our technology solutions.

Summary guidance

Talking to parents about online safety

Our research showed that whilst parents became more concerned about their child spending time online during the pandemic, they aren't always taking appropriate action at home to help protect their child online. So, it's important to consider the barriers they might be facing that prevent them from engaging with online safety information and implementing features such as parental controls.

How should you be communicating online safety guidance to parents?

1. **Printed material** – 39% of parents like receiving tangible guidance. Explore the advice and resources available from sources such as child protection charities or organisations like CEOP, and send home printed copies. Where possible, print out information about new apps and games their children might be using.
2. **Discussion at parents' evening** – Personalised advice can be more useful than broader support, which is why 29% of parents want to talk about online safety at parent's evening. Try having a designated member of staff to support parents at these events and give them the opportunity to book individual slots.
3. **Newsletters** – Some 26% see the value in newsletters, which is the school's most regular form of contact. Think about alternative ways to contact parents with support. Failing this, avoid only reiterating the school's stance on online safety in newsletters and keep advice fresh and relevant.
4. **School website** – Most schools (60%) believe the school website is a good way of communicating with parents. This is in stark contrast to the 3% of parents that actually find it useful. Think about exploring one of the other communication methods mentioned.

Our top tips to effectively engage with parents

1. **Consult regularly with parents and carers**

Try to have ongoing, clear lines of communication with parents and carers about your school's online safety procedures and policies.

Ask parents how they want to receive information about these issues to make sure you're producing materials that are relevant and engaging for them. Encourage them to give feedback on areas that are missing or that they need additional support with.

2. Include the voices of children

Think about how you could involve pupils in your delivery to try and encourage conversations about online safety at home. This could include inviting pupils to give demos of their favourite app or setting homework around how they like to use the internet.

Regularly ask children and young people about how they are using the internet to help you stay informed about the latest apps, sites and games. Ask them about what would help them to stay safe online and who could support them. Use these insights to help develop information and guidance for parents.

Encourage young people to talk to their parents about online safety or give them a demo of their favourite app or game to help get a conversation started at home.

3. Empower parents to help them feel more confident

Be supportive of parents and help empower them to feel more confident in dealing with online safety at home by making yourself readily available to answer any questions they might have. If you don't know the answer don't feel pressured to answer straight away. Instead, be prepared to go to your safeguarding lead for more guidance and tell the parent you'll get back to them.

Make sure parents and carers have access to online safety information in a way that best suits them and signpost them to online resources that can help them.

People tend to engage more with information in one to one or in group sessions. There can be challenges with getting people to attend drop-in sessions so be flexible with your approach. Try hosting sessions virtually so more parents and carers can attend or organise them during times you know they will be available such as at a parent's evening or before a sports match.

4. Address current needs at a national and local level

Keeping up to date with current online safeguarding risks and challenges is important in helping to protect young people online.

The online world moves fast so make sure you're regularly reviewing your policies, procedures and training to ensure that they reflect the needs of your staff and young people.

5. Host a parent workshop

There are several organisations which provide workshops to help parents and carers understand how children experience the online world, show them resources and tools that could help keep them safe and empower parents and carers to guide them on their journey.

For example the UK Safer Internet Centre online safety training <https://swgfl.org.uk/training/online-safety-training/parents-and-carers> and Education Scotland's online safety workshop for parents <https://education.gov.scot/parentzone/news-and-events/online-safety-workshop-for-parents>



Research Aims, Scope, Methodology and Sampling

This report was compiled following two pieces of market research – an initial quantitative survey commissioned by RM and undertaken by C3 Education in early 2021 – as below. This was supplemented in February 2022 by a series of qualitative interviews with a cross-section of teachers, school staff and parents to sense-check the findings of the initial research with a number of verbatim quotes that have been used throughout the report to provide real-life illustrations of the research findings.

Quantitative survey

Statistics are sourced from a survey conducted in the UK by RM Education in February 2021. The 1,700 respondents include senior leadership team members (n=365), designated safeguarding leads (n=352), IT Network Managers (n=404), and parents in England only (n=579).

The aim of this research project is to review the online safety policies and practices in place across UK maintained schools. From a pool of questions, senior leadership teams (SLTs), designated safeguarding leads (DSLs) and network managers (NWMs) or equivalent are offered a relevant selection for response. In addition, the 2021 review sees the inclusion of parents from the associated parent panel.

The methodology follows the same format as previous research commissioned by RM, with an online survey being presented to selected audiences on the National Education Research Panel (NERP). The questionnaire is optimised to allow for responses on tablets and smartphones.

Our sampling practices remain consistent between projects, with potential respondents pre-profiled to ensure a representative picture of the marketplace, allowing for like-for-like longitudinal analysis.

This report is compiled from data collected from opted-in members of the National Education Research Panel (NERP), operated by C3 Education. An online survey was issued to panel members in January 2021.

The following members were contacted, with an average of 61% of invited panellists responding to the questions presented.

Panel	Audience	Invited	Responded	% response
Maintained schools in United Kingdom	SLT	685	365	53%
	DSL	618	352	57%
	NWM	671	404	60%
Parents	Parents (England only)	802	579	72%
Total	All group	2,776	1,700	61%

To ensure a representative view of the marketplace a number of prerequisites were put in place, which included ensuring a broad spread of responses from across the UK, school size profiling and split by sector and school type.

Panel	Audience	Pupil numbers	Responded	% response
Maintained schools in United Kingdom	Primary	Small (<180 pupils)	174	16%
		Medium (200 to 320)	241	21%
		Large (>320 pupils)	250	22%
	Secondary	Small (<840 pupils)	106	9%
		Medium (840 to 1080)	208	19%
		Large (>1080 pupils)	142	13%
		All Primary	665	59%
		All secondary	456	41%

In addition, each school is classified under our 'New Technology' index (NTI), which aims to ensure responses are not only received from technology rich schools, but also from those that are less likely to be making much use of technology for administration or in the classroom.

Panel	NTI	Responded	% of sample
Maintained schools in United Kingdom	Poor	337	30%
	Neutral	418	37%
	Rich	366	33%

Panel	Type	Responded	% of sample
Maintained schools in United Kingdom	Primary authority	502	44%
	Primary academy	163	15%
	Secondary authority	191	17%
	Secondary academy	265	24%

The national and regional breakdown ensures there is no strong bias towards a disproportionate number of schools in any particular region. However, the tables below do show that the North West and Yorkshire/Humber are under-represented within the sample, while the South East is over-represented before the number of schools in each region is taken into account.

UK Nations	Schools	% of sample
Scotland	64	6%
Wales	75	7%
Northern Ireland	48	4%
England	934	83%
Total	1121	100%



English Region	Schools	% of sample
South West	102	9%
South East	232	21%
London	90	8%
East of England	108	10%
East Midlands	130	12%
West Midlands	75	7%
Yorkshire/Humber	55	5%
North East	100	9%
North West	42	4%



An online survey was also issued to parent panel members in January 2021.

The following members were contacted, with an average of 72% of invited panellists responding to the questions presented.

Panel	Audience	Invited	Responded	% response
Parents of pupils in England	Primary-age children	327	276	84%
	Secondary-age children	475	303	64%
Total	All group	802	579	72%

The parent panel coverage is limited to England. The regional breakdown does identify some bias towards the South East, which is over-represented, whilst the North West is under-represented.

English Region	Parents	% of sample
South West	77	13%
South East	147	25%
London	41	7%
East of England	63	11%
East Midlands	69	12%
West Midlands	44	8%
Yorkshire/Humber	57	10%
North East	55	9%
North West	26	5%



Further support and resources

NSPCC Helpline

If you're worried about a child, even if you're unsure, contact the NSPCC's professional counsellors for help, advice and support.

Call 0808 800 5000 or email help@nspcc.org.uk

Childline

Young people can contact Childline about anything. There are lots of different ways to speak to a Childline counsellor or get support from other young people.

Visit childline.org.uk/get-support

Call 0800 1111

CEOP Learning for professionals

Training and resources to help you protect children from abuse.

Visit www.thinkuknow.co.uk/professionals

CEOP Resources for parents

The CEOP website provides resources and guidance for parents and carers about a range of online safety risks.

Visit www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents

Online safeguarding technology for schools

Talk to RM about online safeguarding in your use of EdTech including online filtering, monitoring and cybersecurity.

Visit rm.com/education

Call 08450 700 300



About RM

RM's technology business unit enables the improvement of education outcomes around the world through the innovative use of existing and emerging technologies. With a heritage dating back almost 50 years, dedicated solely to the education sectors, RM is proud to support teachers and learners worldwide – from pre-school to professional qualifications. rm.com

About RM plc

RM's technology division is part of the listed company RM plc – the £189m turnover British business, with c. 1,837 employees globally. Established in 1973, RM plc's group purpose is to enrich the lives of learners worldwide. rmplc.com



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