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A University of Kent Academies Trust School

Dear Parent/Carer,

The Online Safety Act 2023

As many of you will be aware I write with regular updates on Online Safety across the academy, I am pleased to announce the introduction of the new legislation 'The Online Safety Act' passed in October 2023.

Please find attached a guide to help support you and your child to understand the new legislation. This new legislation *"aims to establish major new layers of protection for children when they're online. The government has pledged a zero-tolerance approach to protecting children from online harm' and the act certainly includes more powerful legislation which should help to safeguard young people in the digital world."* *"The act states that 'social media sites must rapidly remove illegal and/or harmful content such as bullying, harassment, pornography or content that supports extremist activity or encourages or depicts violence, suicide, self-harm or eating disorders. If they fail to do so, they can be fined up to 10% of their global revenue, while their executives may even face jail time."*

I would like to take this opportunity to remind you, if a student feels that any online communication is not kind or appropriate, it is important to report it to a trusted adult. Students are encouraged to speak with their PT in the first instance, we also have pastoral support available to help. If students would prefer to report via email, they can use refernow@universityofkentacademiestrust.org.uk or via the student support app on their iPad.

If you are concerned about material on the internet, you should report your concerns and the information to the social media platform. In addition, you can report to the following agencies who will take steps to remove it from the internet and investigate.

[Internet Watch Foundation \(IWF\)](#)

[CEOP Safety Centre](#)

[Report Remove](#) (specifically if of your child)

As previously mentioned, we are proud to be certified with National Online Safety for this academic year. Please find attached the link to National Online Safety, if you would like to find out more around online safety for your child, then please enrol on the platform as a parent/carers using the link below, you will then have free access to webinars, courses and guides about existing platforms and new platforms as they are introduced.

<https://nationalcollege.com/enrol/chatham-grammar>



Yours sincerely,

Elizabeth Sanger
Online Safety Lead

What Schools Need to Know about THE ONLINE SAFETY ACT

The Online Safety Act was passed into UK law in October 2023, with the aim of establishing major new layers of protection for children when they're online. The government has pledged "a zero-tolerance approach to protecting children from online harm" – and the act certainly includes more powerful legislation which should help to safeguard young people in the digital world. Our guide summarises the key points for schools ...

WHAT THE ACT WILL DO

HARMFUL CONTENT

Social media sites must rapidly remove illegal and/or harmful content such as bullying or harassing comments; pornography; and content that supports extremist activity or encourages or depicts violence, suicide, self harm or eating disorders. If they fail to do so, they can be fined up to 10% of their global revenue while their executives may even face jail time.

ANIMAL CRUELTY

Content featuring cruelty to animals is now prohibited, even if it originates from abroad (where the law may be different). Again, it is the platform's responsibility to remove this.

MORE TRANSPARENCY

Sites must be transparent about the hazards that any children using them could encounter – by publishing risk assessments for their platforms, for instance.

HOSTING MISLEADING ADVERTS

Scams and fraudulent adverts must be blocked or removed, or the hosting companies are liable to be fined.

NON-CONSENSUAL SHARING

It's now easier to convict online abusers or people who share intimate images without consent, while legislation on the criminality of deepfakes has been clarified. The new laws also relate to any individuals who even threaten to share such images. This should help to protect women and girls in particular online.

REPORTING AND FILTERING

Sites should have easy reporting mechanisms for children (or their parents and carers) to flag up problems quickly. They must also provide options to filter out unwanted content.

AGE-RESTRICTED MATERIAL

Sites must prevent children from accessing age-inappropriate material. This includes enforcing age limits and implementing robust age verification.

What this means for you

The act has some specific implications for schools: it's essential that leaders understand the new legislation's scope and limitations. The act is certainly a positive step, but as artificial intelligence and other advances in tech continue to produce new challenges, schools will still need to remain extremely vigilant.

KNOW WHERE TO GET HELP

Look out for the Code of Conduct that Ofcom is creating in response to the Online Safety Act. Note that the new legislation doesn't mean an instant change; many of its elements will only come into force at the end of 2023. An Ofcom consultation on 'protecting people from illegal harms online' will be running until February 2024.

REMEMBER THE ESSENTIALS

Remain mindful of your organisation's own online activities: the legal duty for schools to maintain appropriate software monitoring and filtering, for example, will not change.

WATCH FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

There are some issues on which the legislation remains less clear for now: whether it's possible for Ofcom to scan encrypted private messages (such as on WhatsApp) has yet to be resolved, for instance – making this an area where, for the moment, young people have less legal protection.

UNDERSTAND AND EXPLAIN

Staff should learn how to raise concerns with tech companies whose platforms contain anything upsetting or unpleasant. Students also need to be made aware of the newly strengthened laws relating to cyber-bullying, sexting or posting inappropriate content. Young people do make mistakes online – so the clearer their understanding of the possible consequences, the better.

ENGAGE WITH PARENTS

Schools should also explain to parents and carers the new possibilities that the Online Safety Act affords them in terms of protecting their children. Many parents may have previously felt that there was little they could do about changing online platforms' content; they now have a far greater level of support when complaining about a company or the behaviour of an individual.

Meet Our Expert

Luke Ramiden is Senior Deputy Headmaster and Director of Safeguarding for the St Benedict's family of schools. He is a regular speaker at conferences and writes in the *1B* (among other journals) on school leadership, pastoral care and safeguarding. In 2022, he was named Pastoral Leader of the Year at the National Awards for Pastoral Care in Education.



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