



#WakeUpWednesday

What Schools Need to Know about the Online Safety Act

At National Online Safety, we believe in empowering parents, carers and trusted adults with the information to hold an informed conversation about online safety with their children, should they feel it is needed. This guide focuses on one of many issues which we believe trusted adults should be aware of. Please visit nationalonlinesafety.com for further guides, facts and tips for adults.

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 1% 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 ADVERTISEMENTS
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 someone's 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 "preventing 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
Luka Robinson is Senior Deputy Headteacher and Director of safeguarding for the 11 secondary schools of the National Online Safety Trust. He was named National Parental Champion of the Year at the National Awards for Parental Care in Education.

Twitter: @nationalonlinesafety | Facebook: /NationalOnlineSafety | Instagram: @nationalonlinesafety | TikTok: @national_online_safety

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Protecting children □
Blocking illegal material ●
Removing harmful content on major platforms 📱
Those are the three main goals of the Online Safety Act, which entered UK law in October. While demanding more accountability from social media companies in particular, the act revises – rather than replaces – the current digital safeguarding duties placed on schools.

With changes including the creation of new criminal offences and greater options when raising an issue with a platform, there's plenty for educators to take on board. Our

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guide this week provides a bite-size introduction to the Online Safety Act – and highlights some of the key points that schools need to be familiar with in the short term.

Please [click here](#) to download the guide