



## IEWS & OPINION

# Safeguarding Generation Z online



**Comment by  
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We are all very aware of how fast the internet is moving as we evolve into a heavily tech-based world. Our schools are now educating our children for jobs that don't exist and I am not sure any of us really know what the future holds or what it will look like. As a parent, I face many challenges when it comes to keeping up with my own children's use of the internet; for example, we all try filtering and blocking, but the truth is, you don't even need broadband boxes to access the internet, just 3G or 4G. I firmly believe that the current methods of teaching online safety are old-fashioned, ineffective and do not reflect the world around us all.

It is becoming more and more prevalent that some schools comply with the minimum requirement for teaching online safety. Some feel that a policy is enough, whereas others do not even acknowledge it at all or recognise it as a priority.

The statutory requirements in the 'Keeping Children in Education' document focuses on teachers being trained in a variety of safeguarding issues and, as part of this, must now explicitly teach safeguarding issues in the classroom. From experience, this is clearly not the case, with some schools believing that delivering lessons about online safety once a year is adequate.

In order for our children to change their digital habits, adopt positive behaviours online and be responsible users of technology, we need a consistent and targeted approach, not just a one-off event or a list of rules they must adhere to. I've seen schools ask their children to act out scenarios in an assembly, but this doesn't teach, it entertains. Is this just a way of just paying lip service to the increasing challenge of keeping children safe online? And it isn't just the children we need to be teaching. As part of the process we have an obligation to also educate parents and teachers too, as they are a vital part of the jigsaw puzzle for an effective approach to online safety to ensure it is reinforced both in the classroom and at home.

physically show them. When we teach our children to cross the road, we physically hold their hand. Yet it seems ironic that as adults we feel it is acceptable to let children use the internet with no guidance. We often have a misplaced assumption that children always 'know more than us' when it comes to using technology. Therefore, it is our responsibility as parents and teachers to educate ourselves about the online world and share our learning alongside and, in partnership, with our children.

We know that 59 per cent of 10 year olds have a Facebook account, so let's learn how to use it and show them in exactly the same way we would demonstrate something in the physical world.

Let's educate, not regulate. Let's not stop them enjoying a wonderful tool where we can all learn so much, let's embrace the online world. The children of today do not see an online life and offline life: it is their life.