

CABINET STATEMENT

Written Statement: Enhancing digital resilience in education: An action plan to protect children and young people online

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This year we have all faced significant challenges brought about by the global outbreak of coronavirus (COVID-19). Now, more than ever before, we are relying on technology to stay connected. With this increased use of technology in our daily lives, there are undoubtedly greater risks presented.

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It has never been more important to equip our children and young people with the knowledge, skills and resilience to navigate the online world. Protecting children and young people from harmful activity online is critical. It is therefore vital that we provide an education system that enables our learners to embrace technology and contribute positively online.

For many years we have recognised the importance of online safety. However in this third decade of the twenty-first century, learning how to be safe from harm online has become more complex, and the term 'safe' is no longer sufficient. We must support our learners in becoming safe and responsible online and ultimately, digitally resilient.

We live in a world where misinformation, disinformation and bots pose a significant risk, not just to our safety, but also to our fundamental decision-making. The influence of misinformation and disinformation is vast and research has demonstrated that disinformation spreads significantly faster, deeper and more broadly than true information. It's essential we teach our children and young people to become critical thinkers and to always evaluate and check information before they trust it, act on it or share it further.

It's also undoubtedly true that the twenty-first century's most valuable commodity is data and we must accept that cyber security is no longer just the business of major corporate firms. It's essential for us to all protect our devices and our data to reduce the chances of becoming a victim of cybercrime. These habits start young and are grounded in the very basic habits of cyber hygiene such as strong passwords and understanding the kinds of risks to avoid.

We are very fortunate here in Wales to have a cyber sector that employs over 3000 people. As one of the fastest growing technology sectors, Wales is acknowledged for its industry expertise and is home to a number major international cyber security organisations. Working with industry recognised partners such as the National Cyber Security Centre we are keen to build a talent pipeline, delivering a range of training and rewarding career opportunities.

This action plan outlines many achievements to date, from the increased usage of the 360 safe Cymru self-review tool, to the unparalleled suite of bilingual educational resources available on Hwb to learners, practitioners and professionals, families and governors. We have worked with a number of partners such as the National Crime Agency, the NSPCC and SWGfL to provide these excellent resources which tackle a breadth of online issues and to provide a rich range of sources of information and support. We have also relaunched the dedicated area on Hwb – **Keeping safe online** – which has been designed to support the digital resilience of children and young people, their families, practitioners and professionals and the wider school community.

Last year we published the first annual update to our *Online safety action plan for children and young people in Wales*. The 2019 action plan provided an update on the work undertaken and also saw the addition of 15 new actions.

This year, the action plan has been further expanded to reflect the important role cyber resilience and data security has in ensuring our children and young people are safe and secure online. Adding 26 new actions in 2020, the plan now outlines 71 workstreams being undertaken to drive this important area of work.

Enhancing digital resilience in education: An action plan to protect children and young people online continues to provide a focus for our work in online safety and supports our mission to increase the digital resilience of our young people.

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