

Education Committee

Growing up in the online world: The Education Committee's response to the Government's consultation

First Report of Session 2026–27

HC 187

Education Committee

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Introduction

1. Our response to the Government’s consultation on “Growing up in the online world” draws on our two recent oral evidence sessions, and the recommendations we are making in this report are informed by the contributions of a broad range of witnesses with diverse perspectives. These witnesses include children’s rights organisations, bereaved families, academics, school leaders, teaching unions and representatives of the social media and gaming platforms Meta, TikTok, Snapchat and Roblox. Whilst much of the evidence we heard focused on the impacts that social media platforms have on children, it is clear that concerns about children’s screen use extend more widely to gaming services, private messaging platforms and AI chatbots. Our response also builds on our predecessor Committee’s influential 2024 report *Screen Time: Impacts on education and wellbeing*,¹ which examined the relationship between children’s digital lives and their development, learning and wellbeing.
2. The issues raised in the Government’s consultation fall squarely within the Education Committee’s remit, given their direct implications for children’s safeguarding, wellbeing, education, behaviour and attainment. The evidence we heard also demonstrates the growing impact that these issues are having on schools, teachers, and parents and carers. Furthermore, there are clear links between the impact of children’s use of screens and social media and the Committee’s wider programme of scrutiny, including its joint work with the Health and Social Care Select Committee on mental health, and its inquiries into artificial intelligence in education and reading for pleasure.

¹ Education Committee, Fourth Report of Session 2023–24, [Screen Time: Impacts on education and wellbeing](#), HC 118.

Online harms affecting children

3. We heard stark and deeply concerning evidence of the significant online harms affecting children, including mental health risks, sexual exploitation, bullying, misogyny, and behavioural problems inside and outside the school classroom. Esther Ghey, who founded the Brianna Ghey Legacy Project in memory of her daughter, and Andy Burrows from the Molly Rose Foundation told us about the devastating and tragic consequences that online harms can have in the most extreme cases.² The Committee also heard compelling evidence linking children’s exposure to harmful online content—including that which promotes or normalises self-harm, suicide and eating disorders—to serious deterioration in children and young people’s mental health, including hospitalisation and, in some cases, loss of life.³ We heard about the cumulative impact of algorithmically driven exposure to harmful material and how this is exacerbated by repetition.⁴
4. The NSPCC and the Molly Rose Foundation pointed to persistent risks of sexual exploitation of children, including grooming through direct messaging, livestreaming and requests for sexual images. We heard of cases in which children were contacted by adults posing as their peers and groomed to produce child sexual abuse material. These harms often escalate in private or semi-private online spaces. Witnesses further highlighted the considerable difficulties that parents encounter in determining who their children are interacting with online. These same difficulties extend to the police and their ability to trace offenders, particularly where platforms rely on disappearing messages, encrypted or private communications and reactive reporting mechanisms. We heard evidence that adults seeking to abuse and exploit children often initiate contact on mainstream social media sites but quickly seek to move the contact to off-platform encrypted messaging apps.
5. Teaching unions, including the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), NASUWT and the National Education Union (NEU), told us that group chats and messaging platforms can extend bullying behaviour beyond the

2 Education Committee, [Screen Time and Social Media](#), 28 April 2026, Qq92–95.

3 Education Committee, [Screen Time and Social Media](#), 28 April 2026, Q96.

4 Education Committee, [Screen Time and Social Media](#), 28 April 2026, Q95; Q100.

school day, creating “24/7” pressures for children.⁵ Teachers have described how exposure to misogynistic, racist and sexualised online content can influence pupils’ behaviour and language in school, with a particular impact on girls and female staff.⁶ Daniel Kebede, General Secretary of the NEU, told us that:

Female teachers in particular are experiencing a huge increase in misogyny and misogynistic language. What young people, particularly boys, are experiencing online is completely distorting their view of women, sex and relationships, and we should all be alarmed.⁷

6. CONCLUSION

The Committee concludes that online harms affecting children are widespread, severe and systemic. The evidence we heard demonstrates clear links between children’s exposure to harmful online content (including material promoting self-harm, suicide, eating disorders, misogyny and sexual exploitation) and serious deterioration in mental health, wellbeing and behaviour, with tragic consequences in the most extreme cases.

7. CONCLUSION

These harms are not accidental or isolated, but occur because of platform design choices, including algorithmic recommendation systems, infinite scrolling, autoplay and private messaging features, which repeatedly expose children to harmful or exploitative content at a scale which reactive moderation by the companies is not effectively addressing.

8. RECOMMENDATION

The Committee is clear that the companies whose platforms are responsible for these harms cannot be left to self-regulate. We recommend that the Government treats online harms to children explicitly as a safeguarding and public health issue, rather than relying primarily on content moderation and reactive reporting systems. Preventative regulation should focus on reducing exposure to harm by policy and by design of the platforms themselves.

5 Education Committee, [Screen Time and Social Media](#), 28 April 2026, Q129.

6 BBC News, [Teachers’ union warns of ‘masculinity crisis brewing’ in schools](#), 4 April 2026.

7 Education Committee, [Screen Time and Social Media](#), 28 April 2026, Q124.

Supporting parents and carers

9. Parents and carers play a critical role in shaping children's digital habits, attitudes and behaviours. The evidence we heard highlights that children's screen use is strongly influenced not only by parental rules and oversight, but also by parents' own screen time behaviours and norms within the home. Witnesses emphasised that guidance for children, particularly those aged over five, must be complemented by support for parents and carers in order to model healthy and age-appropriate use of technology.⁸

10. **CONCLUSION**

Existing advice and resources for parents and carers are inconsistently promoted and insufficiently clear, leaving many families unsure how to manage screen use in a way that supports their children's development, learning and wellbeing.

11. **RECOMMENDATION**

We recommend that the Government develops and promotes clear, evidence-based national guidance for parents and carers on children's use of digital devices and online services. This guidance should:

- set out age-appropriate principles for children's screen use, including for pre-teenage children aged five and over, young teenagers, and 16-to-18-year-olds
- address the impact of parental and carer screen time and online behaviours on children
- integrate with wider online safety, early years, health and education strategies, so that parents receive consistent messages across services.

12. **RECOMMENDATION**

We recommend that this guidance be co-designed with parents and carers, educators and child development experts, and communicated through schools, health services and online platforms, ensuring that families are supported to create healthy digital environments at home alongside significantly strengthened regulation of social media companies.

8 Education Committee, [Screen Time and Social Media](#), 21 April 2026, Qq78–85.

Addictive design features

13. Addictive and persuasive design features, such as infinite scrolling, autoplay and algorithm-driven content feeds, are significant drivers of excessive screen use, sleep disruption, reduced attention and behavioural problems among children, including those as young as primary school-aged children. We are concerned that current regulatory approaches place undue emphasis on optional safety settings and parental controls, despite evidence that these measures are inconsistently applied, often poorly understood and inadequate to mitigate these harms.
14. When asked for data on children's time spent on its platforms, Meta argued that time "is not always the best metric" for assessing harm and that it focuses instead on preventing harm and providing age-appropriate experiences. It said that it does not hold or share data on average time spent by children, relying instead on time-limit tools controlled by parents.⁹ We do not accept Meta's argument that time spent online is not a meaningful indicator of potential harm. The absence of data on children's usage significantly limits the ability of regulators and independent researchers to assess patterns of exposure and risk. By declining to collect or share such data, Meta risks undermining transparency and accountability.
15. **RECOMMENDATION**
We recommend that the Government introduces mandatory restrictions on high-risk and addictive design features, such as infinite scrolling, disappearing messages and algorithmic messages for under-18s, with appropriate age-related restrictions enabled by default, rather than relying on voluntary measures or user opt-ins.

9 [Correspondence from Meta](#) to the Education Committee, 8 May 2026.

Impact on schools, teachers and children's education

16. The Committee heard overwhelming evidence of the adverse impact that social media and excessive screen use is having on children's behaviour and learning. Witnesses reported that pupils are frequently arriving at school fatigued, distracted and struggling to maintain attention, often as a result of late-night screentime and social media use.¹⁰ This was supported by academic evidence linking children's screen use with sleep disruption and reduced readiness to learn. Teaching union representatives described rising incidence of peer conflict, bullying and sexualised behaviour, often originating online and spilling into the school environment.¹¹ Concerns were also raised that extreme language and behaviour observed online are increasingly being normalised and reflected in pupils' interactions, including amongst younger children.
17. The Committee heard about the pressure this behaviour is placing on teachers and school leaders. Academics and teaching unions reported that significant staff time is now spent managing issues related to mobile phones, social media disputes and the consequences of online behaviour, both during and beyond the school day.¹² In some cases, this was said to amount to the equivalent of several full-time staff each week. Teachers have also highlighted the impact on their relationships with pupils, noting that the constant enforcement of rules and mediation of incidents can detract from teaching and pastoral support.

10 Education Committee, [Screen Time and Social Media](#), 28 April 2026, Q92; Q110; Q123.

11 Education Committee, [Screen Time and Social Media](#), 28 April 2026, Q124.

12 Education Committee, [Screen Time and Social Media](#), 21 April 2026, Q86.

18.

CONCLUSION

Too much responsibility for managing online harms is currently placed on children, parents and carers, and schools—groups with limited power to influence platform behaviour. Schools are bearing a growing safeguarding and behaviour-management burden arising from online activity that takes place beyond the school day. Evidence shows that this burden is having a direct impact on teacher workload and pupil behaviour and learning, with significant staff time diverted from teaching and pastoral support towards managing incidents rooted in children’s social media use.

19.

RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that the Government rebalances responsibility for child online safety decisively towards social media and technology companies. The Government must ensure that schools, teachers and families are supported by regulation rather than left to compensate for unsafe digital environments, over which they have minimal control and cannot reasonably be expected to resolve alone.

Mobile phones in schools

20. There was broad agreement among witnesses that decisive action on mobile phone use in schools is necessary, although views differed on the exact form that this action should take. Teaching union representatives generally supported the Government’s policy to place existing guidance on a statutory footing, particularly where this would strengthen schools’ ability to enforce restrictions consistently and secure parental backing. They emphasised that this approach must be flexible to accommodate the needs of different schools and different pupils, and that significant funding would be required to implement stricter measures. For example, we heard that the cost of obtaining lockable phone pouches for a whole secondary school could be between £20,000–30,000. However, witnesses also said that mobile phone restrictions alone would not resolve many underlying issues, and stressed the need for wider action on social media use outside of school and its impact in the classroom.

21.

CONCLUSION

Action on mobile phone use in schools is necessary and broadly supported by teachers and school leaders. However, restrictions within schools alone cannot address the drivers of harm that originate in the wider online environment. We are concerned that the inconsistent application of guidance undermines schools' ability to enforce restrictions and secure parental support. We therefore support the Government's decision to place mobile phone guidance for schools on a statutory footing.

22.

CONCLUSION

Schools should not be able to adopt "not seen or heard" policies towards phones, whereby children can still have their phones in their school bags throughout the school day. This approach does not alleviate the distraction of mobile phones or prevent their use completely. Schools should be able to choose whether to adopt a phone-free policy under which phones are not permitted to be brought to school at all, or a "lock away" policy involving pouches or lockers. Schools that wish to use pouches or lockers should be provided with the funding to enable them to do so.

23.

RECOMMENDATION

The Government should publish detailed guidance on exemptions to the phone free policy, for example, for children who have smartphone enabled assistive technology or who are young carers, covering the implementation of exemptions and how children with exemptions will be protected from bullying and pressure during the school day.

The role and responsibilities of social media organisations

- 24.** We have serious concerns about the extent to which social media organisations acknowledge and accept responsibility for the harms experienced by children on their platforms. Whilst representatives from Meta, TikTok, Roblox and Snapchat acknowledged that there is “always more to do” and that safety is “a race that is never run”, their evidence to the Committee often framed online harm as an inevitable feature of a fast-moving digital environment rather than a consequence of their platform design choices and the effectiveness of their systems to monitor risks actively and intervene in real time. Despite the overwhelming evidence that harmful content and behaviours persist on their platforms at scale, they presented incidences of harm as rare exceptions.
- 25.** These organisations repeatedly emphasised user and parental agency and the provision of safeguarding tools and controls, rather than the need for systemic interventions. Roblox, for example, has stated that its Sentinel AI system identifies approximately 35% of grooming cases proactively, with the remainder identified through user reports or legal requests.¹³ However, this raises questions about the extent of undetected harm, particularly in cases where users may be unwilling or unable to report abuse. The reliance on user reports and legal requests for the majority of cases suggests that a significant proportion of harmful activity may go unaddressed until after it has already occurred.
- 26.** The position of the social media organisations stood in contrast to the evidence we heard from victims’ representatives and academics, who described the “utter absence of safety by design”, and argued that the incentives that drive platform development prioritise engagement over child safety.¹⁴ They told us that, despite years of reported harms, children continue to be exposed to harmful content and contacted by bad actors, and raised questions about the effectiveness of current approaches taken by social media and gaming companies.

¹³ [Correspondence from Roblox](#) to the Education Committee, 30 April 2026.

¹⁴ Education Committee, [Screen Time and Social Media](#), 28 April 2026, Q96.

27.

CONCLUSION

The Committee believes that social media organisations' reliance on incremental improvements, voluntary measures and shared responsibility falls way short of the level of accountability that is required to address the scale and seriousness of the risks faced by children online. Social media companies have not yet demonstrated a sufficient level of accountability for the harms experienced by children on their platforms. Furthermore, we are concerned that commercial incentives to maximise engagement continue to outweigh child safety considerations.

28.

RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that the Government uses the powers available to it to impose clear, enforceable duties on platforms to prioritise child safety by design, backed by meaningful sanctions for non-compliance.

The case for restricting social media use

29. We heard strong and consistent evidence pointing to the need for significantly stronger protections on children's use of social media. Whilst views differed on the precise form these protections should take, there was widespread agreement that current arrangements do not adequately protect children from harm and that action is urgently needed.
30. The Committee heard that there is limited evidence at present on how effective the Australian model has been.¹⁵ Some pointed to early signs of improvement, others emphasised that many children in Australia continue to access social media platforms and highlighted the challenges of enforcement and industry compliance. However, this evidence also underlined the limitations of partial or voluntary approaches, and the ease with which children are able to circumvent existing safeguards. There was support from teaching unions for any ban to have a wider scope than that of Australia's, particularly to include gaming companies such as Roblox. There was also significant and widespread support for a targeted, risk-based approach, as proposed by the NSPCC, focusing on restricting specific harmful features and functionalities rather than entire platforms.¹⁶
31. Witnesses emphasised that effective age assurance is critical but raised concerns about the reliability of current systems. The Committee heard how social media platforms continue to rely heavily on self-declaration and behavioural signals, which can be easily circumvented and do not provide a robust safeguard against underage access. Whilst some concerns were raised about the potential for circumvention through tools such as VPNs, witnesses suggested that the more immediate issue is the patchy application and limited accuracy of existing age-assurance measures across platforms. Taken together, the evidence points to the need for a clear statutory baseline to prevent children accessing social media, in addition to a broader framework addressing harms across different types of platforms.

15 Education Committee, [Screen Time and Social Media](#), 21 April 2026, Qq76–77.

16 Education Committee, [Screen Time and Social Media](#), 28 April 2026, Q102; Q105; Q114.

32. CONCLUSION

There is a compelling case for an outright statutory ban on social media access for under-16s in order to reset the relationship children and families have with digital devices and social media, and to arrest the current harm. The evidence demonstrates that current regulatory and voluntary approaches have failed to prevent widespread exposure of children to serious harm, and that targeted or optional mitigations have not been implemented consistently or effectively. A clear legal boundary would provide greater protection for children, clarity for parents and carers, and schools, and a stronger basis for holding platforms to account for the environments they create.

33. RECOMMENDATION

The Committee recommends that the Government introduces a statutory ban on the use of social media platforms for children under the age of 16. It is time to apply the brakes and prioritise children's safety.

34. CONCLUSION

The Committee is clear, however, that a ban alone is not enough to tackle the scale and complexity of the harms identified. Evidence suggests that children are likely to continue to access online services through circumvention and by accessing platforms that fall outside the definition of social media. For this reason, a ban must be understood as a necessary foundation for action, rather than a complete solution. The Committee notes strong support for a targeted, risk-based approach focused on restricting specific harmful features and functionalities in addition to blanket restrictions on entire platforms.

35. RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that the Government introduces a risk-based and age-appropriate regulatory framework that applies consistently across social media, gaming and hybrid platforms, private messaging sites and AI chatbots, including sites and platforms widely used by children. This would have clear benefits in terms of future-proofing the approach to safeguarding children online.

36.

CONCLUSION

Age-based safeguards, including minimum age requirements and child protections, cannot be effective without robust, accurate and consistently applied age-assurance systems. Current approaches are unreliable and undermine both safety measures and public confidence. Whilst concerns have been raised about circumvention, including the use of VPNs, the evidence suggests that this is not yet occurring at scale and should not be used to justify inaction.

37.

RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that the Government works with mobile phone manufacturers to ensure that robust safety-by-design features are available and can be activated on all phones that can be used by children, including strengthening age-verification processes for downloading apps.

38.

RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that the Government establishes a clear and enforceable framework for age assurance across platforms likely to be accessed by children, with independent oversight and regular assessment of effectiveness.

39.

RECOMMENDATION

The Committee welcomes the publication of screentime guidance for under-5s and recommends that the Government urgently publishes evidence-based screentime guidance for children and young people from the age of 5–18 with appropriate age-related strata.

40.

RECOMMENDATION

The Committee is clear that further research is needed on both the risks and dangers of social media, and gaming and hybrid platforms for those aged under 18, and the effectiveness of the measures that are needed to tackle and mitigate these pressing problems. As part of the implementation of the restrictions that we would like to see the Government bring in, it is important that, in order to assess the effectiveness of these new restrictions, there is a programme of Government-funded research, including provision for social media companies to grant independent researchers access to relevant internal data.

41.

RECOMMENDATION

Although it is beyond the scope of this Committee's remit, it is clear that the issues that impact children also extend into adulthood. We encourage the Government to expand its work on social media harms and to investigate thoroughly their impact on adults.

Conclusions and recommendations

Online harms affecting children

1. The Committee concludes that online harms affecting children are widespread, severe and systemic. The evidence we heard demonstrates clear links between children's exposure to harmful online content (including material promoting self-harm, suicide, eating disorders, misogyny and sexual exploitation) and serious deterioration in mental health, wellbeing and behaviour, with tragic consequences in the most extreme cases. (Conclusion, Paragraph 6)
2. These harms are not accidental or isolated, but occur because of platform design choices, including algorithmic recommendation systems, infinite scrolling, autoplay and private messaging features, which repeatedly expose children to harmful or exploitative content at a scale which reactive moderation by the companies is not effectively addressing. (Conclusion, Paragraph 7)
3. The Committee is clear that the companies whose platforms are responsible for these harms cannot be left to self-regulate. We recommend that the Government treats online harms to children explicitly as a safeguarding and public health issue, rather than relying primarily on content moderation and reactive reporting systems. Preventative regulation should focus on reducing exposure to harm by policy and by design of the platforms themselves. (Recommendation, Paragraph 8)
4. Existing advice and resources for parents and carers are inconsistently promoted and insufficiently clear, leaving many families unsure how to manage screen use in a way that supports their children's development, learning and wellbeing. (Conclusion, Paragraph 10)
5. We recommend that the Government develops and promotes clear, evidence-based national guidance for parents and carers on children's use of digital devices and online services. This guidance should:

- set out age-appropriate principles for children’s screen use, including for pre-teenage children aged five and over, young teenagers, and 16-to-18-year-olds
 - address the impact of parental and carer screen time and online behaviours on children
 - integrate with wider online safety, early years, health and education strategies, so that parents receive consistent messages across services. (Recommendation, Paragraph 11)
- 6.** We recommend that this guidance be co-designed with parents and carers, educators and child development experts, and communicated through schools, health services and online platforms, ensuring that families are supported to create healthy digital environments at home alongside significantly strengthened regulation of social media companies. (Recommendation, Paragraph 12)
- 7.** We recommend that the Government introduces mandatory restrictions on high-risk and addictive design features, such as infinite scrolling, disappearing messages and algorithmic messages for under-18s, with appropriate age-related restrictions enabled by default, rather than relying on voluntary measures or user opt-ins. (Recommendation, Paragraph 15)

Impact on schools, teachers and children’s education

- 8.** Too much responsibility for managing online harms is currently placed on children, parents and carers, and schools—groups with limited power to influence platform behaviour. Schools are bearing a growing safeguarding and behaviour-management burden arising from online activity that takes place beyond the school day. Evidence shows that this burden is having a direct impact on teacher workload and pupil behaviour and learning, with significant staff time diverted from teaching and pastoral support towards managing incidents rooted in children’s social media use. (Conclusion, Paragraph 18)
- 9.** We recommend that the Government rebalances responsibility for child online safety decisively towards social media and technology companies. The Government must ensure that schools, teachers and families are supported by regulation rather than left to compensate for unsafe digital environments, over which they have minimal control and cannot reasonably be expected to resolve alone. (Recommendation, Paragraph 19)

10. Action on mobile phone use in schools is necessary and broadly supported by teachers and school leaders. However, restrictions within schools alone cannot address the drivers of harm that originate in the wider online environment. We are concerned that the inconsistent application of guidance undermines schools' ability to enforce restrictions and secure parental support. We therefore support the Government's decision to place mobile phone guidance for schools on a statutory footing. (Conclusion, Paragraph 21)
11. Schools should not be able to adopt "not seen or heard" policies towards phones, whereby children can still have their phones in their school bags throughout the school day. This approach does not alleviate the distraction of mobile phones or prevent their use completely. Schools should be able to choose whether to adopt a phone-free policy under which phones are not permitted to be brought to school at all, or a "lock away" policy involving pouches or lockers. Schools that wish to use pouches or lockers should be provided with the funding to enable them to do so. (Conclusion, Paragraph 22)
12. The Government should publish detailed guidance on exemptions to the phone free policy, for example, for children who have smartphone enabled assistive technology or who are young carers, covering the implementation of exemptions and how children with exemptions will be protected from bullying and pressure during the school day. (Recommendation, Paragraph 23)

The role and responsibilities of social media organisations

13. The Committee believes that social media organisations' reliance on incremental improvements, voluntary measures and shared responsibility falls way short of the level of accountability that is required to address the scale and seriousness of the risks faced by children online. Social media companies have not yet demonstrated a sufficient level of accountability for the harms experienced by children on their platforms. Furthermore, we are concerned that commercial incentives to maximise engagement continue to outweigh child safety considerations. (Conclusion, Paragraph 27)
14. We recommend that the Government uses the powers available to it to impose clear, enforceable duties on platforms to prioritise child safety by design, backed by meaningful sanctions for non-compliance. (Recommendation, Paragraph 28)

The case for restricting social media use

15. There is a compelling case for an outright statutory ban on social media access for under-16s in order to reset the relationship children and families have with digital devices and social media, and to arrest the current harm. The evidence demonstrates that current regulatory and voluntary approaches have failed to prevent widespread exposure of children to serious harm, and that targeted or optional mitigations have not been implemented consistently or effectively. A clear legal boundary would provide greater protection for children, clarity for parents and carers, and schools, and a stronger basis for holding platforms to account for the environments they create. (Conclusion, Paragraph 32)
16. The Committee recommends that the Government introduces a statutory ban on the use of social media platforms for children under the age of 16. It is time to apply the brakes and prioritise children's safety. (Recommendation, Paragraph 33)
17. The Committee is clear, however, that a ban alone is not enough to tackle the scale and complexity of the harms identified. Evidence suggests that children are likely to continue to access online services through circumvention and by accessing platforms that fall outside the definition of social media. For this reason, a ban must be understood as a necessary foundation for action, rather than a complete solution. The Committee notes strong support for a targeted, risk-based approach focused on restricting specific harmful features and functionalities in addition to blanket restrictions on entire platforms. (Conclusion, Paragraph 34)
18. We recommend that the Government introduces a risk-based and age-appropriate regulatory framework that applies consistently across social media, gaming and hybrid platforms, private messaging sites and AI chatbots, including sites and platforms widely used by children. This would have clear benefits in terms of future-proofing the approach to safeguarding children online. (Recommendation, Paragraph 35)
19. Age-based safeguards, including minimum age requirements and child protections, cannot be effective without robust, accurate and consistently applied age-assurance systems. Current approaches are unreliable and undermine both safety measures and public confidence. Whilst concerns have been raised about circumvention, including the use of VPNs, the evidence suggests that this is not yet occurring at scale and should not be used to justify inaction. (Conclusion, Paragraph 36)

20. We recommend that the Government works with mobile phone manufacturers to ensure that robust safety-by-design features are available and can be activated on all phones that can be used by children, including strengthening age-verification processes for downloading apps. (Recommendation, Paragraph 37)
21. We recommend that the Government establishes a clear and enforceable framework for age assurance across platforms likely to be accessed by children, with independent oversight and regular assessment of effectiveness. (Recommendation, Paragraph 38)
22. The Committee welcomes the publication of screentime guidance for under-5s and recommends that the Government urgently publishes evidence-based screentime guidance for children and young people from the age of 5–18 with appropriate age-related strata. (Recommendation, Paragraph 39)
23. The Committee is clear that further research is needed on both the risks and dangers of social media, and gaming and hybrid platforms for those aged under 18, and the effectiveness of the measures that are needed to tackle and mitigate these pressing problems. As part of the implementation of the restrictions that we would like to see the Government bring in, it is important that, in order to assess the effectiveness of these new restrictions, there is a programme of Government-funded research, including provision for social media companies to grant independent researchers access to relevant internal data. (Recommendation, Paragraph 40)
24. Although it is beyond the scope of this Committee's remit, it is clear that the issues that impact children also extend into adulthood. We encourage the Government to expand its work on social media harms and to investigate thoroughly their impact on adults. (Recommendation, Paragraph 41)

Formal minutes

Tuesday 19 May 2026

Members present

Helen Hayes, in the Chair

Mrs Sureena Brackenridge

Darren Paffey

Manuela Perteghella

Growing up in the online world: The Education Committee's response to the Government's consultation

Draft Report (*Growing up in the online world: The Education Committee's response to the Government's consultation*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 41 read and agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the First Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order 134.

Adjournment

Adjourned till Tuesday 2 June 2026 at 9.30am.

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Tuesday 21 April 2026

Rebecca Stimson, Director of Public Policy UK, Meta; **Laura Higgins**, Senior Director, Community Safety and Civility, Roblox; **Alistair Law**, Director of Public Policy for Northern Europe, TikTok [Q1–68](#)

Professor Pete Etchells, Professor of Psychology and Science Communication, Bath Spa University; **Professor Victoria Goodyear**, Professor of Physical Activity, Health and Wellbeing, University of Birmingham; **Professor Amy Orben**, Research Professor at the MRC Cognition and Brain Sciences, University of Cambridge [Q69–90](#)

Tuesday 28 April 2026

Esther Ghey, Founder and Director, Brianna Ghey Legacy Project; **Mr Andy Burrows**, CEO, Molly Rose Foundation; **Rani Govender**, Associate Head of Policy and Public Affairs, National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) [Q91–117](#)

Daniel Kebede, General Secretary, National Education Union (NEU); **Tom Middlehurst**, Deputy Director of Policy, The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL); **Darren Northcott**, National Official (Education), NASUWT The Teachers' Union [Q118–143](#)

Jacqueline Beauchere, Senior Director, Global Head of Platform Safety, Snapchat [Q144–180](#)

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Session 2024–26

Number	Title	Reference
9th	Higher Education and Funding: Threat of Insolvency and International Students	HC 807
8th	Historical Forced Adoption	HC 1713
7th	Foundations of Learning: replacing RAAC and securing school buildings	HC 1399
6th	Further Education and Skills	HC 666
5th	Solving the SEND Crisis	HC 492
4th	Children's social care	HC 430
3rd	Appointment of Professor Edward Peck CBE as Chair of the Office for Students	HC 731
2nd	Scrutiny of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill	HC 732
1st	Appointment of Sir Ian Bauckham CBE as Chief Regulator of the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual)	HC 429
	BSL report summary - 5th Report - Solving the SEND crisis	HC 492
	Audio summary - 5th Report - Solving the SEND crisis	HC 492
8th Special	Foundations of Learning: replacing RAAC and securing school buildings: Government Response	HC 1842
7th Special	Solving the SEND Crisis: Government Response	HC 1565
6th Special	Further Education and Skills: Government Response	HC 1555

Number	Title	Reference
5th Special	Children's social care: Government Response	HC 1350
4th Special	Scrutiny of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill: Government Response	HC 925
3rd Special	Screen time: Impacts on education and wellbeing: Government Response	HC 915
2nd Special	Delivering effective financial education: Government Response	HC 628
1st Special	Teacher recruitment, training and retention: Government Response	HC 627