



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP
Secretary of State for Education
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

8 September 2025

Dear Bridget,

I hope this letter finds you well.

I welcome the Government's recognition that the Internet, while full of opportunity, also exposes children to real dangers.

However, the response so far has leaned heavily on technical fixes such as regulation and age verification. These have their place, but they cannot be the whole answer. We must not simply open the floodgates of the online world to people when they turn 18 without having equipped them to deal with it; education should be our first—and strongest—line of defence.

Currently, our approach to online safety education isn't working. While it's included in the National Curriculum, how schools teach it is patchy and inconsistent. Furthermore, it's been criticised for always being far behind the curve and too rigid for the fast-moving evolution of the online world.

Advice like "don't share your password" or "don't talk to strangers online" might have worked during the years of Myspace and MSN Messenger. However, young people today are growing up in a far riskier and more complex digital landscape than you and I did. The harms they face are deeper, faster evolving, and harder to spot. From algorithm-driven body image pressures and AI deepfakes to grooming, financial scams, and misinformation being promoted and driven to them at scale.

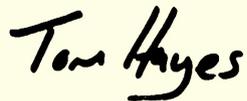
We don't take a tick-box approach to teaching road safety, relationships, or consent. We equip children with fundamental principles, critical thinking skills, and the confidence to stay safe and make good decisions in the real world—whether walking alone at night, setting boundaries with a romantic partner, or advocating for their rights to their employer. We should apply the same approach to online safety.

Fundamentally, we need to stop playing catch-up. The reality is that today's children will spend more time online than any generation before them. It's where they learn and explore, and it's where they work and express themselves. We must ensure they are equipped for this, rather than simply opening the floodgates at 18 to a world they have no experience of and cannot comprehend.

To this end, our children and young people need a robust, holistic, and future-proof curriculum that teaches them digital resilience, media literacy, and personal agency—not just a list of outdated rules. This would provide them with the skills they need to stay safe in childhood, but, just as importantly, will prepare them for adulthood, when they will use the Internet and social media nearly every day for the rest of their lives.

I urge the Government to engage in a comprehensive review of online safety education in schools and develop a new, modern curriculum that recognises the scale and urgency of this challenge. If we want the next generation to thrive online, not just survive it, we need to start teaching for the world they actually live in.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Hayes". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Tom Hayes MP
Labour Member of Parliament for Bournemouth East