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Helen Hayes MP.

Chair

Education Select Committee

House of Commons

London

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02 March 2026

Dear Helen

Government launches a landmark and world-leading consultation on how to give young people the childhood they deserve in an online world

I am pleased to let you know that today, the government is publishing a landmark and world-leading consultation on how to give children the childhood they deserve in an online world.

The Online Safety Act brought in one of the most robust systems globally to tackle illegal content and protect children from harmful and age-inappropriate content. Since the Act has come into effect, the government has ensured keeping children safe online remains to be a firm priority. However, we know that there is more to do.

We know that millions of families across the country are grappling with how much screen time children should have, when children should get a smartphone, what they can see online, and the impact online use can have on sleep, concentration and mental health. Additionally, we know many parents, carers and those that work with children have growing worries about AI, including children forming relationships with chatbots as if they were real people.

There are calls across the UK for the government to take action, but no consensus on how. We firmly believe that policy making must give proper consideration to a range of views and be rooted in the best available evidence. That is why, on 20 January, we wrote to you to set out the government's next steps on online safety: bringing forward a short consultation to strengthen protections for children online and support them in a rapidly evolving digital age.

The government welcomes the contribution your committee has made to the debate on online safety and particularly your recent report on Media Literacy. Recognising the importance of children and adults having the right support, the consultation we are launching today will seek views on how we can further support parents, carers and those who work



with children with media literacy skills as well as screen time. The responses to the consultation will also shape decisions on:

- Whether there should be a minimum age for social media, and if so, what age would be right;
- Whether platforms should be required to switch off addictive features that keep children hooked late into the night - like infinite scrolling and autoplay;
- Whether mandatory overnight curfews would help children sleep better and what age they should apply to;
- Whether children should be able to use AI chatbots without restriction;
- How age-verification and age-assurance technologies can support effective implementation and;
- Whether the use of mobile phones in schools should be put on a statutory footing.

The consultation will run for three months, and the government will respond in the Summer. We will act swiftly on the findings from the consultation and accompanying national conversation.

We welcome views from all those with an interest in this issue, including parents, children's organisations, bereaved families, industry, and children themselves. Alongside the consultation, today we are launching a child- and parent-friendly version to ensure voices in this debate are properly heard.

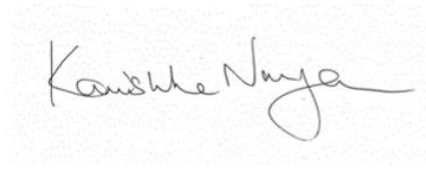
In parallel, our national conversation is underway. Over the coming months, families, young people and communities across the UK will be invited to contribute through community events, MP-led local discussions, and engagement via schools and civil society organisations. We will also work closely with researchers and academics to assess the emerging evidence base and draw on international experience, including from Australia.

In addition, we will work with parents and teenagers to pilot a range of interventions for 13–17-year-olds, including social media bans, overnight curfews and daily screen-time limits. These pilots will help ensure that any future restrictions are informed by real-world evidence as well as public views.

We place a high value on the role of select committees in bringing expert insight and challenge to our policy development. Your perspectives are an important part of ensuring that our approach is robust, evidence-based and responsive to the concerns of Parliament and the public. We would therefore very much welcome your engagement with our consultation and National Conversation. Your views will be given careful consideration as we develop our next steps.

Yours sincerely,





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