08ᵗʰ April 2025 – [Gill Hutchinson]

Sent to Scrutiny inbox (scrutiny@gov.je)

Subject: Online Harms

Message:

Online Harms are a hot topic at the moment for both adults and children. Rightly so as many of us are trying to function in a reality that is totally new and alien to us.

Children and young people are especially at risk because the prolonged use of the internet effects the dopamine levels in the brain, which causes an effect linked to pleasurable rewards and addiction.

As adults, we are almost like tourists in a land that children can function in without thought. And children do this without the expert guidance of responsible adults who would normally be there to tell them right from wrong.

This needs to be addressed as a priority.

The Education Minister is thinking of banning phones in schools and I believe if it's disrupting lessons and teachers agree, it may be useful. Again, there is talk of showing the Netflix production "Adolescence" in secondary schools to use as a vehicle for discussing toxic and dangerous on-line messages, yet I feel this must be handled with care and must come with a lot of training for the teachers to be able to address.

However, what would be the most useful and have a much more long-term effect would be to teach children from primary school all about the internet, the good and bad and give them knowledge tools to cope with it and use it sensibly. Banning in school will not stop children and young people using their phones or the internet outside of the school environment.

As I write this, children, some very young, are navigating a potentially lethal reality without any guidance from responsible adults. It's a bit like sending them out to play in the dark and saying let me know if anything is worrying you, but there are no responsible adults around to tell them what's right or wrong and even if the child asks for guidance, the adult feels that they can't really help because they don't know what's going on. Many of the online platforms seem to be designed to give short dopamine hits which make us want to use them more. For children especially this can have a hugely detrimental effect on how they think, their concentration spans and their boredom thresholds; there is research to back this up for example:

https://providenceproject.org/resource-hub/digital-addiction-risk-for-children/
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/251455/advice_on_child_internet_safety.pdf

Our education system seems to be designed for a past world that didn't function as it does today. I feel it needs to be completely shaken up, and internet knowledge, especially how social media functions, is not a nice-to-have but a vital function as important as teaching our children how to be safe in our communities and homes. The virtual reality communities are just as real to them and potentially more toxic.

The internet, smart phones, social media and Artificial Intelligence are here to stay, and the children need to be taught how to use these tools properly and protect themselves