

28/01/2025

Dear Members of the Children, Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel.

I am writing to provide insights and responses to the questions posed regarding the protection of children in Jersey from online harms and the effectiveness of the current approach to online safety in schools, particularly from the perspective of Highlands College. The feedback was gathered by my lead for Teaching Learning and Development, all sections heads and the co-ordinator for Digital Learning.

### **Protection of Children from Online Harms**

Highlands College, like other educational institutions, has a statutory responsibility for safeguarding, which includes online safety. Our students on full-time Further Education Programmes are educated about e-safety and online harms through various means, including the Tutorial Framework – Future Skills. This framework covers a range of topics related to the safe and effective use of digital technologies and is delivered throughout the academic year, at least once per half term. Additionally, specific PSHE Curriculum content is provided. The tutorial framework also encompasses digital literacy skills, preparing students for their future vocational careers and supporting their digital health and productivity skills. Combined, these efforts aim to enable students to become effective digital citizens.

Our staff undergoes continuous professional development (CPD) relating to Online Safety and Cyber Security Training annually, in addition to regular Safeguarding Training. Highlands College holds the Cyber Essentials Accreditation, recognizing our Cyber Security Protocols and Procedures.

We apply web filtering to all devices accessing the Internet via the college network and Wi-Fi, including college-owned devices and personal Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) technologies. This filtering is implemented using industry-standard technologies (SOPHOS Endpoint Security). Internet logs can identify individual activity when accessing the Internet through these services. While no filtering system is infallible, attempts to circumvent the system are monitored, and any reports of inappropriate use are investigated.

Policies are in place regarding the Acceptable Use of digital technologies, including access and appropriate use of Social Media sites and content. Students and staff accessing the network are required to digitally sign their agreement to adhere to the policy and understand the consequences of inappropriate use.

Highlands College operates a BYOD Policy, and any device accessing the network must adhere to the same policies and is subject to the same content filtering. However, unlike college-owned devices, it is not possible to screen the content stored on an individual's personal device.

### **Restrictions on Smartphone Use in Schools and Colleges**

Access to and use of smartphones is ubiquitous among both students and staff on campus. While it is possible to restrict/filter a smartphone user's access to the Internet if they connect to the college Wi-Fi, cellular/4G connectivity makes it more challenging to monitor smartphone activity across the campus.

Views on the productive use of smartphones for educational purposes are mixed. There is evidence of productive use in lessons, enabling students to access materials, engage in online quizzes, and capture examples of their learning. However, there are also instances of students being distracted by notifications. For many students, their smartphone is their only personal digital device, and they are keen to always have it in their possession. Restricting access to their mobile phones may reduce their equitable access to productive web/app-based educational services.

Further restrictions on smartphone use in schools/colleges would need to be administered consistently across the sector to ensure equity and would need to be nuanced and graduated to reflect the maturing habits and needs of young people. Restricting smartphone access during school/college times would require schools/colleges to provide suitable alternative digital devices for students to access valuable online resources equitably. At Highlands College, we provide self-service laptop loans through a digital locker system, ensuring all students on campus have access to a suitable mobile device to support their learning. Longer-term loan laptops are also available for students who may not have access to suitable digital devices at home.

### **Role of Schools/Colleges and Teachers in Safeguarding Online Spaces**

Education plays a key role in navigating the challenging digital landscape. However, schools/colleges and teachers cannot respond in isolation. These challenges exist at social, cultural, familial, and individual levels. As an island, we can positively articulate our aspirations for future generations' experiences, expectations, and active participation in an increasingly digitally influenced world. It is vital to listen to the voices of children and young people to ensure their views, experiences, and needs are heard and responded to.

The education sector's role and response need to be measured and nuanced to reflect the transition of children and young people through various phases of education. Better IT skills alone do not guarantee safer and more informed decision-making online. Education needs to find creative ways to instigate meaningful discussions about the realities of growing up in the 21st century. Subjects such as English, maths, and media studies can provide cross-curriculum gateways to explore the topic of exposure to online harms.

Issues relating to online harms need to be considered within the wider context of physical safeguarding and other social concerns, such as violence against women and girls in Jersey.

### **Conclusion**

We are experiencing a 'new' normal. To respond, education needs to build strong partnerships with parents, staff, students, and policymakers to create open and transparent dialogue about the realities of digital spaces and potential dangers. All parties need more education and training. We need to explore examples of good practice, consider collaborating with, and learning from, other island communities, and recognize that the challenge does not start and stop at the school/college gates. We need a coherent whole-community approach to protect and support all of the island's citizens, young and old(er).

Thank you for your attention to these important matters.

Yours sincerely,



Jo Terry-Marchant

**Principal**

