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Internet Matters data briefing:

online safety
in schools

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Introduction

This briefing brings together insights from a collection of recent research by Internet Matters into the issue of online safety in schools.

Teachers can play a critical role in supporting children online.

At the most basic level, safeguarding policy is clear that schools have a duty to keep children safe in terms of their online lives as well as offline. But more than that, online safety forms part of the RSHE and Computing curriculums, reflecting the importance of digital capabilities in shaping children's future prospects. Furthermore, schools are a key conduit for reaching parents, who are the first line of support for children when it comes to being online.

Yet schools are under considerable pressure.

Longstanding challenges include teacher retention and recruitment, keeping up with a changing curriculum and the breadth of pupils' additional needs. More recently, the Covid 19 pandemic and cost of living crisis have introduced further pressure still.

Against this backdrop, Internet Matters has conducted a range of research with teachers, school leaders and parents to find out more about online safety in schools.

This briefing presents data on three key themes:

1. Current approaches by schools and barriers encountered
2. The relationship between school and home in relation to online issues
3. The resources available in this space

The briefing ends with our conclusions on how the Government and online safety sector can support schools in this space, especially in light of the ongoing RSHE Review.





Methodology

This briefing draws upon four sets of research conducted between spring 2021 and winter 2022.

1. Tracker survey with parents and children
 - Internet Matters works with Opinium to track the views and experiences of UK children aged 9-16 (n=1000) and parents (n=2000) on a twice-yearly basis. This includes parents of vulnerable children, defined as those with special educational needs and disability (SEND) or experience of mental health problems.
2. Deep dive survey on parents' interactions with school
 - In November 2022 we extended our tracker survey on a once-off basis to explore the relationship between school and home, from the perspective of UK parents (n=2000).
3. Qualitative research study with English **primary** schools and parents
 - Conducted for Internet Matters by Shift Learning in spring 2021 to understand online safety teaching practices and how these could be enhanced.
 - Focus groups and interviews with 38 teachers and 10 parents of children in years 5-6.
4. Qualitative and quantitative research study with English **secondary** schools
 - Conducted for Internet Matters by Shift Learning in spring 2022 to understand practices in secondary schools and how these could be enhanced.
 - Focus groups with 19 staff (teachers and school leaders), survey of 218 staff.
 - Conducted with support from TikTok.





Current approaches by schools and barriers encountered

Competing priorities

Online safety was **consistently highlighted by school leaders and teachers as an important area**. It was acknowledged that schools have a role to play in addressing online issues with their pupils. However, there was also widespread recognition that this sentiment **did not always translate into sufficient focus** on this area, due to competing pressures and priorities:

Varied delivery routes

Our research found that both primary and secondary schools use multiple avenues to teach children about online safety:

- **Timetabled lessons in PSHE and ICT/Computing.** Most schools indicated that the subject was covered in both of these, although the emphasis changed – for example, in PSHE discussions focused more on the relationship between the online world and more general content around relationships, bullying and sex.
- **Form time.** PSHE content is delivered in form time in many schools, meaning online safety is covered in this context – typically in short bursts (e.g. 15 mins).

- **Timetabled lessons in other subjects.** Online issues are sometimes explored in other subjects in the context of assessing the credibility of sources (e.g. English, Media Studies). Furthermore, it is sometimes mentioned in other subjects when online sources are being used, although normally in a light touch way.
- **Ad hoc sessions.** Sometimes ad hoc sessions are held, often through an assembly with entire year groups or key stages. These can be planned (e.g. to coincide with Safer Internet Day) or reactive (e.g. a result of the school becoming concerned by online behaviour occurring within the school community). Sometimes schools make use of guest speakers from tech companies (e.g. Google), the local authority, charities (e.g. NSPCC, Childline), theatre companies, and the police.

Commenting on the landscape, one primary headteacher described delivery as “a bit messy” as it required combining teaching across different subjects. Although having multiple routes through which online safety can be delivered gives schools greater freedom, it **increases the possibility that certain content falls through the gaps**, especially when time is tight, or that children receive **inconsistent messaging** – not only between different schools, but between different classes in the same school.

*“There is often a lot of things in the media like ‘Teachers need to do more on this, teachers need to do more on that’. But then there’s also a lot of pressure to deliver for results and ever squeezing budgets meaning that we are teaching more and more, with less and less free time. Yes, there is knowledge that online safety is important and many other issues, but also we’re a grammar school, we’re all expected to get the very highest grades.” – **Secondary school teacher, North West England***

Assessment methods

Our research explored the ways in which primary schools in particular assess progress in relation to online safety learning. **There was little in the way of official or formal assessment being carried out, and some schools were conducting no assessment at all in this area.**

Where formal assessments were used and results recorded, this tended to be very high level and lacking in detail, e.g. a RAG approach:

“All you’d have is a template of the strand that they’re learning at the moment, red, amber and green, and each child we would consider red or hadn’t understood that topic would go in the red section, those who have partially understood it or completely understood it in the green and then we would pick up on those children who are towards the red section and look at how we can ensure we can push them towards an amber section”
– **KS2 co-ordinator**

In a handful of cases, learning objectives were tracked as part of the curriculum and closer attention paid to assessment via tools such as Project Evolve’s knowledge maps.¹

Any safeguarding concerns around individual children also meant that more attention was given to their levels of understanding and formally recorded.

1. <https://projectevolve.co.uk/guidance/knowledge-maps/>

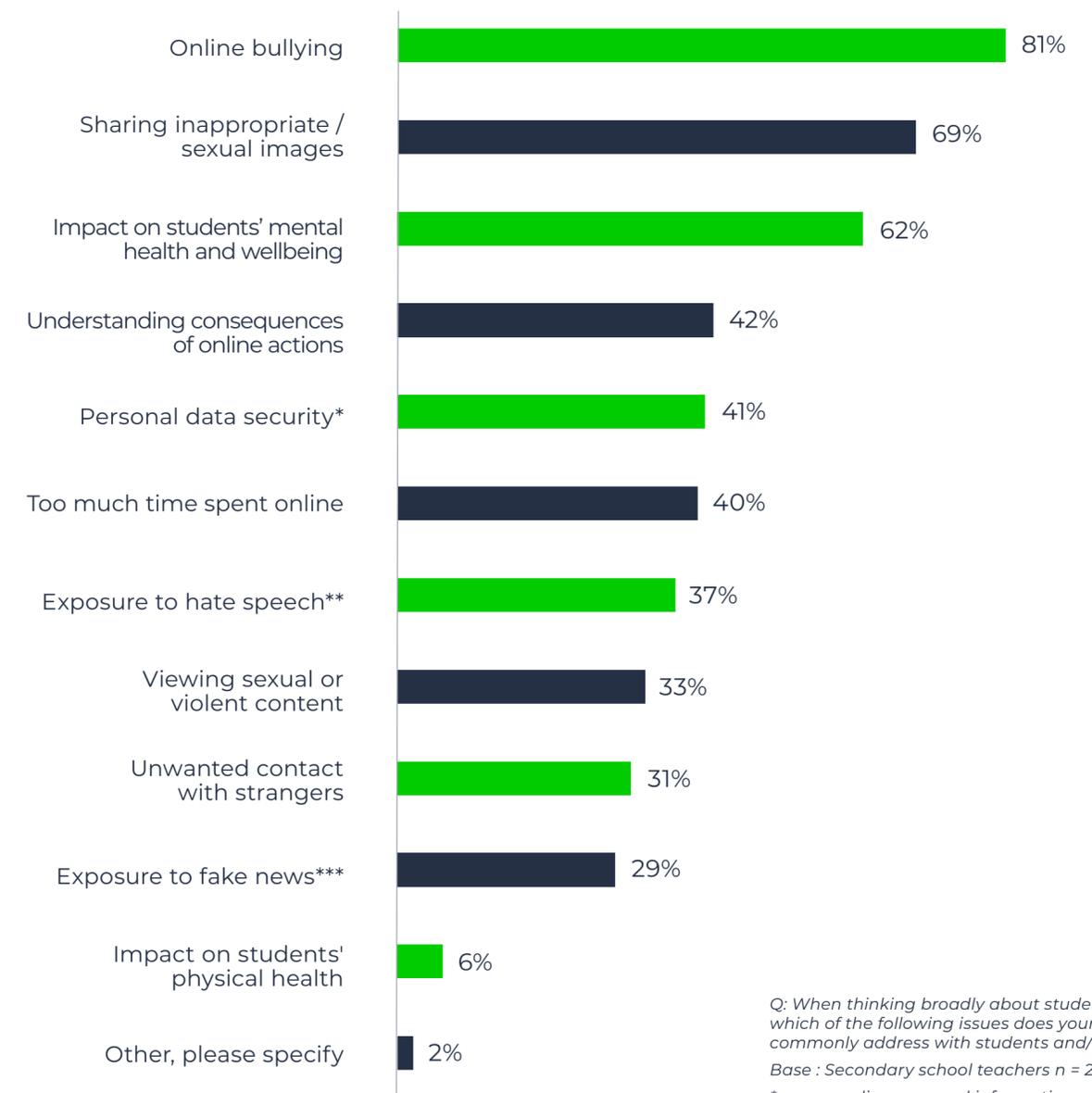
Informal methods of assessment were more common. These tended to be based on teacher judgement and not often recorded, although sometimes some records were kept to show Ofsted if needed. A quiz might be used at the start of a session to check prior understanding, and then another quiz or short task at the end to gauge class learning of topics that had been covered.

Topics covered

In keeping with the breadth of the curriculum and guidance in the online safety space, the schools engaged in our research indicated that they were **addressing a wide range of topics.** Our survey of secondary school teachers indicated that **online bullying, sharing sexual images and the impact of technology on mental health and wellbeing** were the biggest topics they were talking to children and parents about (Figure 1).

Similarly, online bullying and safe relationships were the biggest areas of focus for primary school teachers. Primary schools additionally reported media literacy (i.e. being critical of information online) being a priority area, whereas this appeared to rank lower for secondary schools – perhaps a reflection that other challenges with more direct safeguarding implications become more pressing to teachers as children become older.

Figure 1: Issues most commonly addressed with students and/or parents



Q: When thinking broadly about students' online safety, which of the following issues does your school most commonly address with students and/or parents?

Base : Secondary school teachers n = 218

* e.g. revealing personal information online, phishing, data theft and fraud.

**e.g. racism, sexism, homophobia, religious intolerance.

*** or misinformation, disinformation

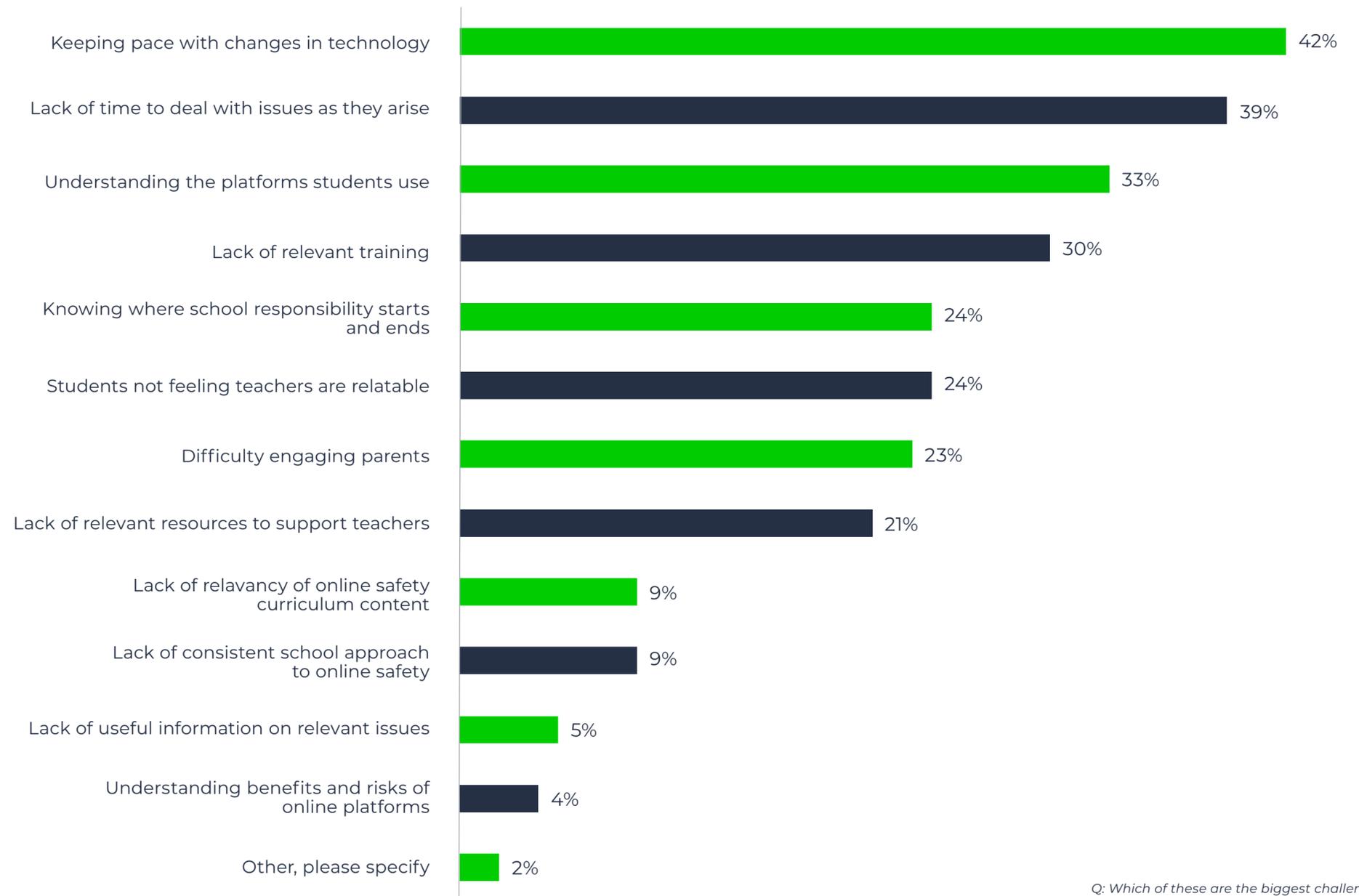
Barriers reported by teachers and school leaders

Our research explored the views of teachers and school leaders about what (if anything) prevents them from being effective in this space.

Our survey of secondary school teachers suggested that the biggest barrier **was keeping pace with changes in technology**, selected by 42% of respondents. This was closely followed by lacking time to deal with issues when they arose (39%), understanding the platforms used by children (33%) and a lack of relevant training (30%) (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Biggest challenges to teaching online safety issues



*Q: Which of these are the biggest challenges or barriers to you being able to address online safety issues?
Base : Secondary school teachers n = 218*

1. Keeping pace with technology and platform understanding

We explored the first and third of these barriers – keeping pace with technology and understanding platforms used by children – in greater depth.

It is notable that these challenges were felt by teachers and school leaders across the sample, including relatively young members of staff:

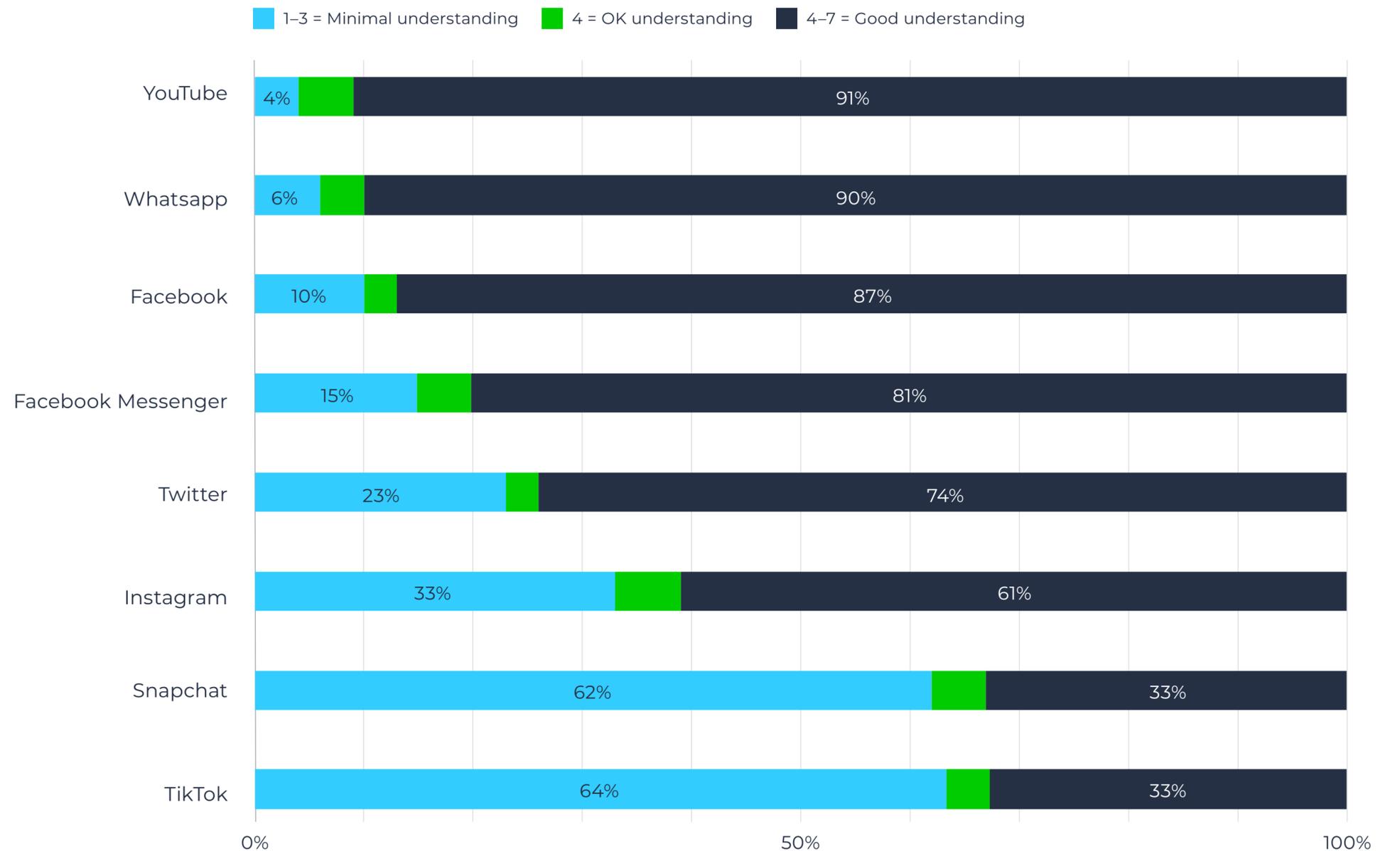
“It can be really hard as a teacher, well more like as a 36 year-old, to be always au fait with what is happening, what’s going on, like because it changes quite quickly.”
- secondary school teacher, North West England

We asked secondary school teachers how much they knew about popular online platforms used by children. Confidence varied significantly, with the vast majority of respondents saying that they had a good or very good understanding of platforms such as YouTube and WhatsApp. In contrast, **just a third of respondents felt that they had a good understanding of Snapchat and TikTok** (Figure 3).

As well as keeping up with the technology and platforms, teachers also told us **they found it difficult to keep up with policy, regulation and guidance in this space.**

It is important to note that these findings reflect teachers’ own understandings of the barriers they face. While it is no doubt helpful for teachers to have a certain level of familiarity with the technology and platforms being used by children, just as important is teacher confidence in asking children questions about their online lives, showing interest and building trust. A teacher could know everything about all the platforms used by children without having these skills.

Figure 3: Knowledge of platforms amongst secondary school teachers



How much do you know about each of the following platforms and how they are being used by students?
 Base: Secondary school teachers n = 218

Figure 4: Topics teachers feel less confident speaking to students about

Q: Which of the following topics would you personally feel less confident speaking to students about, if any?
 Base: Secondary school teachers n = 218

2. Difficulty with certain topics

Our research explored teacher confidence in relation to specific topics within online safety. **Over half of secondary school teachers responding to our survey indicated that there was at least one area they felt less confident on.** Most common was **sexual and violent content**, selected by 33% of respondents, followed by 22% who were less confident on the issue of **sharing sexual images** (Figure 4).

“Just the rules that are ever changing, knowing when it would be a police report or like the rules around taking photos of each other and stuff like that is just always changing and for good reasons, but I wouldn’t be very confident to know what was not okay and what was a criminal offence and stuff like that.”
– secondary school teacher, South East England

Primary school staff tended to be comfortable dealing with most topics, although some noted a lack of expertise regarding certain technology, e.g. algorithms, which they felt impacted their ability to deal with topics such as data and advertising. A small minority also reported feeling less comfortable dealing with topics such as pornography.



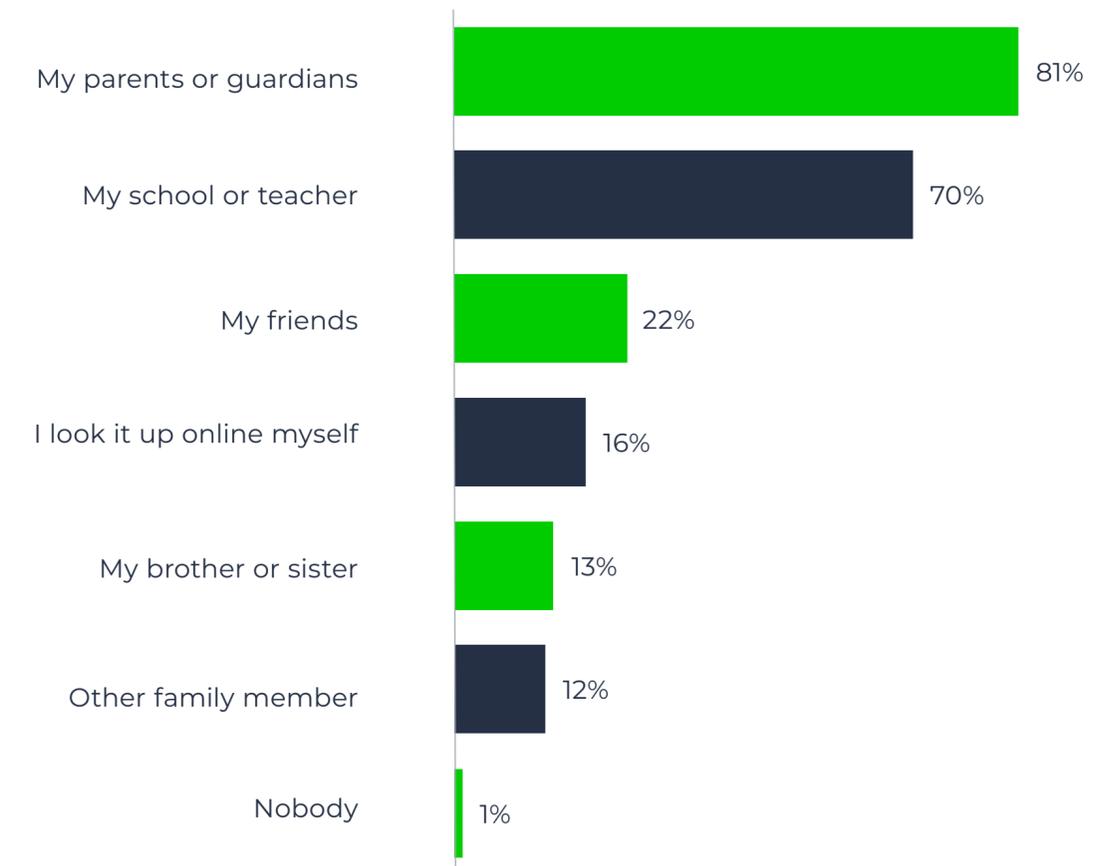
The relationship between school and home in relation to online issues

Why is this relationship important?

Schools are the key conduit for reaching parents and carers, who are the first people children turn to for information about staying safe online.

Our survey evidence shows that 81% of children turn to a parent for this information, followed secondly by teachers (70%) (Figure 5). Other sources such as friends and other family members are much lower on the list. This order (parents first, teacher second) is the same for all the groups of children we consider, regardless of age and background. For example, although children aged 15-16 are more likely than younger children to go to their friends (30%) or to look up the information themselves (30%), they still most commonly consult their parents (72%) or a teacher (61%).

Figure 5: Source of information on how to stay safe online



*Where do you get information about how to stay safe online?
Children aged 9-16 N=1,007*

In our survey, we ask children whether they have had a negative experience online, and if so what they did. Once again, parents come out top, with 49% of children saying they had a conversation with a parent. Just 10% said that they went to a teacher about the issue – although a further 14% of children say that their parent spoke to someone on their behalf, which could include a teacher (Figure 6).

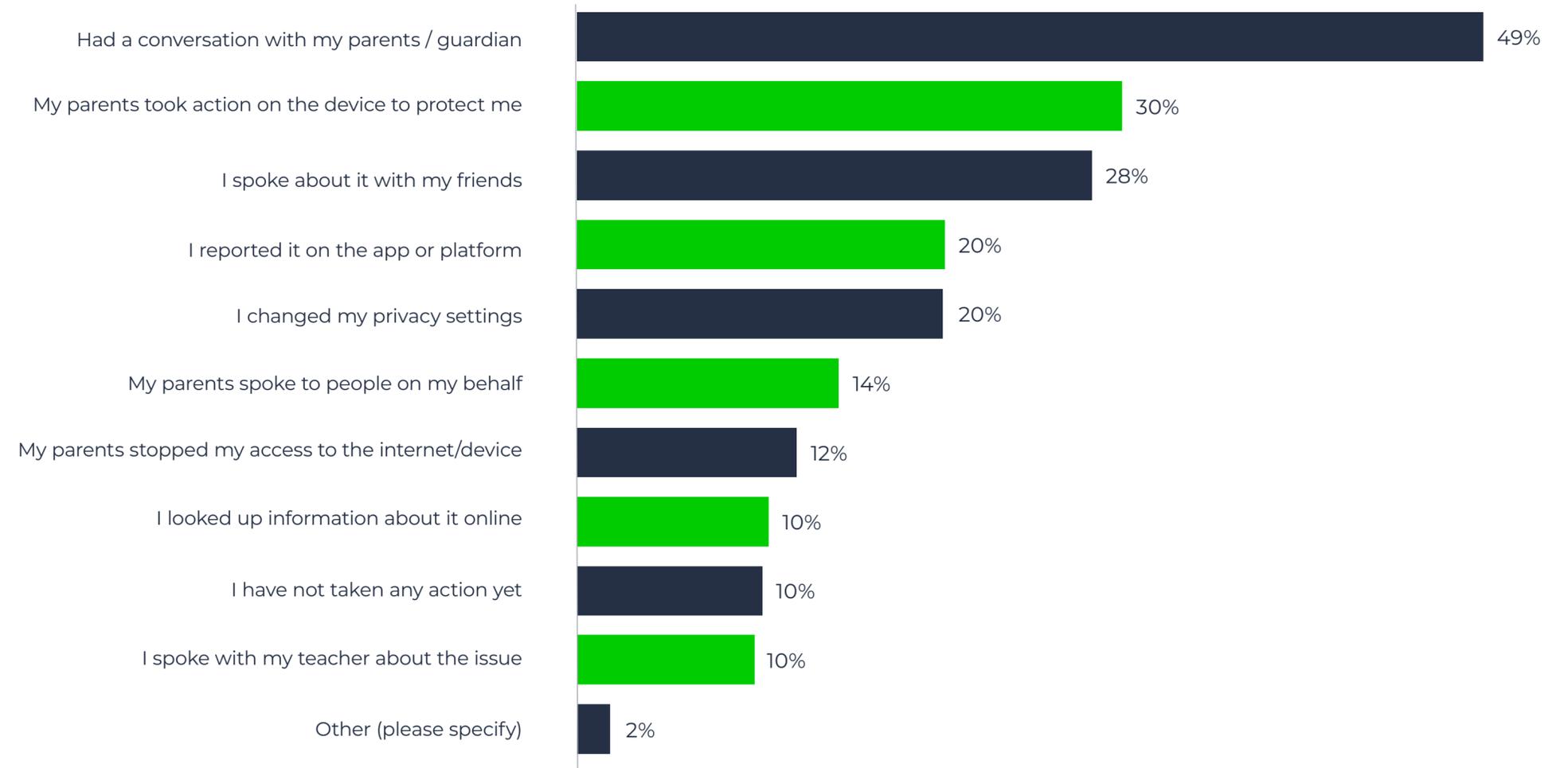
None of this is to say that the provision children receive in schools is unimportant. On the contrary, the majority of children say they talk to their teachers about how to stay safe online. Furthermore, school support is particularly important for vulnerable children who may not have parents at home with the time or capabilities to provide support. This is a key consideration given that research from Internet Matters (and others) consistently shows that vulnerable children are at greater risk of experiencing harm online.²

But it does show that if teachers are going to make a difference in this space, **they need to engage parents** and help them to play their part. Schools are already skilled in crafting these partnerships in other areas where parental input is key – for example, in encouraging younger children to read, and in helping all children to eat healthily. The same principle applies to supporting children in their online lives.

This is particularly important because **digital technology permeates the boundary between school and home.** Interactions that occur online outside of school hours can spark conflict at school, resulting in significant disruption to children’s learning. If one child gains access to inappropriate content (e.g. adult content, underage access to an app) then it can quickly spread across entire year groups.

The answer to this challenge has to be parents and schools presenting **a united front** about what is acceptable and good behaviour online, and what is not – and responding to challenges consistently and coherently.

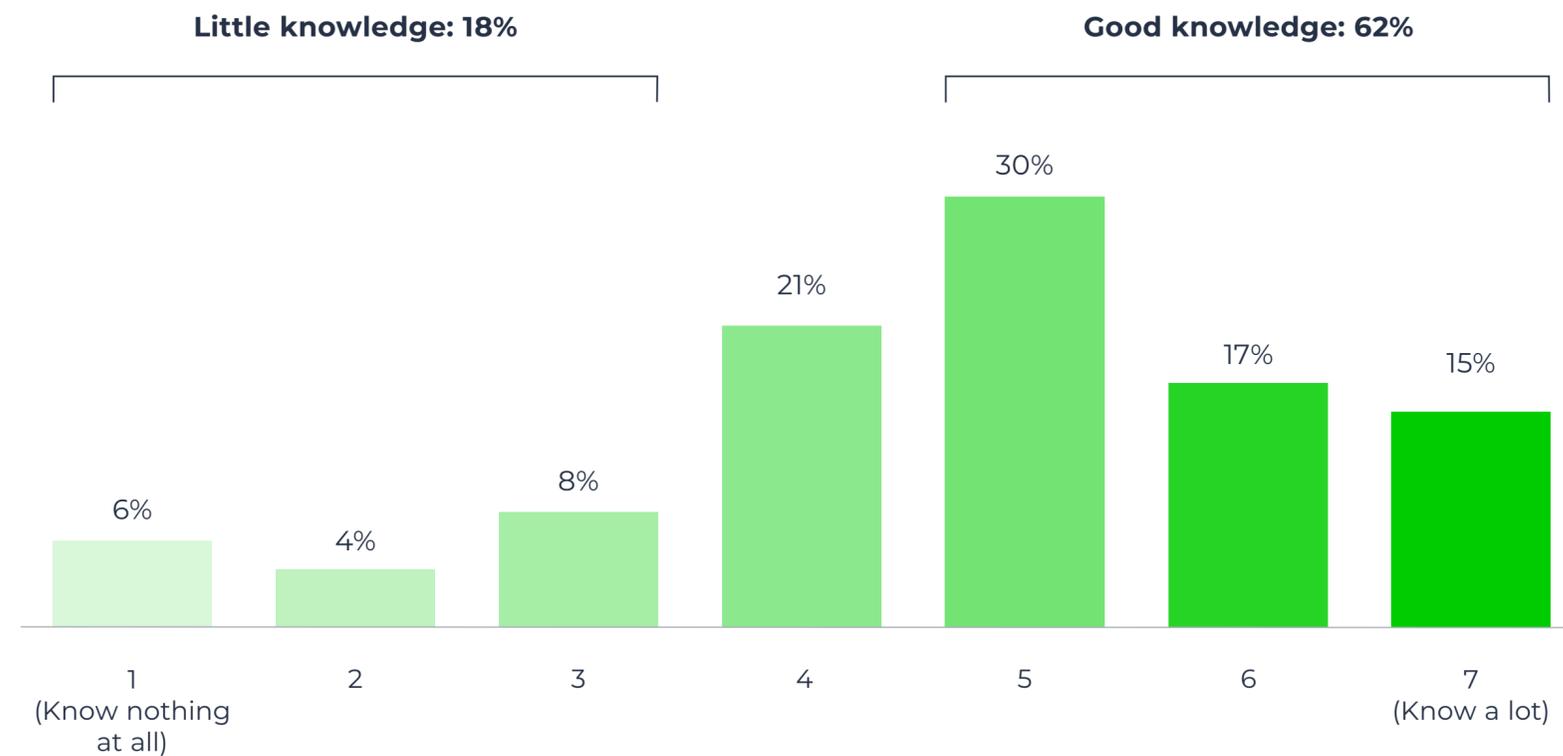
Figure 6: What children did after experiencing an online harm (children)



Q:B6. You mentioned that you experienced issues when being online, what did you do as a result of this experience?
Please select all that apply. Children N=1,000

“Students bring in things that have happened outside school, online, and there is an impact on their relationships in school and we have no control over it. But it’s partially for us to clean up that mess.” – secondary school teacher, Yorkshire and the Humber

2. <https://www.internetmatters.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Internet-Matters-Refuge-And-Risk-Report.pdf>

Figure 7: Knowledge of school's approach to online safety education and issues

X1 In general, how much do you feel you know about how your child/children's school approaches online safety education and issues? On the following scale 1 means 'know nothing at all about it' and 7 means 'know a lot about it'. Base: Parents (1,998)

How effective is the relationship between school and home as things stand?

Our November 2022 survey explored the perspective of approximately 2,000 parents on their relationship with their child's school in relation to online safety issues.

1. Parent knowledge of school's approach to online safety

In encouraging news, **the majority of parents felt that they had a good knowledge of the school's approach to online safety education.**

We asked parents to rate their knowledge on a scale of 1-7, where 1 indicated knowing nothing at all, 7 indicated knowing a lot and 4 was neutral. More than 6 in 10 parents gave a rating of 5-7 while only 18% rated their knowledge as 3 or below (Figure 7).

Notably, parents with a child at a special school were less likely to say they had a good knowledge of the school's approach – just 62% gave a rating of 5-7. In contrast, parents of vulnerable children more generally (regardless of the child's school type) were more likely to say they had a good knowledge of the school's approach. This raises questions about the quality of communication between parents and teachers in special schools in particular, in relation to online issues.

While it is positive that the majority of parents felt informed about the school's approach in the space, this needs to be balanced against the experiences of teachers, who repeatedly told us that the difficulty in engaging parents on online safety was a barrier.

2. Parents' perception of the quality of school's approach

Our survey went on to ask those parents who felt they had a good knowledge of the school's approach for their impression of how good or poor it was. Again, the findings are encouraging: **more than two thirds of these parents rated the school's approach as fairly or very good**, while less than 1 in 10 rated it as poor or very poor (Figure 8).

Parents of vulnerable children were noticeably less satisfied than other parents – 15% of parents of vulnerable children said that the school's approach was fairly or very poor, rising to 20% of parents with a child in a special school. In contrast, just 7% of parents of a non-vulnerable child, according to this survey's definition, said that the school's approach was fairly or very poor.

3. Outreach between school and home

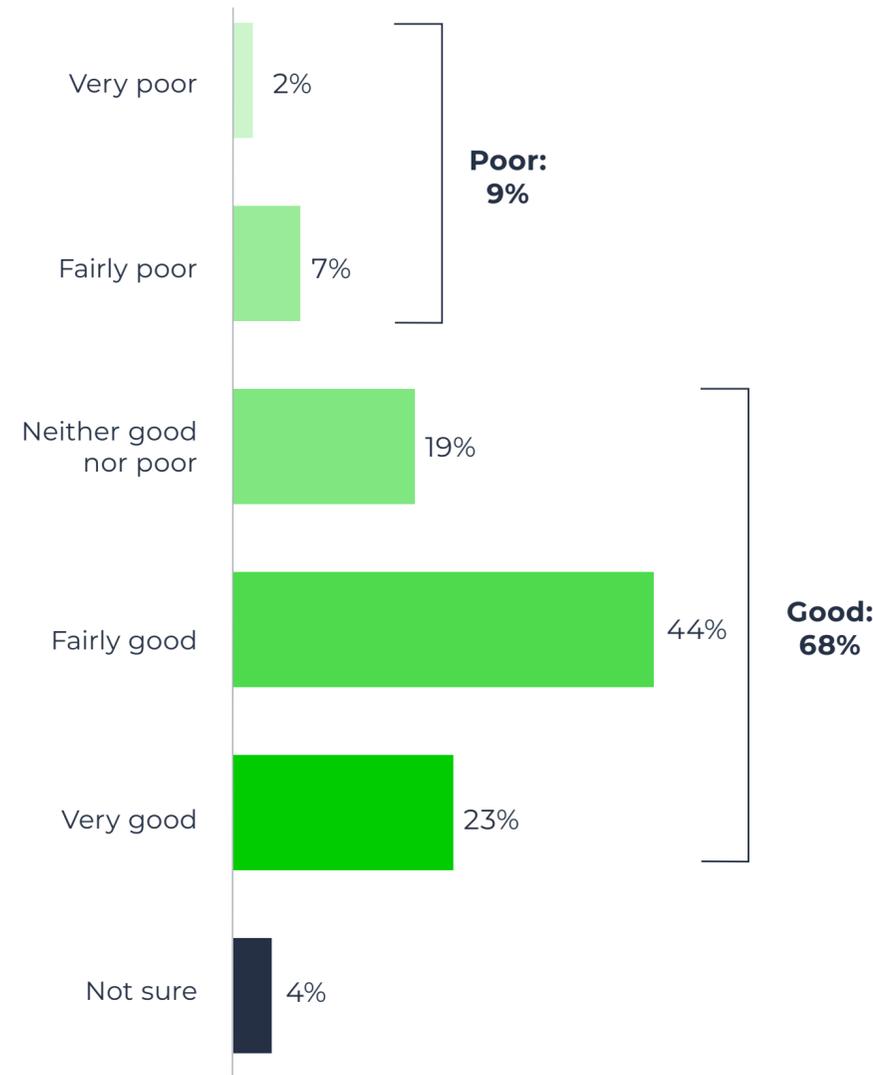
We then presented all parents participating in the survey with a list of different forms of outreach between school and home in relation to online safety. Options ranged from reading the school's online safety policies, speaking to the teacher about an incident to attending an event or session hosted by the school. We asked parents which of these they had experienced, and how effective they were.

At this point, the picture becomes more mixed.

In good news, **the majority (75%) of parents identified experiencing at least one form of outreach with the school.**

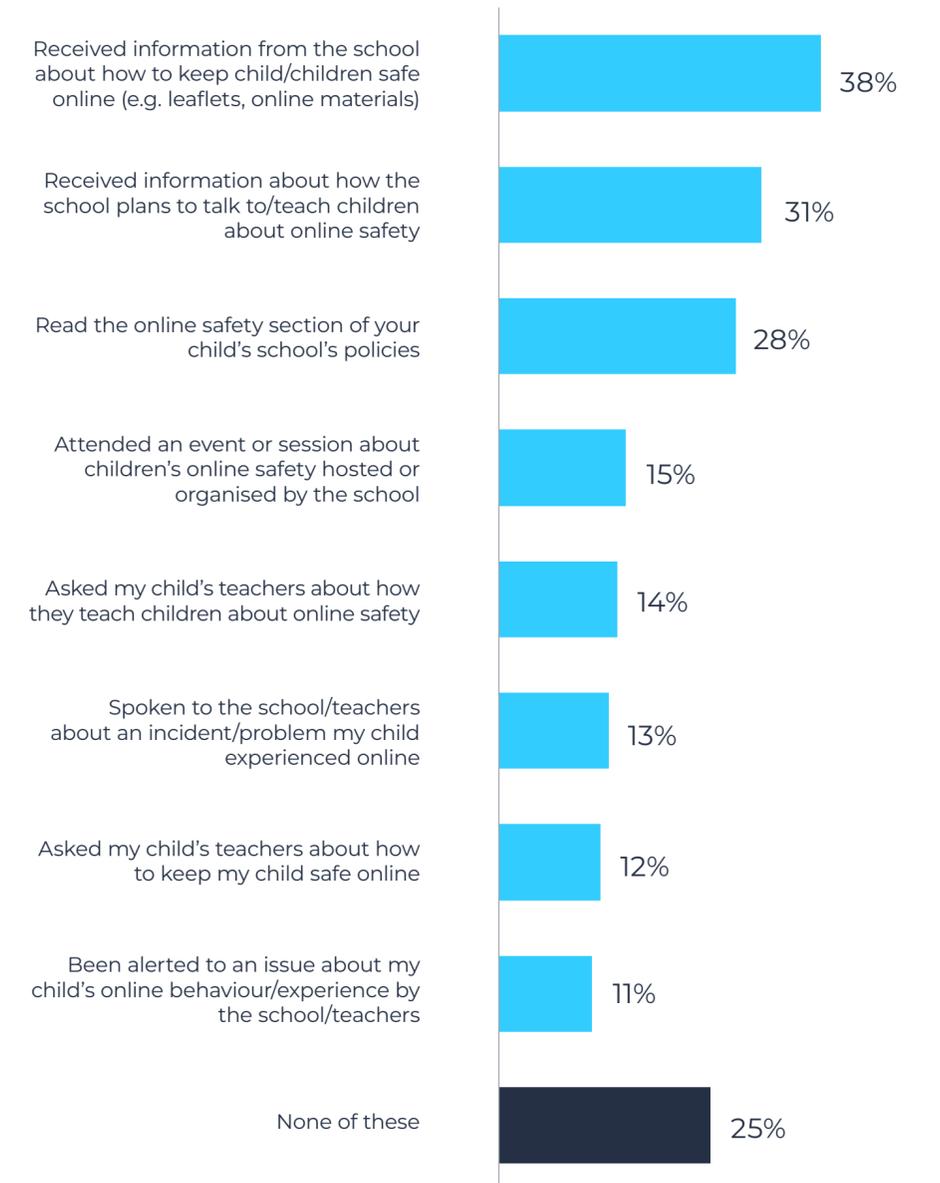
Just one quarter of parents said they had not experienced anything on the list we presented to them (Figure 9).

Figure 8: School's online safety education policies and actions rating (% of those aware of schools approaches)



X2 And how good or poor would you rate the policies and actions of your child/children's school when it comes to online safety education and issues? Base: Parents who know about the schools approaches (1,876)

Figure 9: Activities done or experienced relating to school



X3 Thinking about your child or children's school(s), which of the following have you ever done or experienced, if any? Base: Parents (1,998)

The most common form of outreach experienced was receiving information from the school about keeping children safe online (e.g. leaflets, online materials). 38% of parents said they had received this information. This was followed by receiving information about how the school planned to teach online safety (31%) and reading the school's online safety policies (28%). The least common forms activities were being alerted to a problem by the school (11%) and asking a teacher's advice on online safety (12%) (Figure 9).

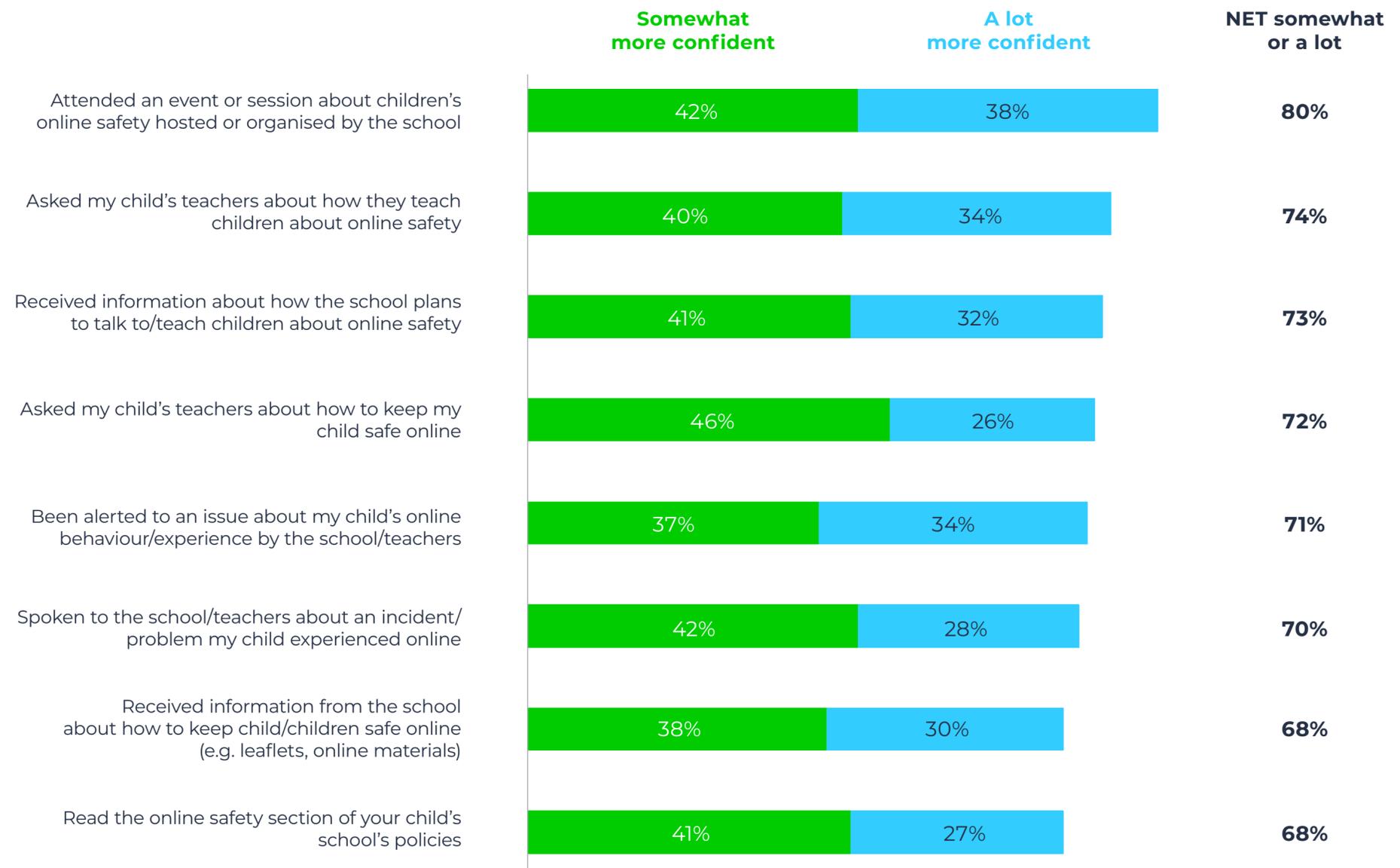
It is notable that the top two activities are passive, in terms of the parent's engagement – just because they received information, it is not necessarily the case that they engaged with it.

Our qualitative research with schools indicates that they often experience challenges encouraging parents to engage with online safety content.

Furthermore, parents themselves seem to doubt the usefulness of some of this information. In our survey, where parents said they had experienced a form of outreach, we asked them how effective they had found it in raising their confidence in how to keep their child safe online. The evidence shows that despite receiving information about keeping children safe online being the most common activity experienced, **it was rated amongst the least effective**, with nearly a third failing (32%) (Figure 10) to indicate that it made them more confident.

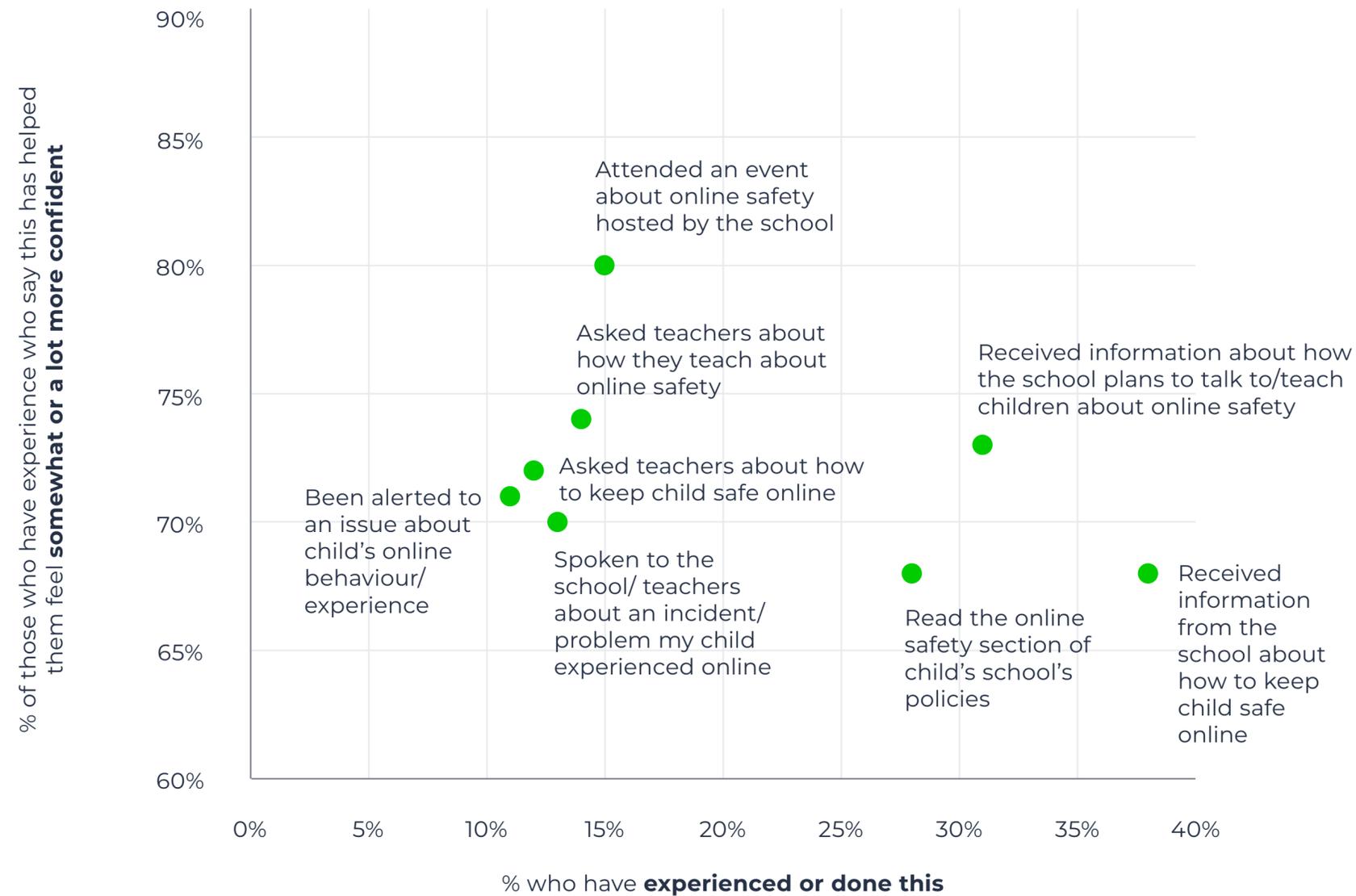
This does not necessarily mean that there should be less of a focus on schools sending out this information. But it does raise questions about the **quality of the information they are sending** – is it from a reputable source, and is it speaking to parents' needs in this space? It raises an additional set of questions about **how parents are scaffolded to make use of this information** – for example, perhaps sending out information is not enough without

Figure 10: Effect of school activity on confidence in keeping child safe online (% who have experienced this)



X4 Thinking about each of the following, did this make you more confident about how to keep your child safe online? If any of these has occurred more than once, please think about the most recent occasion. Base: Parents who have experienced the activity

Figure 11: Experience vs impact of school online safety initiatives, policies, and actions (Parents)



the opportunity to discuss it with a teacher. Further research into this would be helpful. Ultimately, the majority of parents who received this information said it had a positive impact on their confidence (68%) – and an even greater proportion (73%) (Figure 11) were positive about the information they had received about how the school intended to teach online safety.

The most striking finding from this part of the survey was parents' attitudes towards **events or sessions held by the school**. Out of the eight activities listed, **parents felt this had the biggest impact**, with 80% saying this made them somewhat or a lot more confident about keeping their child safe online. And yet, the previous findings showed that just 15% of parents had attended a session like this. Again, this raises questions which the survey alone cannot answer – is this mismatch a result of schools not hosting these sessions, or in parents not choosing (or being able) to go along? Anecdotally experiences vary, with some schools struggling to get parents to attend while others find that it is often one of the most well attended sessions of the school calendar.

The graph to the left summarises each activity, mapping the proportion of parents who have experienced it by the perceived impact (Figure 11).





The resources available in this space

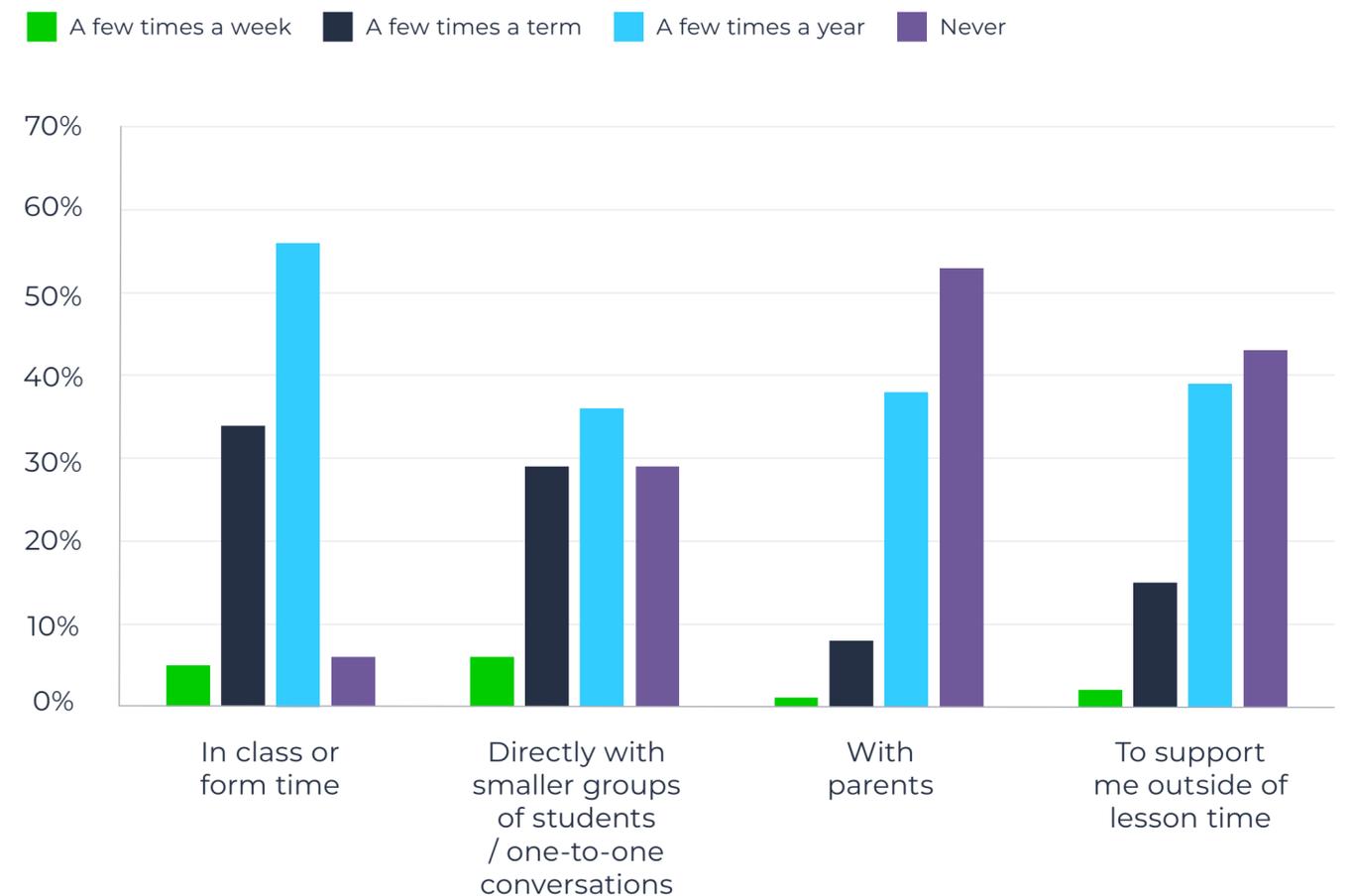
Our research considered the specific issue of online safety resources. We explored how teachers currently use resources to teach online safety, how adequately these meet their needs and how their experience of using resources could be improved. The research also considered resources for use with parents.

How teachers currently use resources to teach online safety

Our research indicated that in line with the lack of time devoted to online safety within the school calendar, **schools accessed online safety resources with limited frequency.** In our survey of secondary school teachers, we found that the majority made use of resources just a few times a year, typically in class or form time. Some used them more frequently, on a termly basis, when working with individual pupils or small groups. This could be as a reactive response to a specific incident or safeguarding issue (Figure 12).

Significant proportions of the secondary schools teachers we surveyed never made use of resources outside of their work with pupils. More than half of respondents said that they had never used resources with parents. 43% said they had never used resources to improve their own skills and knowledge in this area.

Figure 12: Frequency and location of using online support or resources



Q: How often do you typically use online support or resources?
 Base: Secondary school teachers n = 143 (those involved in online safety)

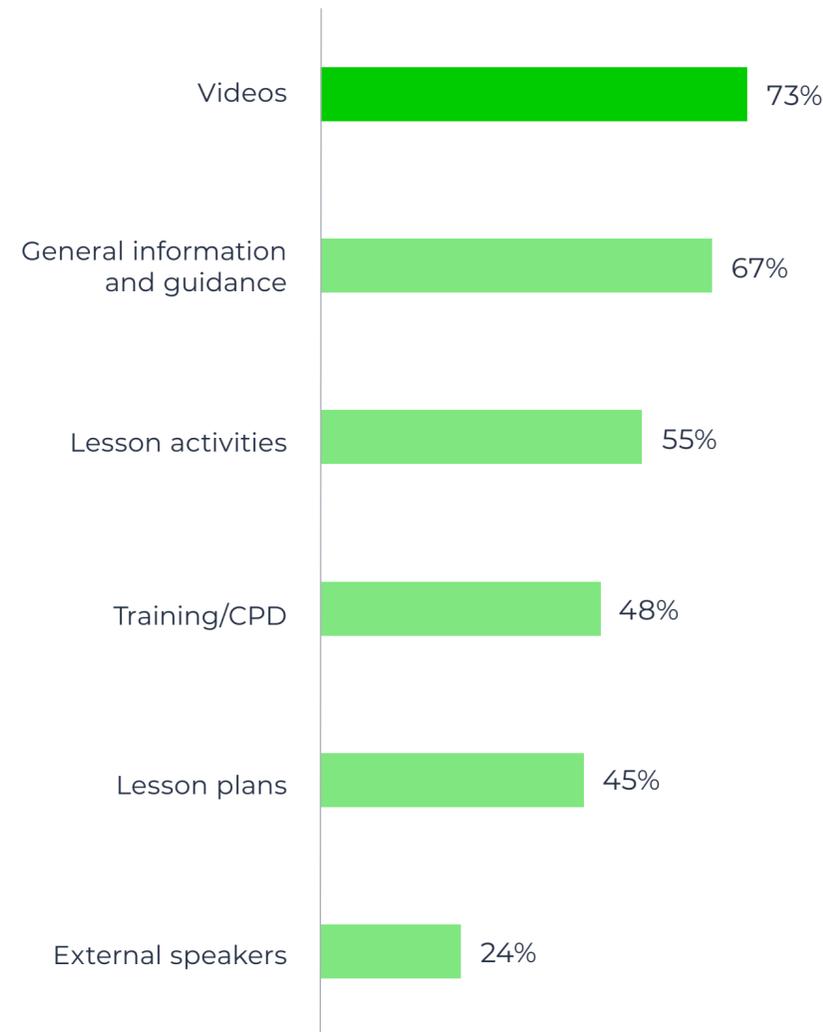
When resources are used, our research suggests that both primary and secondary teachers took a **'pick and mix' approach**, drawing upon numerous sources to put together content which meets the particular needs of their pupils. Often teachers led with one resource, and then supplemented it with other materials to address the gaps. Resources came from a range of providers, including commercial companies in the safeguarding and/or curriculum space, charities and not-for-profits, tech companies, school networks and the local authority. In rarer cases, content was custom-produced by a particularly engaged staff member. Sometimes content was shared informally between teachers on social media:

*"I sometimes use teaching Facebook groups because ... there's a really nice culture of sharing stuff and sharing links, it might be stuff that people have made or just things that people have used that have been useful ... I tend to find that's quite a good way to see what people have actually used that works in schools. So I'll just search on different groups that I'm in and see what works." – **secondary school teacher, London***

The resources used took many different formats. According to our survey of secondary school teachers, videos were most common, with 73% of teachers having used these in the previous three years (Figure 13).

General information and guidance as well as lesson activities were also relatively common. Guest speakers were used by less than a quarter of respondents in the previous three years.

Figure 13: Type of online safety support or resources used in the last 3 years

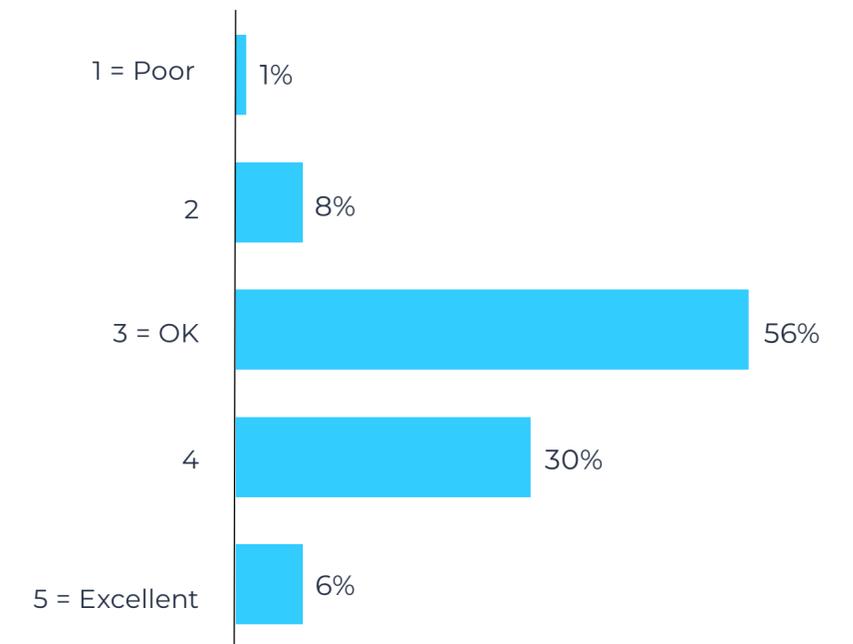


Q: What types of online safety support or resources have you used within the last 3 years?
 Base: Secondary school teachers n = 149 (those involved in online safety)

How adequately current resources meet teachers' needs?

At the time our research with schools was conducted, their assessment of the quality of resources available was mediocre. Just 36% of the secondary school teachers we surveyed said that they would rate the resources they had used in the past year as good or excellent. The majority rated them as 3, simply 'okay' (Figure 14). Similarly, our focus groups with primary school teachers indicated the generally poor quality of resources as being one of the most significant barriers they faced when teaching online safety.

Figure 14: Quality of online safety support used in schools?



Q: Overall, how would you rate the quality of the online safety support and resources you have used over the last year?
 Base: Secondary school teachers n = 143 those who had used online safety resources

One of the key problems faced in both primary and secondary schools was the **lack of a comprehensive one-stop-shop** where teachers could access high quality content in all the areas needed. This is likely in part a reflection of the fact that **online safety education is split across different curriculum areas, in addition to safeguarding**, making it less obvious where teachers need to go for resources. Teachers emphasised how time consuming it is to keep abreast of curriculum and safeguarding requirements in this space, find relevant resources and then pre-screen them for quality.

Primary school teachers spoke of an additional challenge in finding resources which dealt with **topics and platforms which were supposedly off-limits to children**, but which they knew were being accessed. Examples included adult content and WhatsApp. Resources based around the curriculum did not cover topics such as these.

Furthermore, teachers noted that the resources they used went out of date quickly, failing to keep pace with changes in the technology and platforms used by children:

“No one really tells you ‘this is the thing that the kids are using now, this is the social media’. I find PowerPoints really quickly go out of date ... I get it out and it’s referencing something and they’re all like ‘Oh miss no one uses Snapchat anymore’, it does go out of date.”
– **secondary school teacher, North West England**

How teachers’ experiences of using resources could be improved

Our focus groups with secondary school teachers explored what they would be looking for from better quality resources.

1. Engaging for pupils

The clearest (and unsurprising) theme was that resources **needed to be engaging for pupils**. There was a preference for video content, case studies and interactive or scenario driven learning, with a focus on the most popular platforms and online trends of the day. Teachers spoke of how current resources could be improved in this regard:

“I think having some possibly constantly updated but certainly some very up-to-date video clips, age appropriate. They don’t have to be very long but perhaps British so we’re not just using American stuff off YouTube and we have some stuff that’s specifically made for our context, a bit more relatable for the students who are going to watch them” – **secondary school teacher, Yorkshire and the Humber**

Although teachers currently favour resources they can use with pupils, as outlined above, they saw the value of **resources which had a dual purpose**, enabling them to enhance their own understanding of online safety topics too. This would help overcome the fact that they are time poor and lacking capacity to find different resources for different purposes. Teachers in our research also indicated that they would value online resources over hard copy ones, and that editability is valuable so that they can be tailored to meet the particular needs of their cohorts.

In line with the findings set out above which showed that secondary school teachers were less confident dealing with (1) viewing of sexual and violent content, and (2) sharing of sexual images, there was clear appetite for resources dealing with these topics. **Two thirds (67%) of respondents indicated they would like to see more resources on these two themes** – joint top with online bullying.

2. Provider preference

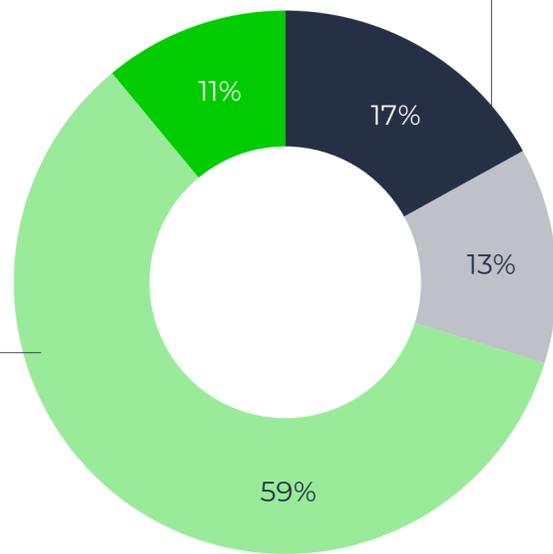
Our focus groups with secondary school staff also considered who they would be most happy to receive resources from – in particular, how they perceived resources provided by social media platforms. The majority of teachers responding to our survey (59%) indicated that they would be **likely to use resources produced by social media platforms** (Figure 15). This was on the basis that platforms themselves would have the most up-to-date information about their services and how they were being used. There was also a feeling that content produced by these platforms could be more instinctively engaging for pupils. Nevertheless, concerns were expressed about how far resources produced by platforms could be trusted. In free text responses in the survey, some respondents said that more **partnerships between social media companies and NGOs** could overcome this challenge.

Figure 15: Likelihood for a school to consider using a resource produced by a social media platform to support teachers

■ Net Unlikely (1-3 out of 7) ■ Undecided (4) ■ Net Likely (5-7) ■ Unsure

“I would have concerns about the social media platform’s ability to be honest about the use of its own services.”

Survey respondent



“The companies are best placed to understand the habits of young people, so they can use this information to create a resource to help teachers.”

Survey respondent

Q: How likely would your school be to consider using a resource produced by a social media platform to support teachers with online safety?

Base : Secondary school teachers n = 218

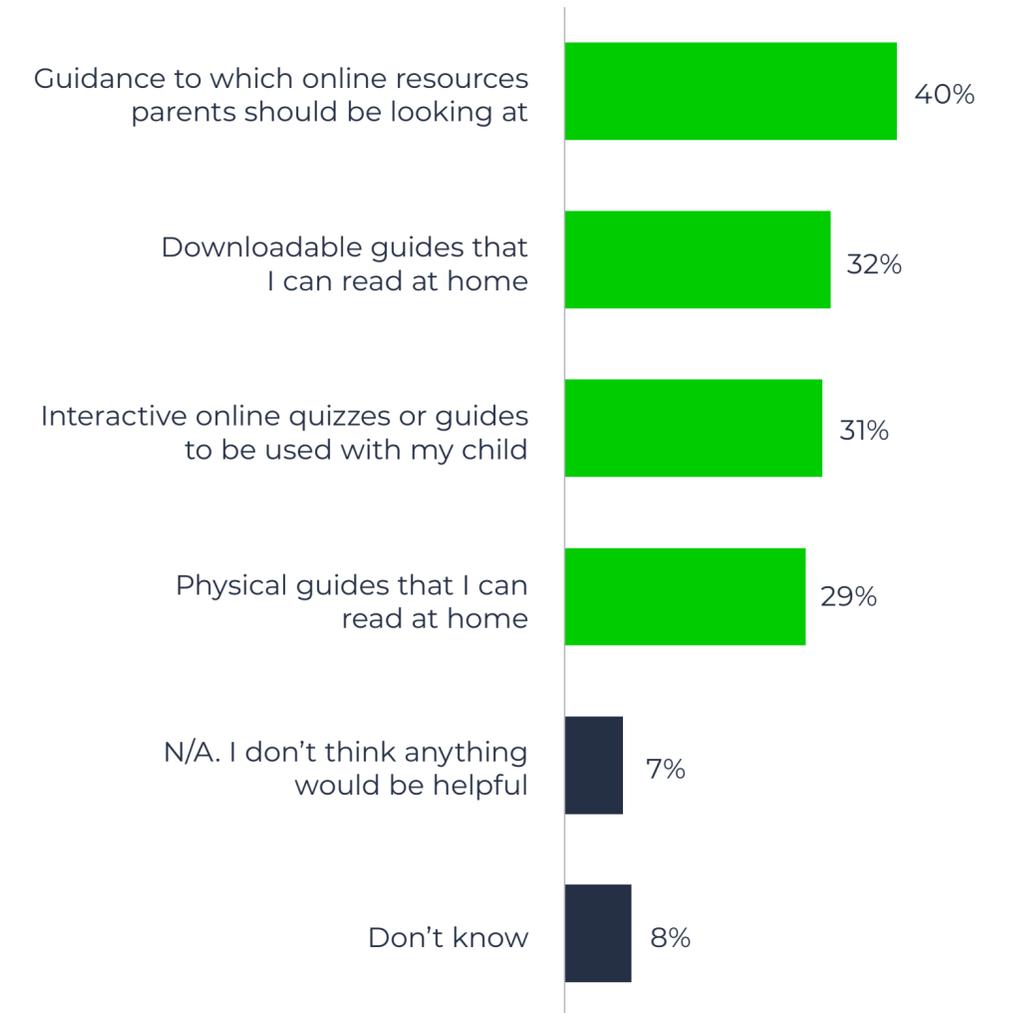
Resources for use with parents

As set out above, **the majority of secondary school teachers reported never using resources with their parents.** Yet half of secondary school teachers we surveyed said they would **be likely to use a resource with parents, if the right one existed** (in contrast less than 3 in 10 said they would be unlikely to do so). Primary school teachers focused on the need for resources to help them advise parents on setting parental controls and locking access to certain content.

This is matched by an appetite amongst parents for more resources from the school. Our November 2022 tracker survey asked parents which online safety materials they would find it most helpful to receive from the school, if any. **The overwhelming majority of respondents identified at least one item on the list.** Just 15% of parents answered “Not applicable – nothing would be helpful” or “don’t know”, decreasing to 10% of parents of vulnerable children (Figure 16).

The most popular item on the list was “guidance about which online resources parents should be looking at” (40%). This shows an appetite amongst parents to be signposted to providers of quality advice and resources by their child’s school. Fewer and roughly similar proportions supported receiving downloadable guides for them to read at home, interactive quizzes to use with their child and physical guides to read at home.

Figure 16: Materials schools could provide which would be deemed helpful



X4A. Finally, thinking about materials your child/children's school might provide to help you keep them safe online, which, if any, of the following would be most helpful for you? Base: Parents (2,000)

Conclusions

This research demonstrates that while schools consider online safety a priority, many find it difficult in reality to match this commitment with quality teaching and support. The reasons behind this are complex, but one factor appears to be particularly significant: a lack of time to engage with online safety, in terms of both time with pupils and staff training time. This is compounded by the fact that planning is complicated due to the subject being split across RSHE, Computing and non-subject time interventions (e.g. assemblies). It can be particularly difficult for teachers to respond to the needs of vulnerable children, who often need a tailored approach.

These findings suggest that there are fundamental questions about how effectively the current model can support schools to deliver in this space. But in the absence of significant changes to curriculum policy, there are still ways in which schools, parents and most importantly children can be better supported. **Below are some key priorities for improvement**, which can be used to inform the Department for Education's ongoing review of RSHE, along with how Internet Matters is responding.

Teachers told us that they wanted access to **high quality resources** – those which are truly engaging for children, regularly updated and dealing with the topics they felt less confident on, such as sexual content and particular platforms. While the online safety sector is working hard to continually expand its offer, it can be challenging for schools to know how to find resources they can trust and how they fit into the curriculum. The challenge is to make this process simpler.

- There is also a need for **better join up between school and home**. Internet Matters is expanding our research on this topic, by regularly exploring parents' experiences with their child's school through our twice-yearly tracker study. We will continue to share our findings regularly.

- There is clear awareness amongst schools (and parents) of the importance of **supporting pupils in relation to sexualised content and the sharing of sexual images**, but a lack of confidence in doing so. Internet Matters has recently kicked off dedicated work exploring what works in preventing children aged 11-13 from sharing sexual images, as well as how policymakers and industry can respond more effectively to this challenge and other forms of image-based abuse (e.g. sextortion, cyberflashing). We will be reporting on this work throughout the year, including a formal report to be published this summer.

Further data is available. Please contact Simone Vibert, Head of Policy and Research, at simone.vibert@internetmatters.org.

Resources for schools from Internet Matters

Digital Matters is an award winning resource for KS2 teachers. It is an interactive learning platform which engages children with story-based activities and also includes resources to be used by parents at home.

<https://www.internetmatters.org/digital-matters/>

The TikTok Playbook provides a vital overview for teachers on how this popular platform works, its latest safety and privacy features and advice on identifying potential safeguarding issues.

<https://www.internetmatters.org/tiktok-playbook/>



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