2016

CyberSafeIreland Annual Report

Foreword by Professor Brian O'Neill

It is just 25 years since the World Wide Web became a reality when Sir Tim Berners-Lee created the first website to go live to the public. Now, two and a half decades later, three billion users are online, one billion of whom are children. Social networking sites are even more recent in origin and today, kids use all kinds of connected devices to communicate and socialise through the Internet. Young people have always been to the fore in adopting new media technologies. Today's children are a generation of 'digital natives' never having known what it was like not to be able to connect anytime, anywhere with anyone and to have access to the unlimited resources the internet offers. Mostly, children use Information and communication technologies (ICTs) for fun, games and entertainment. But ICTs are also incredibly powerful learning tools that provide access to almost unlimited knowledge, enabling children to explore, learn and discover the world around them wherever they are. Computing devices are also inherently creative and give children a host of opportunities to learn new skills, create new content and express themselves through powerful communication platforms.

Just as with any powerful tool, children need the skills to use the Internet effectively and to ensure they get the benefits of what today's technology-rich environment has to offer. We cannot assume that because of the ease with which children take to ICTs, that they have the necessary skills, knowledge or experience to use technology safely or wisely. Cyber safety is a set of skills and competencies that children need to learn in order to act in a safe and responsible manner when they use ICTs and go online. It is about being safe and secure, understanding the risks that being in a connected environment might involve. It is also about being respectful of others and responsible in the use of technology so that it plays a positive, enriching and empowering role in young people's lives.

Educating children to be safe and to be responsible digital citizens is now an important priority for governments everywhere as well as for the technology industry, for educationalists and not least for parents. There are many educational programmes and internet safety resources available and sometimes the array of advice available can be bewildering. *CyberSafeIreland* was established to provide expert, balanced and professional guidance to schools, children and to parents in the safe and responsible use of all communications technologies. It has a particular focus on supporting children aged 9 to 12 when they are first exploring many aspects of online communication and unfortunately can be victim to bullying, harassment and other kinds of abuse. In its first year, it has reached out to over schools in Dublin and Wicklow, provided tailored workshops and training sessions in cyber safety to over 2300 children as well as almost 250 parents. Providing children at an early age with the skills to navigate the online world safely and securely is the best foundation for positive future online engagement. That, alongside supportive parental communication, is key to making technology an enabling and rewarding environment for the digital generation.

Brian O'Neill

Brian O'Neill is Director of Research, Enterprise and Innovation Services for the three partner institutions of TU4Dublin. Brian's research focuses on children's digital literacy, online safety and participation in the information society. He also leads the EU Kids Online project (EU Safer Internet Programme) in Ireland.

Highlights

CyberSafeIreland has spoken directly to 2,321 children aged between 8 and 13 and 239 parents across Dublin and Wicklow.

Despite age restrictions of 13 and older on many social media services, the vast majority of children that we have met already had a significant online presence.

Snapchat and Instagram were the most popular instant messaging and social media apps along with YouTube amongst the children surveyed

At least one child in 82% of the sessions we provided was playing adult rated games.

19% of the children surveyed spent in excess of 4 hours online a day

28% of children surveyed were in online contact with a stranger either occasionally or every day

64% of teachers surveyed reported that they do not feel sufficiently resourced to effectively deliver educational messages on Internet safety, notwithstanding the fact that 84% of teachers address Internet safety in the curriculum

100% of teachers we spoke to feel that getting experts on Internet safety into schools was beneficial and 100% would recommend our sessions to other teachers

Also see Recommendations at the end of this report

1. Introduction

Irish children and young people are using online technology more actively than ever before. 72% of Irish children use the Internet daily in their homes, and this uptake increases with age - a recent national survey reported rates of domestic access increasing from 53% of 9-10 year olds to 92% of young adolescents[1]. Children's online access has increased considerably in Ireland, due, in part, to their increasing use of mobile online devices and the ready accessibility of a myriad of apps, games, social media and other online services. With rapidly improving digital infrastructure and an increasing policy focus on the integration of technology within the Irish educational curriculum (e.g. the Department of Education's national Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020), online living and learning has become firmly embedded in the lives of Irish children.

The online world has created unprecedented opportunities for children to socialise, create, learn and develop new skills online. However, while major policy emphasis has been placed on developing media literacy and digital skills with Irish children, comparatively little attention has been placed on the social and personal impact of their online activity. One in five Irish children (20%) report that they have been upset by something online in the past year, a figure that has more than doubled since 2011.[2] As children's use of digital technology advances, so too does their vulnerability to online risk and harm. These risks range from more rare and extreme problems such as sexual grooming, extortion and self-harm, to more common problems such as bullying, peer-perpetrated abuse, privacy violations and access to inappropriate content, all of which have become familiar experiences for many Irish children. More recently, particular concern has been expressed about Irish children's exposure to age-inappropriate content such as pornography, and related problems of early sexualisation.[3]

International research evidence attests to the negative impact of these problems on children's mental health and wellbeing. So great is the concern around the implications of Irish children's online activity that the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (ISPCC) has described online safety as 'the child protection issue of our time'.[4] These concerns have been prompted by a stark increase in the number of children contacting its Childline service to report experiences of online violence, abuse, bullying and exposure to age-inappropriate content. These experiences can be detrimental to children's social and emotional development, their relationships, and even their understanding of what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. [5]

One positive corollary of increasing online access and the work of online safety stakeholders such as *Webwise.ie* is that Irish children report that their digital safety skills have increased. However, compared to other European countries, their skill levels remain slightly below the average.[6]

[1] O'Neill, B. & Dinh, T. (2015) Net Children Go Mobile: Full findings from Ireland. Dublin: Dublin Institute of Technology
[2] O'Neill & Dinh, 2015
[3] Helping children to be children: ISPCC Annual Report 2015 (July 2016); Kiely et al (2015) http://www.dcya.gov.ie/documents/research/20160816TheSexualisationCommercialisationChildrenIrl.pdf
[4] ISPCC, 2016 (page 5)
[5] ISPCC Annual Report 2014, (April 2015)
[6] O'Neill & Dinh, 2015

Moreover, less than 20% of Irish parents report actually supervising their children's online activity[7], while children lack the maturity and awareness to effectively safeguard themselves in the online world. Therefore without the right support structures in place, children continue to be left vulnerable to online risks. In order to engage children, parents and teachers effectively with the online safety agenda, and meaningfully respond to children's needs around online safety, it is critical to keep apace with the fast-changing reality of their online experiences, as well as the experiences and needs of parents and teachers in relation to online safety provision. This is the first of a series of reports that aims to provide a snapshot of this information, based on a series of large-scale, rolling consultations with Irish children, parents and teachers under the aegis of the CyberSafeIreland schools programme for digital wellbeing.

2. About CybersafeIreland

CyberSafeIreland was established in September 2015 with a mission to reach every child in Ireland with key messages on keeping safe online and safeguarding their digital wellbeing. We officially rolled out the initiative in schools in January 2016, and have provided sessions across Dublin and Wicklow. We prioritise children from disadvantaged backgrounds because they may experience particular challenges in accessing advice and support on matters of online safety.

Our core work is with children in primary schools. We are usually commissioned by principals, parents associations or home-school liaison coordinators. Teachers tell us all the time that it is incredibly beneficial for them to have an expert come in to talk to the children - we have consistently received excellent testimonials, e.g. "*I was delighted… The facilitator quickly built a good rapport with the pupils who were interested and engaged throughout… they will be more aware and better equipped to deal with the online world."* Listening to children, being knowledgeable about the apps and games that they use, the YouTubers they follow, as well as the risks, enables us to really engage them and to positively influence their online behaviour and wellbeing.

2.1 Feedback on our First Year

We have been operational for one year, having set-up in September 2015. We spent the first few months putting together an excellent board of trustees and special advisors, including national and international experts with a wide range of expertise including young people's use of the Internet, online child exploitation, cybercrime investigation, law, accountancy and organisational management. We are a charity registered with the Charity Regulatory Authority and are on the adoption journey to comply with the Governance Code, Ireland's code of good practice for the community and voluntary sector.

We also invested considerable time in the research and development of our education materials, ensuring that they reflected current trends as well as best practice, in an age and stage appropriate manner. We have met widely with key stakeholders, including teachers, principals, parents and members of the community and voluntary sector, statutory agencies, law enforcement, and industry

[7] O'Higgins Norman & McGuire, 'A Survey of Parents Internet Usage and Knowledge' (2016)

to ensure that we formed a comprehensive picture of how Internet safety is being addressed in Ireland today and also to explore opportunities for collaboration and partnership. We assisted Shine Ireland on the Internet safety content for an app they have developed for children on the autism spectrum and SpunOut also worked with us on a prevention campaign around 'what I wish someone had told me about the Internet when I was 12'.

Awareness-raising is an important part of our strategy and we have invested considerable time in developing a presence on social media and in preparing opinion pieces for our website and the national press. We have also applied for funding to undertake further research on such areas as children's digital rights and to collect baseline information from schools and parents that would improve current provision for children on online safety and wellbeing.

From January to June, we made 43 school visits across Dublin and Wicklow. 68% of the schools we visited were DEIS schools, i.e. schools that have been identified as serving disadvantaged communities under the national ***Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools*** (DEIS) programme. We provided parents talks for 22 schools.

2.2 Funding

We have a five-year funding strategy and business plan in place. We intend to publish our accounts on an annual basis and we will publish our first year's figures early in 2017. In terms of income, we charge schools a modest fee for our services. These fees do not fully cover our costs but they are an important factor in our sustainability as an organisation. To date, we have also received funding from a foundation and a private benefactor and we have also won two grants but details of these have not yet been made public.

3. Irish children's online activity and challenges to well-being: Key issues

3.1 Our first year in numbers

The data presented in the following sections was collected between January and June 2016 from children, parents and teachers. Our focus is on children in primary schools in 4th – 6th class. We visited schools across Dublin and Wicklow. A summary is provided below:

- We have spoken directly to 2,321 children and 239 parents.
- 223 children completed the feedback form:
    - 133 (60%) males
    - 90 (40%) females
- Five children did not provide an age, but of the 218 that did:
    - 44 (20%) were aged 8 – 9 years
    - 134 (62%) were aged 10 – 11 years
    - 40 (18%) were aged 12 – 13 years
- 161 parents completed feedback forms.
- 74 teachers attended our sessions with the children and completed feedback forms.

- 68% (15) of the schools we visited were DEIS schools, i.e. schools that have been identified as serving disadvantaged communities under the national ***Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools*** (DEIS) programme.

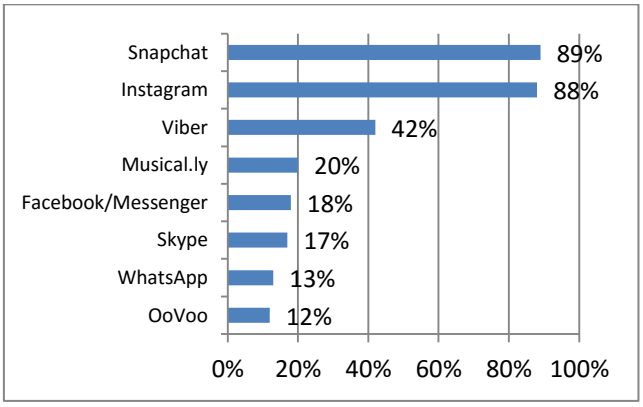
3.2 Key Findings

Children

Popular apps and games

Whilst most social media platforms and instant messaging apps are available only to those aged 13 and older to comply with their terms of service, the vast majority of the children to whom we have spoken are under the age of 13 and **most already have a notable online presence.** Many of the children, parents and teachers to whom we have spoken are unaware of age restrictions. All need support and education to empower them to manage their online experiences in a safe and responsible way.

Through our discussions with more than 2,300 children we have found that **Snapchat and Instagram are by far and away the most popular social media and messaging apps** at the moment. In every session that we do with children, we ask them which apps they are using. Snapchat was one of the top three apps used by children in 89% of the sessions that we did, while Instagram was one of the top three apps in 88% of the sessions that we undertook with school children. It's worth noting again that the vast majority of children that we speak to are under the age of 13.



Apps that most often featured in the 'top three' apps

The above graph depicts the apps that most often featured in the most popular apps in the sessions we delivered. YouTube also featured hugely in our conversations with children, but has not been included in the graph above as most children we met were merely consumers of YouTube, i.e. they enjoyed watching videos. Only a small minority had their own account (channel) on YouTube and/or had posted videos. However, we did come across children as young as 8 or 9 who were posting videos of themselves on YouTube, and this is an area of some concern for us. Content on YouTube is usually openly shared rather than being restricted to a list of friends. Sharing videos of themselves could make children more vulnerable to a whole range of risks including peer abuse and online

grooming and extortion. We've spoken to many children who have been exposed to mean comments on videos that they've posted online. Other children noted that when they tried to intervene with a nice comment in support of a friend, they in turn had been subjected to bullying.

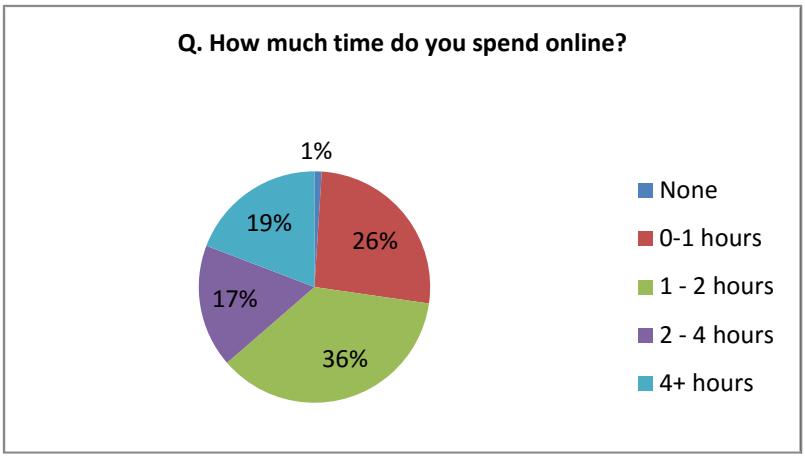
It was also apparent that children do not in general restrict themselves to one site; they have a wide-ranging online presence. And yet when we talk to parents about the apps that their children are using, e.g. Snapchat, Instagram and Musical.ly, not all of the parents present will have heard of these apps, and only a very small minority will have used them.

TIPS FOR PARENTS: explore with your children the apps and games that they enjoy and agree together the safeguards that you can put in place to protect the identity of your child, e.g. applying privacy settings. Ensure that your child is not sharing their location. Location sharing should be turned off on devices for cameras and also within the safety or privacy settings for each app.

We noted that in 82% of sessions that we did with children, there was at least one child in the class playing games with a PEGI [8]rating of 18. This is an adult classification, an indication that the game includes high-levels of violence and sexual behaviour and/or language, references to drugs or gambling, or perhaps that it has multiplayer aspects. Parents need to be aware of the content of the games their children are playing in order to make a sound judgement about its appropriateness for the age and stage of their child. While the research shows that some of this content could negatively harm children, parents should also be mindful of other risks, including peer abuse and online grooming that can result from children playing games online in multiplayer environments.

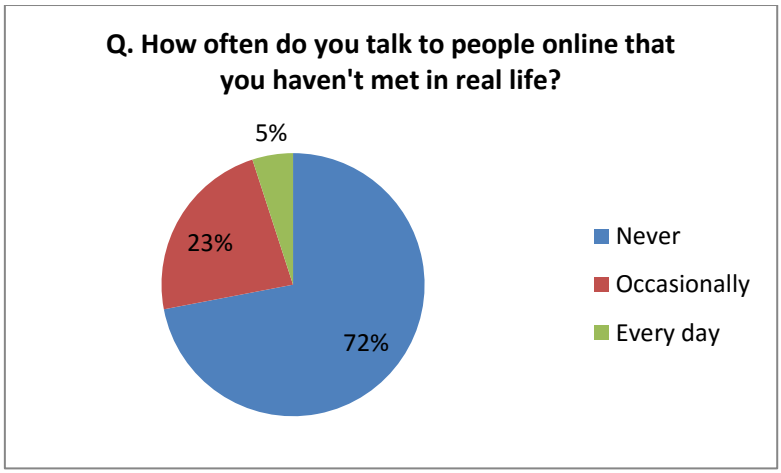
TIPS FOR PARENTS: actively research any game that your child wants to play, regardless of the PEGI rating. We have come across games with a PEGI rating of 3, which means that it is theoretically suitable for children aged 3 and up, that essentially provide a chatroom for children to talk to others playing the game. This presents an increased risk of peer abuse or online grooming. Parental supervision is particularly important where games involve online interaction. Privacy / safety settings for that game should be explored and make sure that you have the conversation with your child around appropriate online behaviour for themselves and others. Also be aware of hidden costs, such as in-app purchases.

[8] PEGI is the Pan-European Game Information age rating system to help parents make informed decisions about the age suitability of computer games. For an explanation of the age ratings used, see: http://www.pegi.info/



We asked children how much time they spent online per day, and the most commonly reported amount of time was 1-2 hours. We also noted that **19% of those surveyed had in excess of 4 hours of time online a day**. We often get asked by parents how much screen time is appropriate for their children. In the past, advice for parents (e.g. that provided by the American Academy of Pediatrics)[9] has largely focused on the amount of time children spend online. However, this guidance fails to take into account the nature of the activities undertaken by young people, which may be passive but equally may be highly interactive and collaborative. In their recent media policy brief, the London School of Economics argue that parents should instead ask themselves and their children questions about where, when, how and what digital media are accessed and whether relationships are facilitated or impeded[10].

TIPS FOR PARENTS: know what your child is doing and seeing online. Talk to them regularly about this and set reasonable time-limits and boundaries to ensure that the usage is not excessive or detrimental to their overall health and well-being. Create device-free zones and times where possible.



[9] https://www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/aap-health-initiatives/Pages/Media-and-Children.aspx
[10] http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/66927/1/Policy%20Brief%2017-%20Families%20%20Screen%20Time.pdf

Another point of interest arising from the feedback forms was that **28% of the children were in contact with a stranger online either occasionally or every day.** This contact could involve varying circumstances, for instance, some children told us they regularly play games online with gamers that they don't know, sometimes because they have been invited into a group in which they wouldn't know every other child. Others may have accepted friend requests on social media or messaging apps from someone who they believed to be a friend of someone they already know. In some of these cases, contact with strangers is of significant concern, particularly for the 5% of children who are in contact with a stranger on a daily basis. Unfortunately for all its positive aspects, the Internet presents increasing opportunities for sexual predators to meet and groom children online. **In many cases, there's a huge gap between what parents know and what kids are doing.** This knowledge gap needs to be bridged so that parents can put appropriate protections in place to safeguard their children's wellbeing when online. Communicating with others online can be fun but it is important that parents know what children are doing online and to whom they are talking.

The Internet allows children to connect effortlessly with others around the world. It can however, also enable online predators to seek out children. Potential perpetrators can access multiple victims in a way that wasn't possible before, with hundreds of victims being targeted online by a single perpetrator in some cases[11]. While such cases are extremely rare, parents need to be vigilant and look out for the signs of potential harmful contact.

TIPS FOR PARENTS: keep a close eye on what your child is seeing and doing online and ensure that you do not rely solely on technical means such as parental controls. The most important thing is that as parents we are educated on the risks, learn how to keep safe online and have the conversations to help empower our children to make smart decisions.

Parents

A key objective of our education programme is to reach parents and enhance their awareness of the risks, opportunities and safeguards relating to Internet use. We tailor our parent sessions to each school, and discuss specific apps and games that their children are using as well as helping them to develop strategies to keep their children safe online.

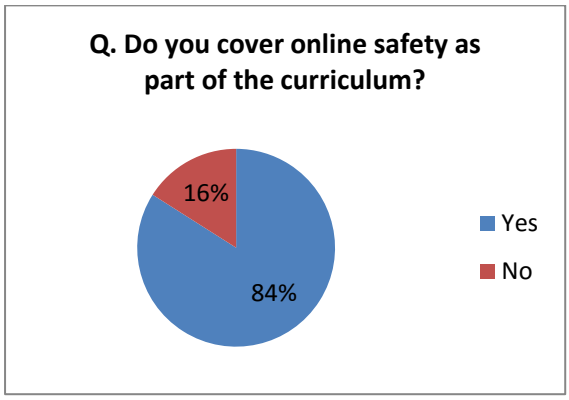
Feedback from parents indicated that the topics which they found most useful were social media & messaging apps, gaming and parental controls. We find that parents sometimes arrive at our sessions with the specific goal of identifying appropriate technical controls or tools for monitoring their child's internet activity. We discourage over-reliance on technical controls, which can be very useful for younger children, but are less effective once they get older. Instead we recommend that parents use a combination of approaches including doing their research, starting the conversation about online usage early and agreeing boundaries and limits with their children. It is also important that parents model positive digital media behaviours, such as thinking before they share online, using privacy settings and having device free time.

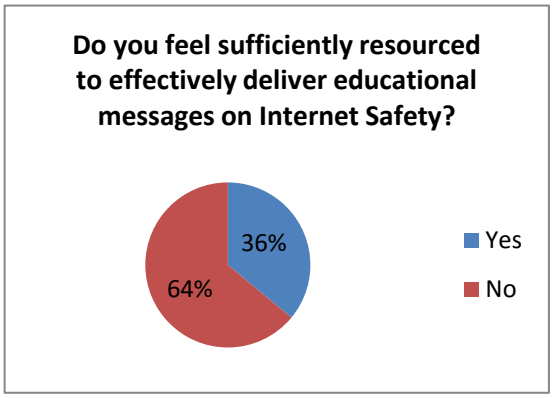
[11] https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2010/sep/24/paedophile-postman-jailed-500-children

Although we have received highly positive feedback from parents who have attended our sessions, a key challenge for us has been to get parents to attend in the first place. On one occasion, no parents showed up at one of our sessions. For this reason we need to explore more innovative ways of involving parents and raising their awareness levels.

Teachers

We ask class teachers to remain with the class throughout the session and to complete a feedback form at the end. The purpose of getting their feedback, beyond ascertaining their view on the quality of the session, is to understand better how Internet safety is addressed in their class/school and to gauge how they feel about addressing it with the children.





Whilst most teachers do cover Internet safety in one form or another (84%), the majority of teachers (64%) told us that they did not feel sufficiently resourced to effectively deliver educational messages on Internet safety. This is very concerning given that teachers are the main influence over child development, safeguarding and wellbeing outside of the home yet this statistic suggests that the majority don't feel confident to cover Internet safety. Training and information resources are available to them from the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) and Webwise.ie so further research is needed into why some teachers are not availing of the resources available to them. It could be that some teachers are not aware of them or that they don't feel it is a priority since they are not compulsory. It could also be that the material is not providing enough up-to-date knowledge of popular apps and games that would enhance the confidence of teachers in dealing with this topic in the classroom. It is crucial that guidance for children on Internet safety and positive online behaviour is not delivered in a standalone fashion once a year but instead is covered and referenced with children on an ongoing basis.

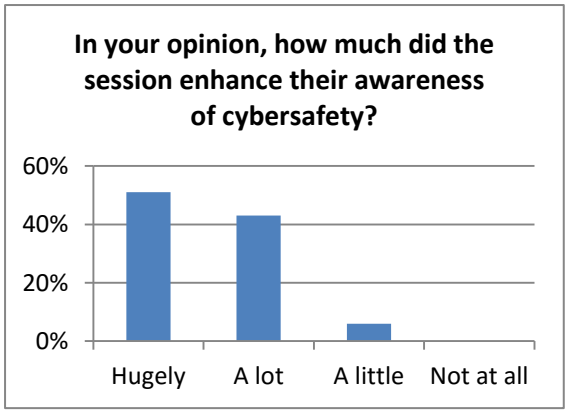
In our sessions with children we find it really beneficial to be completely up to date with the technology that the kids are using, as they become much more engaged in the conversation when talking about apps and games that they know and love. Often teachers tell us that they need more current information on the technology that the children are using as well as key messaging around appropriate behaviours.

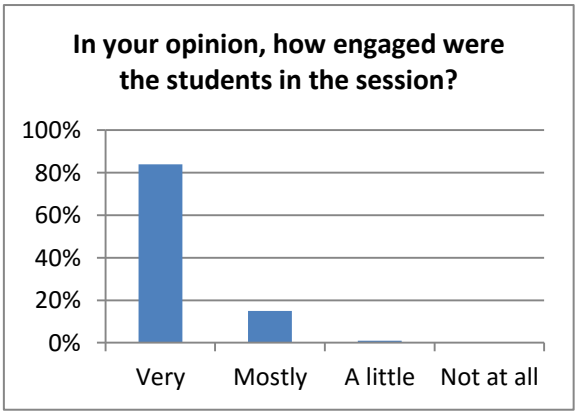
100% also told us that they felt cybersafety experts are beneficial and 94% felt that the children's knowledge had been enhanced either 'hugely' or 'a lot' by the end of the session, so we know that teachers really value expert support in this area.

Whilst schools are the obvious place for this kind of learning to take place, it is unreasonable to expect teachers to shoulder the entire responsibility. Technology is changing so fast that it is extremely challenging for even IT-savvy teachers to keep up. We have found that kids will use and discard many different apps and games in line with what their peers are currently using. While teachers need to stay abreast of the technology so that they have more confidence in discussing Internet safety on an ongoing basis with their pupils, education must focus on online behaviour. Education should also focus on building resilience in our children from a young age and address issues like consent in an age and stage appropriate manner, so that they can be better equipped to deal with potentially harmful online experiences.

3.3 How Did We Do?

74 teachers attended our sessions with the children and completed feedback forms.

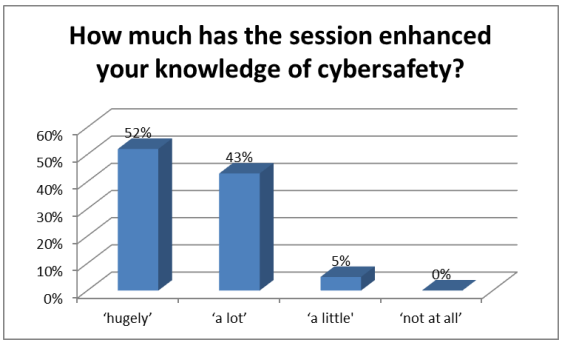


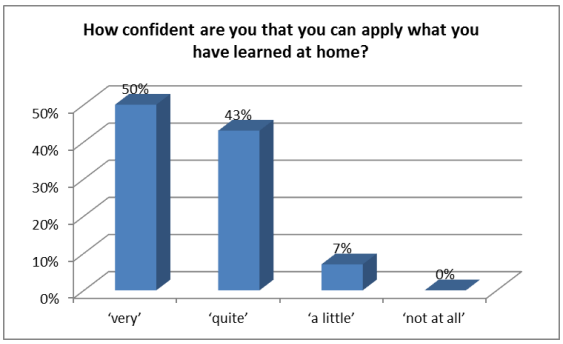


100% of teachers felt that visits by external cybersafety experts were beneficial.

100% of teachers said that they would recommend our sessions to other teachers.

We invested considerable time whilst developing the presentation material for parents in ensuring that the content provided the right balance between information on what kids are using, advice/support and actions parents can take including technical measures along with recommendations around good communication. The vast majority of parents (95%) felt that their knowledge had been significantly enhanced following the session.





Our sessions focus on empowering parents with information and practical tips rather than scaremongering and it is a key measure of success for us is that parents walk away feeling that there are positive actions they can take to support and protect their children online. Our feedback forms indicate that 93% of parents felt 'very' or 'quite' confident in applying the knowledge at home.

We know that parents are busy and they have a number of competing demands on their time so another key measure of success is whether not parents who attended our sessions feel that it was worthwhile. **100% of parents said that they would recommend our sessions to other parents.**

4. Conclusion

Notwithstanding age-restrictions on many apps and games, children under the age of 13 are accessing and using technology widely in Ireland today and often without appropriate supervision, support and boundaries in place. This report acknowledges the enjoyment and educational benefits that ICTs can deliver to children but it also recognises the risks and that many children lack the maturity levels to use them wisely; there are also significant gaps in the support available to schools and parents. We urgently need to work together to address Internet safety for children in a comprehensive and joined-up way so that we reach every child in Ireland. Parents, educators, the Government, industry and children themselves all have an essential part to play in ensuring that technology enriches, rather than damages, the lives of our children.

5. Recommendations

- Ireland needs a **national strategy on cybersafety.** This should be child-centred, focused on children's rights and developed in consultation with key stakeholders such as Internet safety experts, educators, children, parents, academics and industry.

- **All children need to be empowered to use the Internet in a safe and responsible manner** through effective education based on best practice methods. We need to listen to children of all ages to fully understand their online experiences, to help them develop responsible behaviours online, to help them understand risk, and to help build resilience. Whilst schools can clearly benefit from engaging external experts, Internet safety also needs to be addressed throughout the school year and across the curriculum.

- **At a minimum we need to ensure that all teachers are trained in delivering internet safety education.** We found that 64% of teachers did not feel sufficiently resourced in addressing Internet safety in the classroom. We need to explore this issue further since training and information sources on Internet safety are already available, if a teacher wishes to access them. It may be the case that teachers are unaware of these resources or it could be because the training is not compulsory. While the focus of in-service training should be on online behaviour as a whole, it would benefit the confidence levels of teachers to be briefed on popular and current apps and games on a regular basis.

- Guidance should be available to schools on how to apply **a whole school approach to Internet safety.** The UK has introduced a self-assessment model that allows schools to assess their online safety provision and this complements the official school inspection process, incorporating online safety as both an educational and safeguarding measure. We would recommend the introduction of a similar model in Ireland that is appropriate to the Irish context. Reference: http://www.360safe.org.uk/

- **Parents need to catch up with what their children are doing online.** We have found it challenging to reach large numbers of parents through direct educational sessions and we recognise the need to find innovative and engaging ways of reaching them. We would recommend developing awareness campaigns and public education programmes targeting parents on how to support their children to stay safe online and be responsible digital citizens.

- **Ireland needs a task force on Internet safety** with representatives from the tech industry, the community and voluntary sector, academia, statutory bodies, law enforcement and educators, politicians and other policy makers to ensure a collaborative and consistent approach to keeping children safe online. Ireland is in a unique position as host to the EMEA headquarters of many of the key social media platforms and we should be leading the way in this area.