

## Social media firms told to protect the young

Culture Secretary Michelle Donelan says social media giants will face “severe punishments” if they fail to stop young children using their platforms. While most social media sites require children to be aged 13 and over to create an account, there are concerns that simple “self-declaration” age checks are easily bypassed. Ofcom analysis in October found that a third of children on the sites had faked their ages to pass themselves off as being over 18. Amendments to the Online Safety Bill will require social media companies to inform parents of how they will enforce minimum age limits. They will also be required to publish their risk assessments for children. Failure to comply with the laws could lead to companies facing fines of up to 10% of worldwide revenue.

*The Times*

## Heads warn children at risk from county lines gangs

Headteachers across the UK have warned that the cost of living crisis is leading to rising numbers of pupils being groomed by sophisticated gangs to run drugs from cities to other parts of the country. Many say they are struggling to keep vulnerable children safe outside school, with cuts to youth support and other public services in local areas, and problems recruiting enough school support staff due to low pay. Geoff Barton, general secretary of the ASCL, said that a recent meeting of heads in the north of England had been dominated by fears about county lines gangs and “life outside school unraveling”. He added that county lines exploitation was “rife” in rural areas, where there was less support available from cash-strapped social services and police. Sara Cunningham, director of Diversify, says many schools have cut back on the number of staff on playground duty at lunchtime due to financial pressures, so gangs can approach young people then. Her charity has photos of gang members passing packages through school fences during lunch break.

*The Observer*

## More than 1m children referred for mental health treatment

New NHS figures have revealed that the number of children referred for NHS mental health treatment rose 39% in a single year, from 839,570 in 2020/21 to 1,169,515 in 2021/22. The data includes children suffering with suicidal ideation, self-harm, serious depression or anxiety, and eating disorders, while hospital admissions for eating disorders were up from 4,232 in 2019/20 to 6,079 in 2020/21 and 7,719 in 2021/22. Dr Elaine Lockhart from the Royal College of Psychiatrists says specialist services are needed to support the “most urgent and unwell”, while the NSPCC said the “alarming figures are sadly reflected in the conversations we are having through Childline”.

*The Daily Telegraph* *The Guardian* *The Independent* *The Times*

## Education sector leads Prevent referrals table

New data reveals that education sector has overtaken the police for the first time for referrals to the Government's counter-terrorism programme, Prevent. Analysis shows that the police made 1,808 referrals, or 28% of the total, compared with 1,829 for boys aged under 15 - or 29%. The education sector made 2,305 referrals to Prevent in total. It means that under-15s now made up the largest proportion of all age groups adopted as “channel cases”, which are those considered most at risk of becoming radicalised and turning to terrorism. Figures show that 154 referrals were related to concerns surrounding school massacres, while 77 were due to an association with the incel - or involuntary celibate - subculture, who consider themselves unable to attract women and become hostile and violent towards them. Overall, the largest number of referrals - 2,127, a third of the total - related to people “with a vulnerability present but no ideology or counter-terrorism risk”.

*The Times*

## Lockdowns linked to tenfold rise in child sex imagery

Imagery of young children carrying out sexual acts on camera has risen by more than tenfold since the pandemic lockdowns, new data suggests. The Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) says its data highlights how predators took advantage of the situation. Social media websites exploded in popularity in early 2020 when the pandemic began. Last year the IWF logged more than 63,000 webpages showing the material compared to 5,000 before the pandemic. The charity says it is confident that the rise in self-generated material it is seeing is because of an increase in activity, because reporting levels have remained relatively similar in recent years. Self-generated child abuse videos and images now make up two-thirds of imagery investigated by analysts. Of the imagery, more than 8,000 items contained what is classed as Category A material.

*BBC News*

## Schools cite Andrew Tate in rising referrals to Prevent

Counter-extremism workers have warned of a rapid rise in the number of cases being referred to them by schools concerned about the influence of the self-styled misogynist influencer Andrew Tate. Incidents include the verbal harassment of female teachers or other pupils and outbursts echoing Tate's views. Frontline practitioners delivering the government's counter-extremism Prevent programme told *the Guardian* Tate was a factor in cases dating into last year. One said: “From September he's just accelerated from nowhere to become a primary issue for schools that I have been dealing with.” Another commented: “Tate's conversion might be a stunt, but what it has done is feed into that kind of unclear and very messy ideological aspect that is now affecting a larger cohort of pupils in schools. Not only do you now have, for example, white kids who were drawn to him before but you now have young English Muslims too”.

*The Guardian*

## NSPCC report reveals surge in child abuse image crime

A report from the NSPCC shows that police have recorded a 66% increase in child abuse image offences in the UK over the past five years, with more than 30,000 reported in the most recent year. The charity warned that the increase was in part due to the “pervasive” issue of young

people being groomed into sharing images of their own abuse, with tech companies failing to stop their sites being used by offenders to “organise, commit and share child sexual abuse”. However, it also noted that improved police recording, greater awareness of abuse and survivors feeling more confident in coming forward can also contribute to higher numbers of recorded offences.

*The Daily Telegraph\_ The Guardian*