

SAFEGUARDING

Children's Commissioner launches probe on pornography harms

Children's Commissioner for England, Dame Rachel de Souza, has launched an inquiry into the harms of online pornography, amid concerns that access to extreme imagery is "normalising" sexual abuse and violence against women and girls. The inquiry will investigate cases reported to NHS abuse referral clinics and interview victims and perpetrators of peer-on-peer attacks, to see if there is a correlation with watching pornography. The Children's Commissioner is calling for the Government's Online Safety Bill to require pornography operators to fit age-verification software on sites and will push for better teaching in schools about the dangers of pornography and issues of consent and sexual violence. She said: "It really affects what boys think is normal and girls think is acceptable and they should be doing. There are issues around consent and whether it normalises rape porn." The move comes as the all-party Parliamentary group on commercial sexual exploitation was launched last year in the wake of the murder of Sarah Everard.

Daily Express

Major mental health scheme to launch in schools

A major £5m Government-backed mental health programme is to be rolled out in schools in an effort to reduce teenage suicide risk. Government health policy unit NHSX has worked with King's College London to develop Govox Wellbeing, a platform which will allow pupils from 1,000 state secondary schools the change to complete mental wellness "check-ins" for free. Participating pupils will answer a series of short questions about their overall mental health, and will be given a "wellbeing score". The platform will also flag any findings of concern to the pupil's school and highlight those whose mental health is at "high risk". However, *The Telegraph* highlights that the platform will not automatically notify parents if their child has been flagged as "high risk" of suicide, which is the responsibility of internal school pastoral care networks. The scheme is being rolled out in partnership with suicide prevention charity Papyrus, the Mental Health Foundation and local Mind groups. This comes after Govox research found that one in 14 children have attempted suicide by the age of 14, with teenage suicide rates rising by 45% over 10 years. Govox co-founder Richard Lucas said: "This marks a very important day for the wellbeing of pupils in our schools across the country. We truly want to make mental health support available to as many pupils in the UK as possible. Tight budgets should not stop them getting the help that both the data and the personal experience of so many shows is urgently needed."

The Times *London Evening Standard*

Schools warn parents of children abusing laughing gas

The *Mirror* reports that schools have issued warnings to parents about the dangers of children abusing Smartwhip cylinders, which are sold to caterers online through Amazon and eBay for whipping cream. The nitrous oxide - laughing gas - is also used by more than half a million 16- to 24-year-olds to get high, with five children a year on average dying from the dangerous effects. Smartwhip capsules, which can be bought in bulk, contain 76 times more nitrous oxide than the smaller silver ones which can often be seen "littering streets and parks". A warning notice sent out by schools from the charity Change Grow Live highlights that this means "there is no control of how much is consumed".

Mirror.co.uk

Record number of young people on anti-terrorism course for far-right views

The *Mirror* reports that a record number of children and young people have been referred to the Channel anti-terrorism course for having far-right views. Home Office figures show that 70 under-15 with far-right views were referred to the programme last year, along with 129 15- to 20-year-olds for the same reason, compared to 20 under-15s and 47 aged 15 to 20 five years ago. This comes as the number referred to Channel for being at risk of Islamic extremism fell from 262 to 152 over the same period. Channel is a voluntary scheme, which is part of the Prevent programme, and aims to help young people at risk of radicalisation. Nigel Bromage, founder of campaign group Exit Hate, claims that economic stressed could be a factor in the rising cases, adding: "We need to support people to walk away from hate via education, compassion and understanding."

Mirror.co.uk

Vaping craze emerging in schools

The Times reports that a craze for brightly coloured, sweet-flavoured e-cigarettes is emerging in British schools, with social media sites including TikTok filled with posts of young people smoking them. Disposable vapes, which contain as much nicotine as up to 50 cigarettes, come in flavours such as candy floss and blue raspberry, do not require charging and filling and cost as little as £4 a pen. The #elfbar hashtag on TikTok, which has nearly 7m views, features videos of pupils vaping in class or talking about vaping in front of teachers. Research by the charity Action on Smoking and Health found recently that 11.2% of 11 to 17 year olds in Britain had tried vaping last year. Although the official retailers have verification policies to prevent under- age sales, industry leaders are calling for tight regulation to stop unscrupulous traders from targeting youths.

The Times

Harrow teacher suspended after discussing pupils on busy train

Philip Evans, the head of safeguarding at **Harrow School**, has been suspended after claims that he had discussed confidential details about pupils on a busy train. The conversation was overheard by a journalist from *Mail Online*, which reported last night that Evans's school identity lanyard was clearly visible. It is claimed that Evans discussed the ability of certain children to sit GCSE exams, their sexual identity, their health and wellbeing and

safeguarding concerns. Evans also allegedly commented on the state of one pupil's mental health while repeatedly referring to the boy by his first name and giving details of how the pupil expressed his feelings. Harrow, which charges £14,555 per term, said: "We are deeply concerned to hear that a trusted staff member who holds such a critical role within our school community may have apparently betrayed that trust." It said the teacher had been suspended with immediate effect as "a neutral act" while the school investigated.

The Times Daily Mail

Head issues warning over screen-addicted pupils

Sophie Gosden, head teacher at **The Mill Primary Academy**, has warned that young children are viewing more "distressing" content online after becoming addicted to phones during the Covid lockdowns, with many not wanting to be separated from their devices at night. She said online safeguarding incidents requiring teacher involvement had become "a regular occurrence". She has hired an extra staff member to join the school's pastoral team, but said the issue needed "a more strategic view from Governmental level and...more money being spent". Ms Gosden added that if more mental health support for children was not provided, problems would continue into secondary school where youngsters were already becoming "school refusers".

BBC News

Record numbers of children referred to mental health services

Figures from NHS have shown that a record numbers of children and young people are being referred to mental health services, with pressured staff dealing with two new cases a minute. March saw the highest monthly figure of referrals on record at 90,789, while experts warn that this is the "tip of the iceberg". Waiting lists at Children and Mental Health Services (CAMHS) have risen to three years in some parts of the country, with the service turning down 50% of applications for specialised help. The rise highlights the impact of the pandemic, as research by Oxford University shows that one in six children are now diagnosed with a mental health problem, up from one in nine before lockdown measures were introduced. The *Sunday Express* calls for a national network of "early support hubs" in every community, all schools to have mental health support teams and for CAMHS waiting times to be reduced to a maximum of four weeks.

Sunday Express