
Comisiynydd Plant Cymru Children's Commissioner for Wales

Sally Holland

By email:

23 September 2015

Mr William Powell AM/AC
Chair/Cadeirydd Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff CF99 1NA

Dear William Powell

Petition P-04-630 Facebook Regulations for Looked After Children

Thank you for your letter dated 18th June 2015 in relation to the above named petition. Unfortunately this letter was not received until 22nd September 2015 due to an administrative error on the part of the Petitions Committee; I would be grateful if this could be recorded on the Committee's records. I have endeavoured to respond as swiftly as possible upon receipt of the letter.

First and foremost, children who are looked after must have the same rights as all other children to access and benefit from technology, including social media. Article 13 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) gives children and young people the right to access information through any media of their choosing.

Foster carers and residential carers must be encouraged to act as any parent would in guiding and regulating safe behaviour on the internet. This includes discussing the risks and benefits of certain behaviours while using the internet. As any parent, carers should be reinforcing safety guidelines such as age restrictions on signing up for Facebook accounts and age restrictions on gaming.

It is my view that foster carers and residential carers should be provided with adequate training and support to ensure that they feel empowered to provide the safe care needed in terms of digital technology. This would be equally applicable to Local Authority carers and independent fostering agencies or residential care providers.

As a wider issue I think that all professionals working with children and young people would benefit from greater training in relation to online safety, as methods of online communication are developing rapidly and professionals need to keep pace with this in order to adequately safeguard children and young people. The 2015 report of the four UK Children's Commissioners to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child Examination of the Fifth Periodic Report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland¹ highlights the fact that although Wales has the "Hwb" digital learning platform, in a survey of 2081 13 and 14 year olds, only 40% of children report having lessons on newer platforms like Snapchat, Instagram, Kik and Twitter, which have been adopted by more than half of all the children.²

¹ <http://www.childcomwales.org.uk/uploads/publications/564.pdf>

² <http://wisekids.org.uk/wk/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/EnglishFinal.pdf>

23 September 2015

Page 2

Mr William Powell AM/AC

In addition, the education of parents and children on these matters is an urgent requirement right across Welsh society. Looked after children complain frequently that they are treated differently from other children, for example when bureaucratic barriers are put in place which prevent them from having sleepovers with friends or attending school trips. Carers should be encouraged to make responsible parenting decisions with support and advice as required but should also respond to the needs and abilities of individual children they care for.

I recognise that many looked after children are particularly vulnerable due to their difficult backgrounds, often involving abuse and neglect, and often complex relationships with birth families. This can present additional complexities in accessing social media and online information, so they therefore require particularly skilled, responsive and responsible care from their everyday carers. I agree that IROs should be alert to this issue and in review meetings encourage carers to gain the knowledge, skills and confidence to provide the care and protection regarding online safety that the particular child they care for needs.

In my response to the Tranche 2 consultation on the regulations and code of practice in relation to Part 6 of the Social Services and Well-being Act 2014 I have called for a revision of the IRO Guidance in Wales. However this is an issue that should also be considered by local authority decision makers and independent fostering agencies, to ensure that the relevant training and support is available to workers and carers to ensure that their corporate parenting responsibilities are discharged consistently to all children in their care, in order to safeguard children and young people in their online communications.

I look forward to receiving the conclusion of the Petitions Committee in due course.

Yours sincerely



Sally Holland
Children's Commissioner for Wales
