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My Lords,

During the Question for Short Debate on ‘Educational Technology’ on 23 November, I committed to write to you with more detail on the digital content in the National Curriculum, which I have outlined below.

The best way to prepare for an uncertain future is to develop a strong grounding in the knowledge that has proven most influential in building the world today. The English National Curriculum provides pupils with an introduction to the essential knowledge they need to become educated citizens, who are prepared for further study, employment, or life in a world increasingly dependent upon technology. Digital literacy is taught explicitly through the curriculum subjects of computing and Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE).

Computing

In September 2014, the Department for Education (DfE) introduced computing as a statutory English National Curriculum subject across Key Stages 1 to 4. The computing curriculum ensures that pupils become digitally literate, so that they can use, express themselves and develop their ideas through information and communication technology, at a level suitable for the future workplace and as active participants in a digital world. The broad set of principles outlined in the computing programmes of study were designed to avoid over prescription, providing schools with room to innovate, whilst supporting longevity in the content, given the speed of technological advancement.

Through the computing curriculum, pupils are taught how to select, use, and combine software and applications (including internet services) across a range of digital devices, and to understand computer networks. Pupils are taught how to understand the hardware and software components that make up computer systems, how to use search

technologies effectively, how to appreciate how results are selected and ranked, and be discerning in evaluating digital content.

The computing curriculum is also designed to ensure that all pupils learn the fundamental principles and concepts of computer science. England was one of the first G20 countries to introduce coding into the primary curriculum, with pupils taught how to analyse problems in computational terms and write simple computer programs, from Key Stage 1. This knowledge and understanding of programming and algorithms, alongside the use of information technology, provides the foundation for further study in areas such as cyber security, data analytics and artificial intelligence.

It is important to note that e-safety is embedded within the computing curriculum across all Key Stages, with progression in content to reflect the different and escalating risks that young people may encounter as they grow older. They are taught how to use technology safely, responsibly, respectfully and securely, how to keep their personal information private, how to recognise inappropriate content, contact and conduct, and where they can go for help and support when they are concerned about the content or contact they may come across on the internet, or via other online technologies.

To improve the teaching of the computing curriculum, and the computer science GCSE and A level, the DfE has invested over £100m in the National Centre for Computing Education (NCCE). The NCCE provides continuing professional development (CPD) through its network of over 30 school hubs and provides free online teaching resources which have been downloaded nearly two million times by teachers in English schools. To date, over 8,000 teachers have accessed the NCCE's 'Computer Science Accelerator' CPD, providing them with the subject expertise they need to teach the computer science GCSE with confidence.

RSHE

Since 2020, through the introduction of compulsory RSHE, pupils are taught about online relationships, the implications of sharing private or personal data (including images) online, harmful content and contact, cyberbullying and where to get help and support for issues that may occur online. Through RSHE, pupils are taught how to recognise risks, harmful content, and contact, and how and to whom to report issues. Pupils are taught to understand how data is generated, collected, shared, and used online, for example, how personal data is captured on social media, and to understand how businesses may exploit the data available to them. Pupils are taught that certain websites may collect and share personal data from their users, and that users' information about their internet use also may be collected for commercial purposes. In addition, pupils are taught how advertising and information may be targeted at them, and that criminals can operate online scams, for example using fake websites or emails to extort money or valuable personal information from individuals.

Schools should take these factors into account when planning teaching of these subjects and consider the overlap with their wider curriculum to ensure pupils know how to keep themselves and their personal information safe. To support teachers to deliver these topics safely and with confidence, the DfE has produced RSHE teacher training modules

'online and media' and 'internet safety and harms'. The DfE has also updated the Teaching Online Safety in Schools non statutory guidance (2023), on how to teach about all aspects of internet safety, not just those relating to relationships, sex, and health. This is to help schools deliver this in a coordinated and coherent way across their curriculum. A link to the guidance is here: [Teaching online safety in schools - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/teaching-online-safety-in-schools).

I can also advise that, on 31 March, the Secretary of State for Education announced the acceleration of the first review of the RSHE statutory guidance. It will go out to public consultation soon, with revised guidance published in 2024. The review is looking at how the guidance can be strengthened and give schools clearer guidelines for when to teach the most sensitive content. The DfE appointed an independent panel to advise on the ages at which certain topics should be taught, which considered how to balance the need to ensure pupils have the information they need ahead of a particular experience, against exposing them to explicit content before they have the capacity to understand and contextualise it.

Thank you again for your contributions to the debate. I hope these further details have been useful and I will place a copy in the House libraries.

Yours sincerely,



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