



Council of Catholic School Parents NSW/ACT

Submission to the Parliament of
Australia *House Select Committee
on Social Media and Online Safety*

12 January 2022

Preamble

This submission has been prepared by the Council of Catholic School Parents NSW/ACT (CCSP) representing the parents and carers of more than 275,000 students in approximately 630 Catholic schools in NSW/ACT.

CCSP thanks the *House Select Committee on Social Media and Online Safety* for the invitation to provide a submission to this Inquiry. This submission is made on behalf of the more than 150,000 families who choose to send one or more of their children to a NSW or ACT Catholic school.

CCSP is the officially recognised body representing the interests of parents and carers of children and young people in NSW and ACT Catholic schools. The work of the Council is guided by the principles of parental choice, equity, and social justice. CCSP provides leadership, advocacy and support to the parents and carers of children and young people in all Diocesan and Congregational Catholic schools in NSW and the ACT.

'Parents,' as the term is used in this submission, is intended to cover both biological and adoptive parents and other carers who are the primary carers of children and young people, including grandparents and recognised kinship carers.

This submission is in response to the Committee's published Terms of Reference. In particular, it addresses Terms of Reference (c) and (d), which relate to parents and children.

(c) the effectiveness, take-up and impact of industry measures, including safety features, controls, protections and settings, to keep Australians, particularly children, safe online;

(d) the effectiveness and impact of industry measures to give parents the tools they need to make meaningful decisions to keep their children safe online;

CCSP accepts that online experiences augment the learning, entertainment and social connections that take place in the real world. Because of this, CCSP supports parents in their quest for safe online environments for both themselves and their children. This is consistent with the [submission made by CCSP to the Australian Government's Online Safety Legislative Reform Discussion Paper](#) on 19 February 2020, which stated: *parents want a legislative framework in place that keeps them and their children safe online.*

Feedback

Parents are the first educators of their children.¹ This is not only true for parents in Catholic families or the parents of children in Catholic schools but all parents.

CCSP helps parents to establish safe online environments for their children by providing hints and tips for safer internet usage through a variety of methods.

- [CCSP website](#), [Parent Talk eNewsletter](#) and [facebook](#).
- Promoting online safety resources developed by the eSafety Commissioner.
- Collaborating with the eSafety Commissioner to deliver online safety webinars for parents and carers across NSW/ACT.

¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed., 2223.

CCSP acknowledges the expertise of the eSafety Commissioner in the area of social media and online safety. It is a reliable source of free resources that serve to educate members of the Australian community about the benefits and pitfalls of engaging in various online platforms. CCSP is grateful for the collaboration it enjoys with the eSafety Commissioner and looks forward to this continuing.

CCSP welcomes and applauds the passing of the *Online Safety Act 2021 (Cth)*, which strengthens the eSafety Commissioner's powers to help protect all Australians from the most serious forms of online harm.

CCSP supports and encourages efforts to educate all people to ensure that they enjoy a safe online experience for themselves and the children in their care.

Not all parents are digitally literate or have a full understanding of the potential short- and long-term risks that children may face from using social media platforms. This extends to their digital identity/footprint, personal reputation, viewing of age-inappropriate content and unknowingly breaking the law by possessing and forwarding certain images.

CCSP admits it can be challenging for users of technology, including parents, to understand and effectively navigate security settings on devices and online platforms. It is an area in which many parents are inexperienced and unskilled.

Anecdotal evidence exists to suggest that some parents either intentionally set up social media accounts for their children even though they are under the minimum user age, or, turn a blind eye to their children's use of age-inappropriate social media platforms. In either case, children's online safety and wellbeing is at risk. There does not seem to be any meaningful enforcement of identity verification and age assurance policies and practices. These seem to be all too easily circumvented or ignored.

Online harm may result from parents being unskilled and/or inexperienced in the use of social media platforms, such as the posting of inappropriate content or other forms of unacceptable conduct. A lack of awareness of the implications of such behaviour can lead to harm caused to others, whether inadvertent or intended. For example, commenting on a post thinking it is only going to be seen by a select group of friends when in fact its circulation is to a wider public audience.

Education is essential. The Australian community needs education campaigns that provide users of technology or anyone supervising children who use technology with an understanding of how to mitigate the risks that social media and online platforms might present.

These education campaigns should be multimedia campaigns that are not limited to being delivered online. They should consider how to reach parents with little or no digital literacy, low proficiency of written English or limited access to the internet. They should be tailored and targeted to meet the needs of each intended audience.

Conclusion

CCSP commends the House Select Committee on Social Media and Online Safety for conducting an Inquiry into this important area. In a world in which technology is advancing at a rapid rate, it is imperative that the Australian community continues to monitor closely all policies and practices designed to keep Australian safe online, particularly children. CCSP

acknowledges the challenge the Parliament of Australia faces in achieving this outcome. It is only through legislators working closely with parents and carers that we can best ensure that we and our children are kept safe online.

CCSP thanks the Parliament of Australia and the House Select Committee on Social Media and Online Safety for the opportunity to provide this submission and will happily contribute further, as requested.