



England Schools Online Safety Policy & Practice Assessment 2025

Annual Analysis of 360 degree safe self review data covering schools and colleges in England

Prepared By

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Overview

This report presents the 2025 analysis of data from nearly 13,000 schools and colleges in England using the *360 Degree Safe* self-review tool, which enables schools to assess, benchmark, and improve their online safety provision. Developed by SWGfL and launched in 2009, the tool covers 21 key aspects of digital safeguarding—from filtering and monitoring to staff training, leadership accountability, and community engagement—rated on a five-level maturity scale (5 = no provision, 1 = aspirational best practice).

Current performance shows that schools have made steady, measurable progress in strengthening their online safety frameworks. Technically driven and compliance-related areas, such as filtering, monitoring, acceptable use, online safety policies, and data protection, consistently score highest. These aspects reflect the impact of statutory duties, inspection frameworks, and national safeguarding expectations.

However, weaker areas persist, including governor training, staff development, external agency collaboration, and meaningful involvement of young people in shaping strategy. Nearly half of schools report limited engagement with external stakeholders, and 29% still lack basic staff training, despite statutory safeguarding requirements. These gaps highlight the need for stronger leadership focus and systematic scrutiny beyond inspection compliance.

A historical analysis of the data since the tool’s launch in 2009 reveals a remarkable cultural shift. Early adopters have shown significant improvement across all aspects, especially in leadership accountability, professional standards, and the safe use of mobile and social technologies. Differences between primary and secondary schools—once pronounced in areas such as social media, mobile technology, and technical security—have now narrowed considerably, with primary schools showing notable gains. Meanwhile, technical safeguards such as filtering and monitoring have remained strong but largely unchanged, suggesting the greatest progress has been in strategic and cultural development rather than technology alone.

Key findings:

- Almost 50% of England’s primary and secondary schools actively use the tool to review and improve online safety.
- Filtering (2.07), Online Safety Policy (2.11), Acceptable Use (2.17), and Monitoring (2.19) are the strongest performing areas.
- Agencies (3.31), Online Safety Group (3.13), Governors (3.11), and Impact of Policy (3.07) remain the weakest, indicating gaps in collaboration and oversight.
- The percentage of schools with no staff training dropped from over 70% in 2010 to under 10% in 2025, demonstrating sustained improvement over time.

Overall, the findings confirm that the *360 Degree Safe* tool is an effective driver of school improvement and cultural change in digital safeguarding. To continue advancing, schools must now move beyond compliance-focused technical measures and invest in governor capability, staff development, parental engagement, and whole-community participation to create resilient, future-ready online safety cultures.

Introduction

360 degree safe (<https://360safe.org.uk/>) was launched by SWGfL in November 2009 to allow schools to evaluate their own online safety provision; benchmark that provision against others; identify and prioritise areas for improvement and find advice and support to move forward. There are now versions of the tool used in schools in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales¹.

This annual analysis explores the data collected almost 13,000 schools across England who make use of this free tool which integrates online safety into school policy and the curriculum in a way that actively challenges school teachers and managers to think about the schools' online safety provision, and its continual evolution.

The flexibility of 360 degree safe is such that it can be introduced at any speed (as appropriate to the school's situation) and can be used in any size or type of school. As each question is raised so it provides suggestions for improvements and also makes suggestions for possible sources of evidence which can be used to support judgements and be offered to inspectors when required.

Where evidence is needed, the program provides links to specific areas of relevant documents, rather than simply signposting documents on the web. This saves time for everyone concerned about online safety, and allows the school to show immediately the coverage and relevance of its online safety provision.

360 degree safe will also provide summary reports of progression, (useful when challenged), and is an excellent way of helping all staff (not just those charged with the job of implementing an online safety policy) to understand the scope of online safety and what the school is doing about the issue.

Above all 360 degree safe provides a prioritised action plan, suggesting not just what needs to be done, but also in what order it needs to be done. This is a vital time-saving approach for teachers and managers who approach the issue of online safety for the first time, in a school that has no (or only a very rudimentary) policy.

This self review process is more meaningful if it includes the perceptions and views of all stakeholders. As broad a group of people as possible should be involved to ensure the ownership of online safety is widespread.

Once they have registered to take part in 360 degree safe process the school will be able to download the 'Commitment to Online Safety' certificate, as a sign of the commitment to use the online tool. Once the school has completed some of the elements of 360 degree safe tool then the Online Safety Certificate of Progress can be awarded. When the school meets the benchmark levels it may choose to purchase a formally assessment via assessor visit before

¹ There are three versions of the tool available - 360safe.org.uk, used in England, 360safecymru.org.uk, used in Wales and 360safescotland.org.uk, used in Scotland

being awarded the “Online Safety Mark”. There are now over 450 schools in the country with this award (<https://360safe.org.uk/Accreditation/Accredited-Schools>).

The 360 degree safe tool defines 21 aspects of online safety, and are defined below:

Table 1 - 360 Degree Safe Aspect Definitions

Acceptable Use	How a school communicates its expectations for acceptable use of technology and the steps toward successfully implementing them in a school. This is supported by evidence of users’ awareness of their responsibilities.
Agencies	How the school communicates and shares best practice with the wider community including local people, agencies and organisations.
Contribution of Young People	How the school maximises the potential of young people’s knowledge and skills in shaping online safety strategy for the school community and how this contributes positively to the personal development of young people.
Data Security	Describes the school’s compliance with Data Protection legislation and how it manages personal data. It describes the ability of the school to effectively control practice through the implementation of policy, procedure and education of all users from administration to curriculum use.
Digital and Video Images	How the school manages the use and publication of digital and video images in relation to the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018
Families	How the school educates and informs parents and carers on issues relating to online safety, including support for establishing effective online safety strategies for the family.
Filtering	A school’s ability to manage access to content across its systems for all users.
Governors	The school’s provision for the online safety education of Governors to support them in the execution of their role.
Impact of Online Safety Policy and Practice	The effectiveness of a school’s online safety strategy; the evidence used to evaluate impact and how that shapes improvements in policy and practice.
Mobile Technology	The benefits and challenges of mobile technologies. This includes not only school provided technology, but also personal technology
Monitoring	How a school monitors internet and network use and how it is alerted to breaches of the acceptable use policy and safeguards individuals at risk of harm.

Online Publishing	How the school, through its online publishing: reduces risk, celebrates success and promotes effective online safety.
Online Safety Education Programme	How the school builds resilience in its pupils/students through an effective online safety education programme, that may be planned discretely and/or through other areas of the curriculum.
Online Safety Group	How the school manages and informs their online safety strategy, involving a group with wide representation that builds sustainability and ownership.
Online Safety Policy	Effective online safety policy; its relevance to current social and education developments; its alignment with other relevant school policies and the extent to which it is embedded in practice.
Online Safety Responsibilities	Describes the roles of those responsible for the school's online safety strategy including senior leaders and governors/directors.
Professional Standards	How staff use of online communication technology complies with legal requirements, both school policy and professional standards.
Reporting and Responding	The routes and mechanisms the school provides for its community to report abuse and misuse and its effective management.
Social Media	The school's use of social media to educate, communicate and inform. It also considers how the school can educate all users about responsible use of social media as part of the wider online safety strategy.
Staff	The effectiveness of the school's online safety staff development programme and how it prepares and empowers staff to educate and intervene in issues when they arise.
Technical Security	The ability of the school to ensure reasonable duty of care regarding the technical and physical security of and access to school networks and devices to protect the school and its users.

For each of these aspects the school is invited to rate their practice based upon five levels, generally defined as:

Table 2 - Basic Level Descriptions

Level 5	There is little or nothing in place
Level 4	Policy and practice is being developed
Level 3	Basic online safety policy and practice
Level 2	Policy and practice is coherent
Level 1	Policy and practice is aspirational

Given the level of detail in each aspect, the staff members at the school performing the assessment have clear guidance on the level they should be disclosing in their self review. A full breakdown of all aspect level descriptors can be found on the [360 Degree Safe website](#).

The tool allows schools to perform the self-review at their own pace, it is not necessary for them to complete 21 aspects before using the tool for improvement. As each aspect in the database is analysed independently we collect all responses from each aspect regardless of whether an institution has completed a full review. However, a breakdown of accounts shows that almost 6000 schools have a full profile:

Table 3 - Account Breakdown

Total accounts	16000
Accounts linked to DfE Record	12947
Embarked on review	8888
Full profiles	5828

The majority of the schools who have started their self review are from the primary setting, which is unsurprising given the number of primary to secondary schools in England². There are also a number of establishments who are defined as “not applicable”, that don’t easily fit into an easy definition of phase (for example, local authorities, pupil referral units, community special schools, independents, etc.). We can see from this data from almost 50% of primary and secondary schools in England are engaged with the tool and using it to profile their online safety performance and practice, and using the tool for school improvement.

Table 4 - Type of Establishments

Primary	8683
Secondary	1868
Not applicable	2092
Nursery	76
All-through	91
16 plus	137

The analysis presented in this years report will differ somewhat from previous publications. While in general this analysis is presented as a “state of the nation” report as is – so reflecting on the overall data in the tool, given that this year’s report coincides with SWGfL’s 25th birthday, we will also present a historical review of the data in the tool which shows very clearly how online safe policy and practice has improved over the years.

² According the UK government data (<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics>) there are 16,791 primary schools and 4190 secondary schools, so approximately half of the schools in England use the tool.

Current Performance From Schools in England

Prior to the historical analysis, however, we will perform the routine state of the nation analysis. As we have stated above, the tool allows establishments to rate each aspect on a progressive maturity scale from 5 (lowest rating) to 1 (highest rating). Over time schools should make use of the tool to improve policy and practice around online safety, and, therefore, data from the schools will improve over time. The analysis presented below is taken from the best rating on any given aspect submitted by a school, aggregated across the whole 360 Degree Safe establishment population.

As discussed above, when classifying the performance of each aspect in the database, the baseline rating is 3, indicating "Basic online safety policy and practice." Therefore, a core assessment of the tool should be that anything below 3 means that's schools are not implementing basic policy or practice in this aspect. And the lower the score, the better the performance (given that the highest level is 1). Figure 1 shows overall average ratings from all of the data in the 360 Degree Safe database.

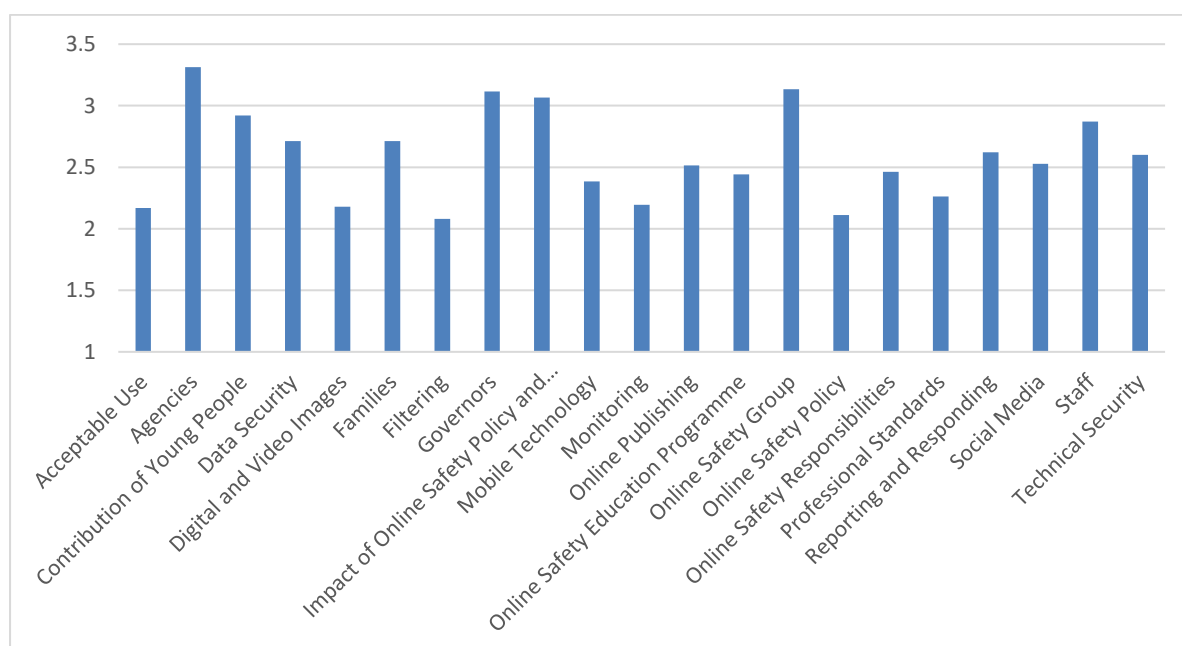


Figure 1 - Overall Aspect Averages on Whole Dataset

This data has a familiar pattern and we are used to seeing the general shape of the data being consistent over the duration of the use of the tool – those aspects with a technical requirement, policy, and statutory duty, in general, perform well, and those aspects requiring longer-term resource investment generally perform less well. If we consider the 360 Degree Safe definitions from the strongest five aspects:

Table 5 - Overall Best Performing Aspect

Filtering (2.07)	A school's ability to manage access to content across its systems for all users.
Online Safety Policy (2.11)	Effective online safety policy; its relevance to current social and education developments; its alignment with other relevant school policies and the extent to which it is embedded in practice.
Acceptable Use (2.17)	How a school communicates its expectations for acceptable use of technology and the steps toward successfully implementing them in a school. This is supported by evidence of users' awareness of their responsibilities.
Digital and Video Images (2.18)	How the school manages the use and publication of digital and video images in relation to the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018
Monitoring (2.19)	How a school monitors internet and network use and how it is alerted to breaches of the acceptable use policy and safeguards individuals at risk of harm.

Therefore it is unsurprising to see the range of best performing aspects. And similarly, for the weakest aspects:

Table 6 - Overall Weakest Performing Aspects

Contribution of Young People (2.92)	How the school maximises the potential of young people's knowledge and skills in shaping online safety strategy for the school community and how this contributes positively to the personal development of young people.
Agencies (3.31)	How the school communicates and shares best practice with the wider community including local people, agencies and organisations.
Governors (3.11)	The school's provision for the online safety education of Governors to support them in the execution of their role.
Impact of Online Safety Policy and Practice (3.07)	The effectiveness of a school's online safety strategy; the evidence used to evaluate impact and how that shapes improvements in policy and practice.
Online Safety Group (3.13)	How the school manages and informs their online safety strategy, involving a group with wide representation that builds sustainability and ownership.

This pattern of data has been consistent over a long period of time now, and there are no surprises being presented from this analysis. However, we can report overall that all aspects continue to improve across the whole dataset.

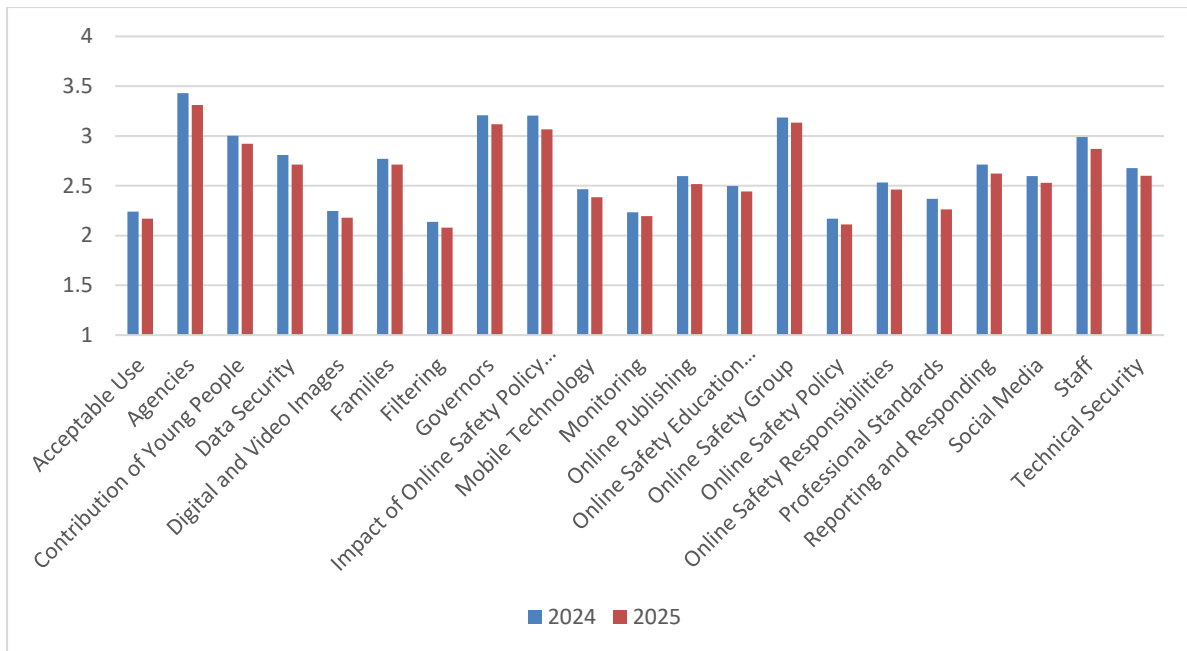


Figure 2 - Aspect Improvement Compared to 2024 Analysis

For Primary and Secondary settings (which we will explore in more detail in the historical analysis), we can see that while there are differences between the settings, they are no as pronounced as they used to be.

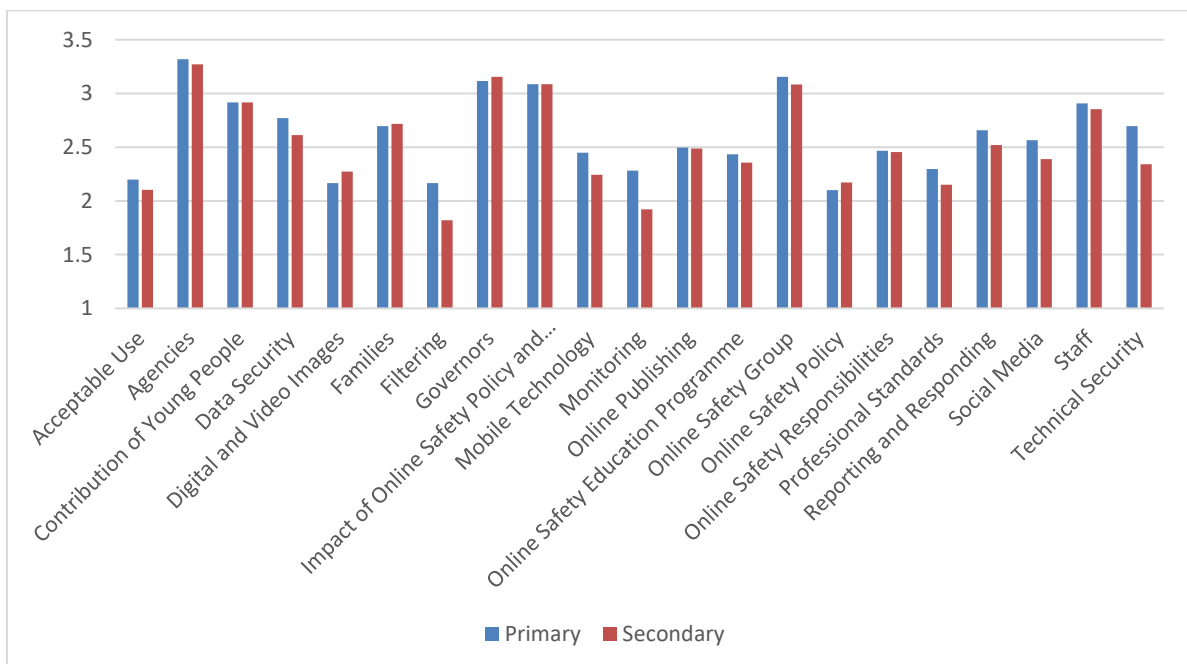


Figure 3 - Primary and Secondary Comparison on Whole Dataset

However, we can see differences that generally relate to technical measures (which might require the sort of investment many primary schools would struggle with, or one that relates to social media:

- Monitoring (0.36 difference)
- Technical Security (0.35 difference)
- Filtering (0.34 difference)

- Mobile Technology (0.2 difference)
- Social Media (0.18 difference)

The only aspect where this is a marked difference in favour of primary schools is Digital and Video Images (0.11 difference), which, we might assume, is down to stricter regulation of the use of digital media due to the age of students in the settings.

Aspect Frequency Distribution

To further assess the performance of schools in the database, we can examine the distribution of levels for each aspect. This involves looking at the proportion of schools rated at each level (e.g., level 1, level 2, etc.) for each aspect.

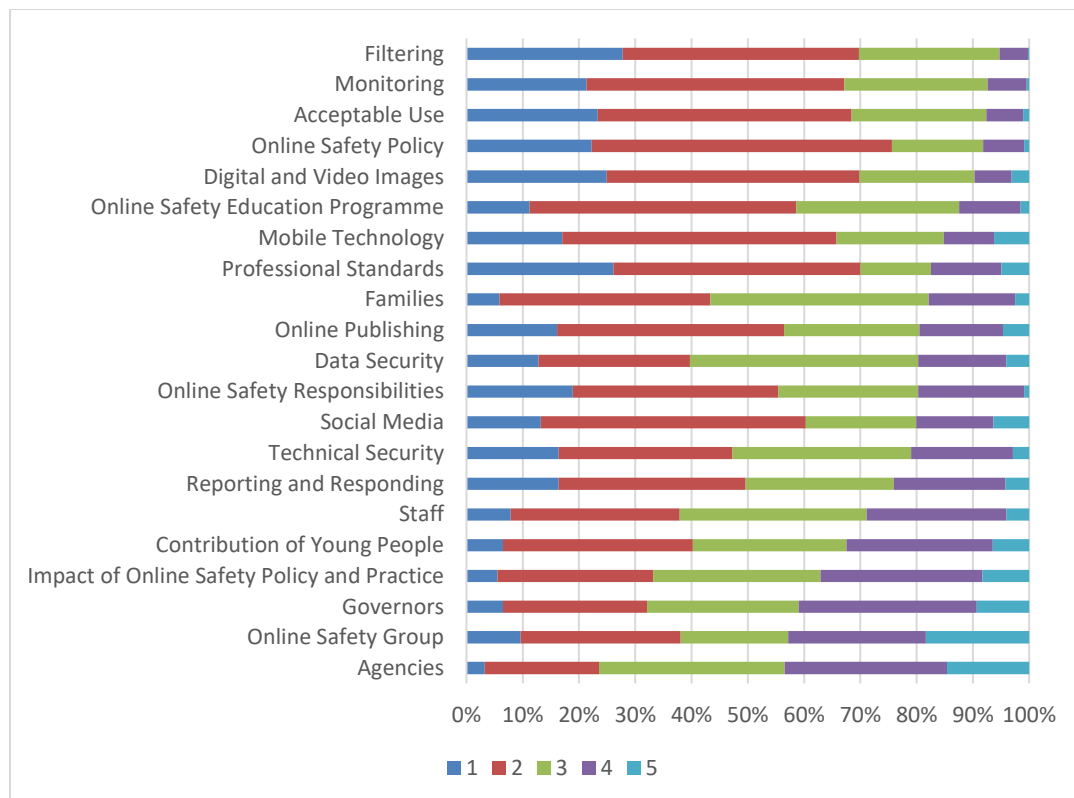


Figure 4 - Frequency of Aspect Scores

Here, we focus on a specific measurement: the proportion of schools that rate an aspect as either level 4 or level 5. A rating of level 4 or 5 indicates that the school has no practice in place for that aspect—they are either planning to implement it or have not considered it at all.

These data align closely with average ratings, but does give us a different perspective on the data. The aspects with the smallest number at either level 4 or 5 are:

- Filtering (5.25%)
- Monitoring (7.37%)

- Acceptable Use (7.6%)
- Online Safety Policy (8.15%)
- Digital and Video Images (9.7%)

For the weakest aspects, we have far great concerns:

- Agencies (43.45%)
- Online Safety Group (42.83%)
- Governors (40.96%)
- Impact of Online Safety Policy and Practice (37.08%)
- Contribution of Young People (32.45%)

This means that almost half of all schools do not engage with external stakeholders around online safety and just under half do not have any online safety education for those who are expected to scrutinise practice (their board/governors). Given the lack of external scrutiny on policy and practice (with the exception of inspections), scrutiny of strategy has to come from governors. However, without sufficient knowledge in the field, we doubt whether this scrutiny would be rigorous. It is also worth nothing that sixth weakest aspect in the data presented in figure 6. Staff (related to staff training) is reflected in statutory requirements for school safeguarding³, yet in 29% of settings making use of 360 Degree Safe, we can see that even basic staff training is not in place. This reflects how statutory duties can motivate some change in practice, but that it also requires routine scrutiny to ensure it is actually in place.

In conclusion, the 2025 analysis of the *360 Degree Safe* data shows that schools in England have made consistent, measurable progress in strengthening their online safety policies and technical safeguards. Core statutory areas such as filtering, monitoring, acceptable use, and data protection are now well established across most settings, demonstrating a growing maturity in digital safeguarding practice. However, the findings also reveal persistent weaknesses in leadership engagement, staff development, and collaboration with external agencies—areas that are crucial for creating a sustainable, whole-school approach to online safety. To continue improving, schools need to move beyond compliance-driven technical measures and invest in governor training, staff capacity building, and meaningful involvement of young people and the wider community in shaping strategy.

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/68add931969253904d155860/Keeping_children_safe_in_education_from_1_September_2025.pdf

A Historical Review

While the previous section provides use with our annual “state of the nation”, the following is more of a deep dive into the history of the tool, and the data within. The tool was released in 2009 and both the online safety landscape, and school regulation, has evolved a great deal in this time. While we tend to explore the whole database in order to consider the state of the nation, we acknowledge that, given the tool might have been adopted by schools in some instances in 2009, the tool may not have been used for a long time in some settings, some settings will have closed, and exploring the whole dataset might not give us a detailed picture of current practice.

Therefore, the data presented below will break down changes that have occurred at different points in the history of the use of the tool, to show a more detailed picture of current online safety policy and practice, and also to show how the tool can reflect both statutory changes and impacts, and also its value as a school improvement tool.

In starting this analysis we will compare activity on the tool since the end of 2019 (so an approximate 5 year analysis of activity), compared to overall averages. This is initially presented in figure 5:

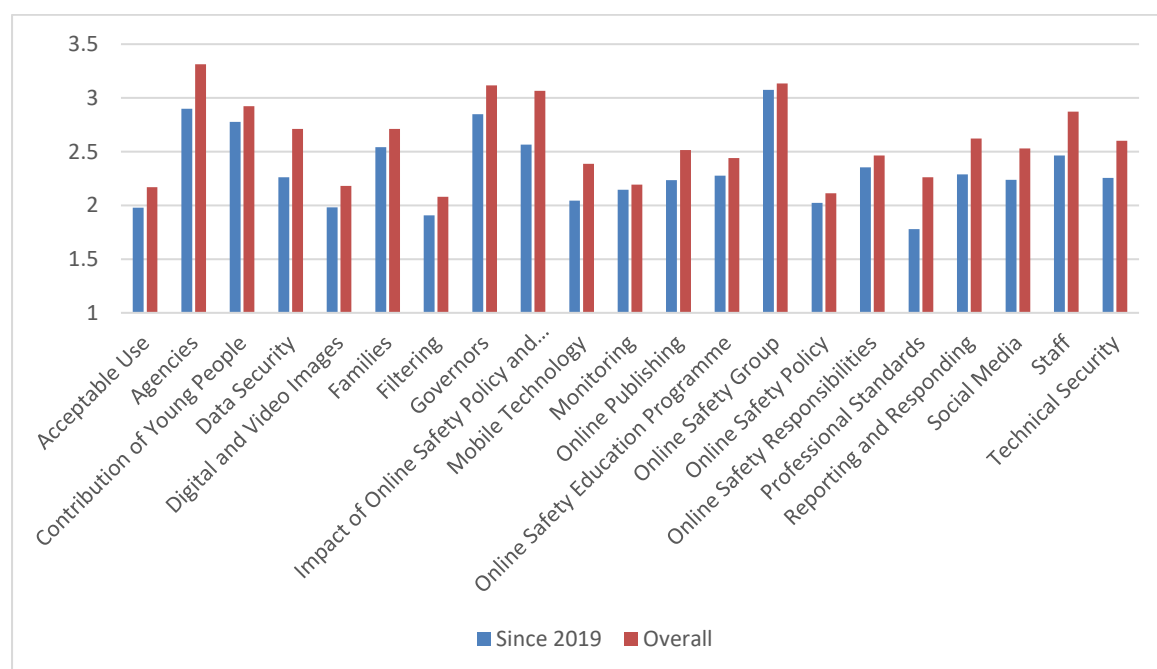


Figure 5 - Comparing Averages Between Whole Set and Activity Since 2019

We can see that while the general shape of the data is similar (and matches the shape of data we have seen since the very early days of analysis of the tool), there are significant differences between the broader dataset and recent activity. We can see this in more detail in figure 6:

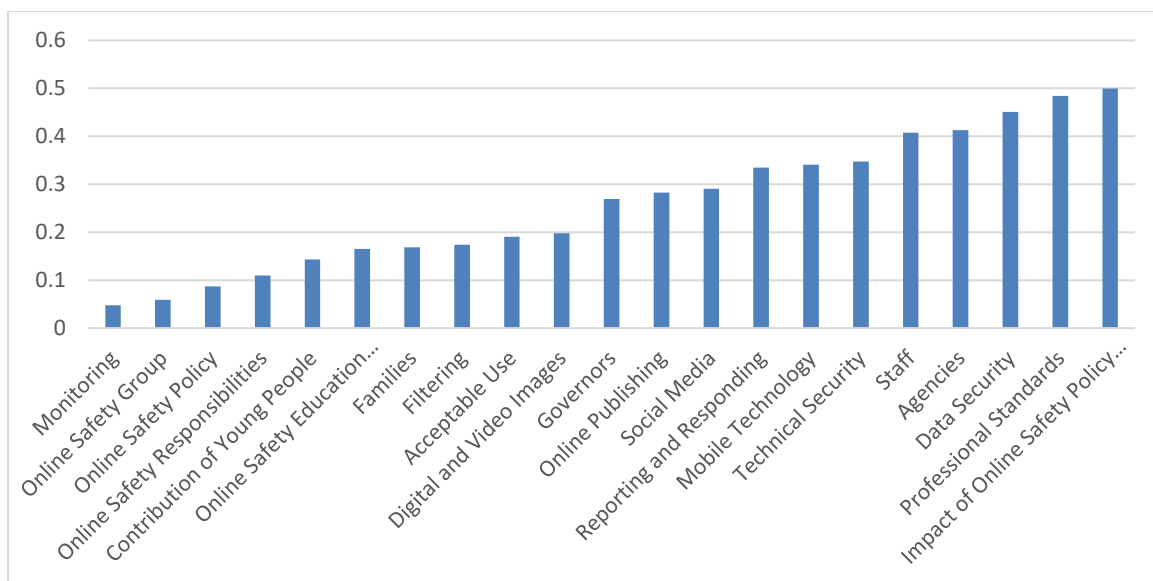


Figure 6 - Aspect Differences Between Overall Averages and Performance in the Last 5 Years

It is interesting, and encouraging, to see that in general those aspects with the biggest differences are those which can be considered, historically, weaker aspects of performance. In particular there are significant differences in Staff (training) and Agencies (working with external bodies), as well as major improvements in Professional Standards (staff communication with digital technology and its compliance with data protection and safeguarding expectations). Which suggests that in more recent history, senior leaders are responding to more stringent statutory duties around these practices. This is something we will explore in more detail below.

However, it is also worth noting, from a historical perspective, activity on the tool. We can see from figures 7 and 8 that growth in tool adoption came first after inspection frameworks introduced online safety into safeguarding reviews (2012), and a post-COVID increase, during which online safety requirements have been strengthened in statutory guidance have been strengthened. We should also acknowledge the role of SWGfL work in schools in promoting online safety and making use of the tool for both baselining and improvement in increasing activity with the tool.

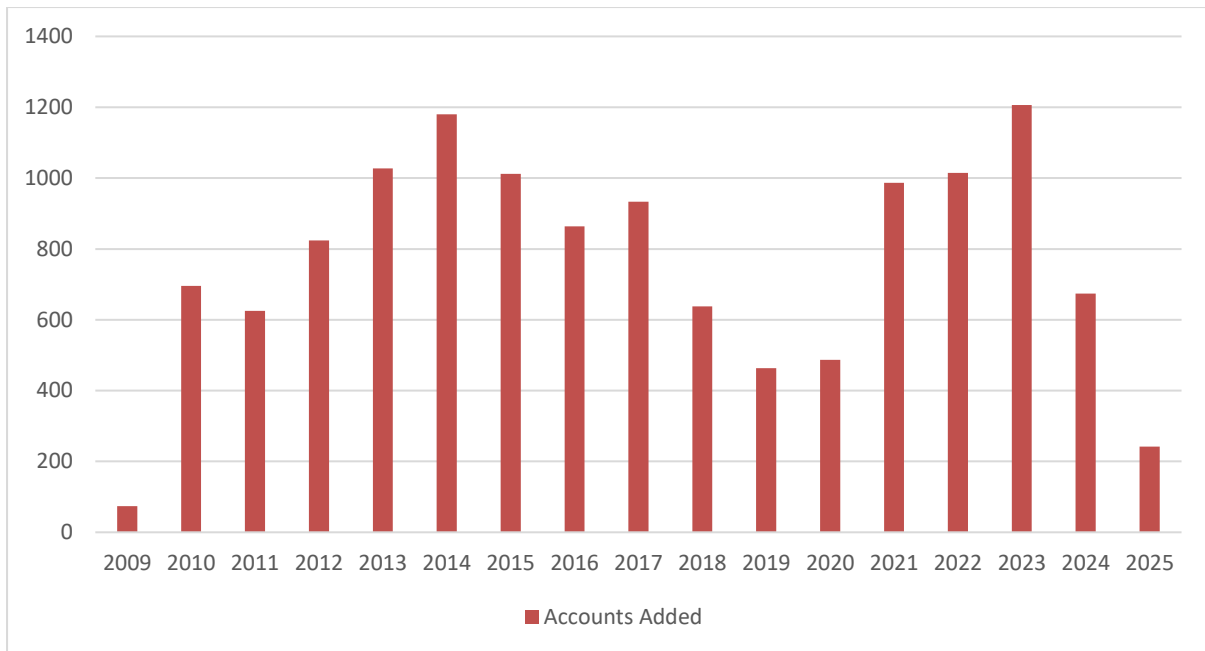


Figure 7 - New Account Sign Ups for 360 Degree Safe per Year

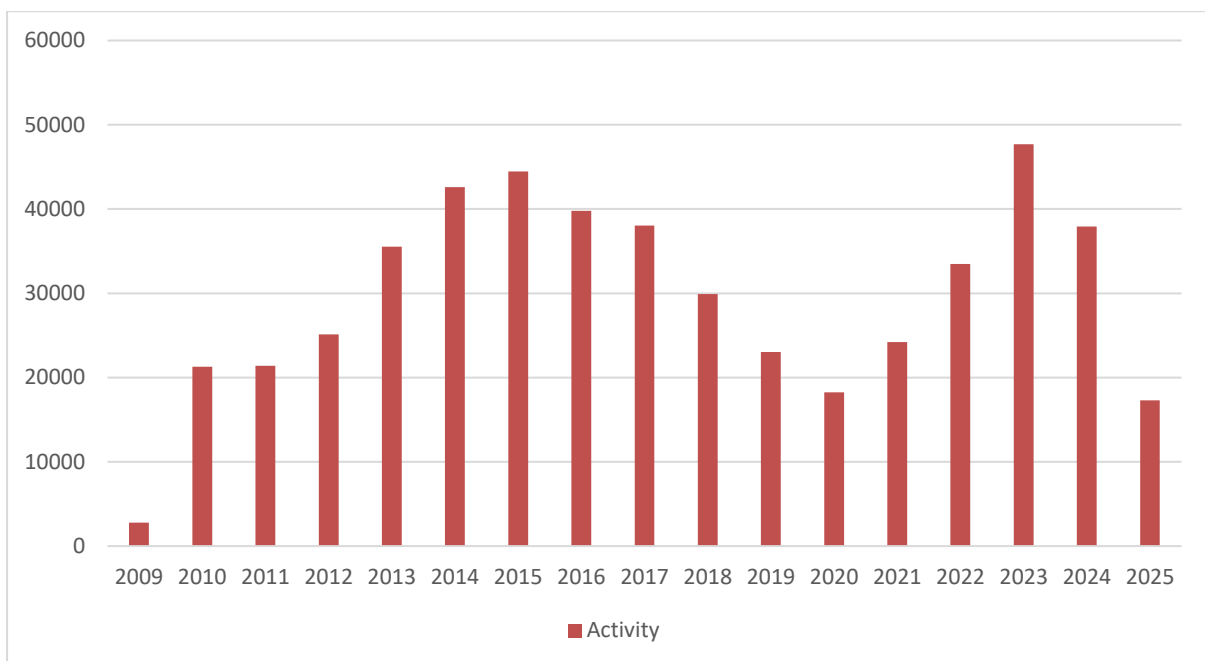


Figure 8 - Activity on 360 Degree Safe Per Year

In the following analysis, we perform a more detailed breakdown of the tools use over the years, looking at its initial adoption by a small (approximately 800) number of schools, its use five years on from there, and the most recent activity with the tool. A basic analysis of this is presented in figure 9.

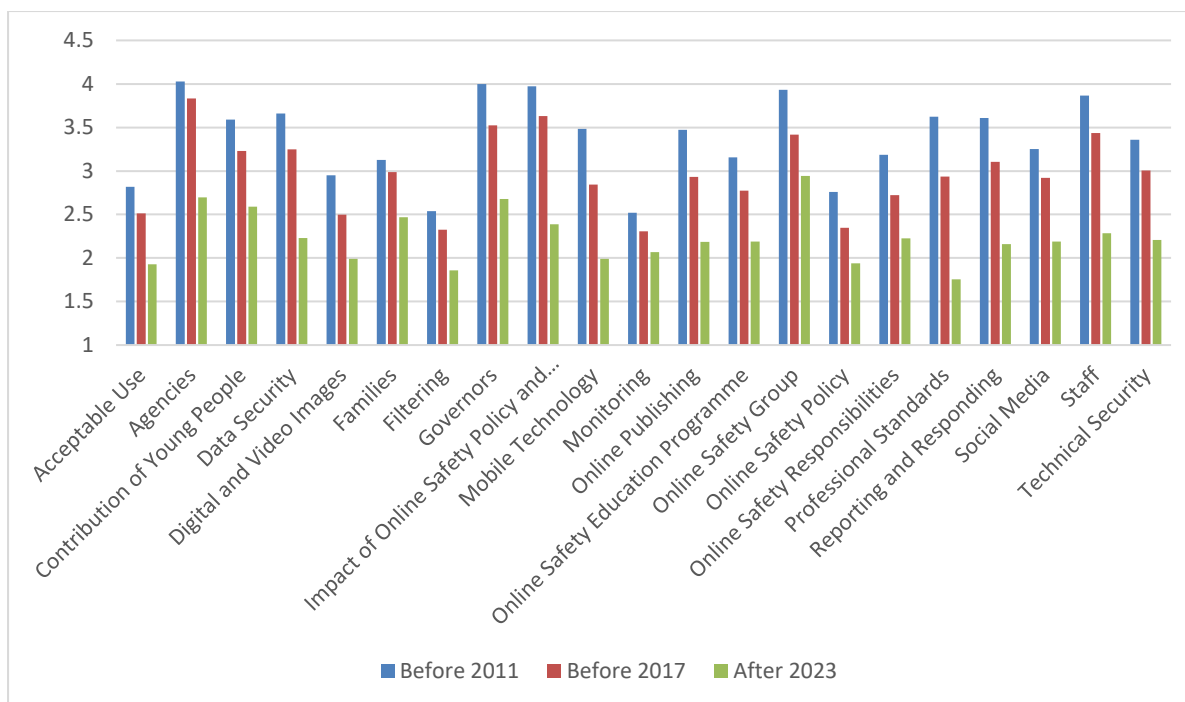


Figure 9 - Changes in Aspect Averages Over Time

We can see from this analysis that there has been significant improvement off all aspects over this time. While the improvements vary depending on aspect, there is no aspect where there have not been at least half a level change over this time. This can be seen more clearly in figure 10, which ranks the differences between pre 2011 activity and post 2023.

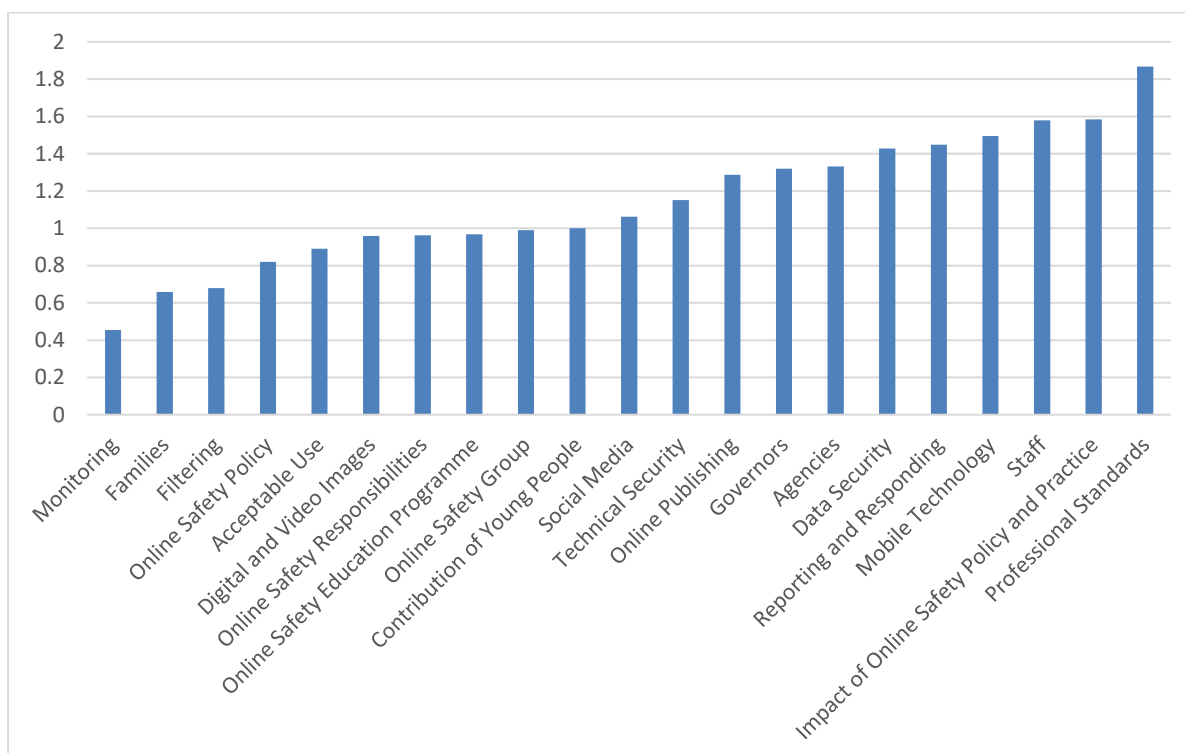


Figure 10 - Overall Aspect Improvements between 2011 and 2024

As with figure 6, it is encouraging to see that aspects that require long term investment and bring in greater strategic scrutiny around online safety practice, are those what have seen the

move significant change over the lifetime of the tool. We can also note that, while Filtering and Monitoring have consistently been the highest performing aspects in analysis, they are among the aspects that have changed the least over time – showing once again that while there is a need for technical investment to put these measures in place, they are modified little once in place. However, the lack of change in Families over this time is perhaps the most concerning, given how important it is to involve parents and carers in the online safety education of young people.

Another very interesting comparison to make on the data is to consider the “best” performance on early adoptors (those settings who signed up before 2011) with those who have started to use the tool in the last two years. We can see from figure 11 that late adoptors will generally start with a stronger profile, showing, we might suggest, that the general state of online safety policy and practice now is far improved from how it once was. While there is variation between the current profiles of early adoptors and new sign ups, we can see comparable performance in a lot of aspects.

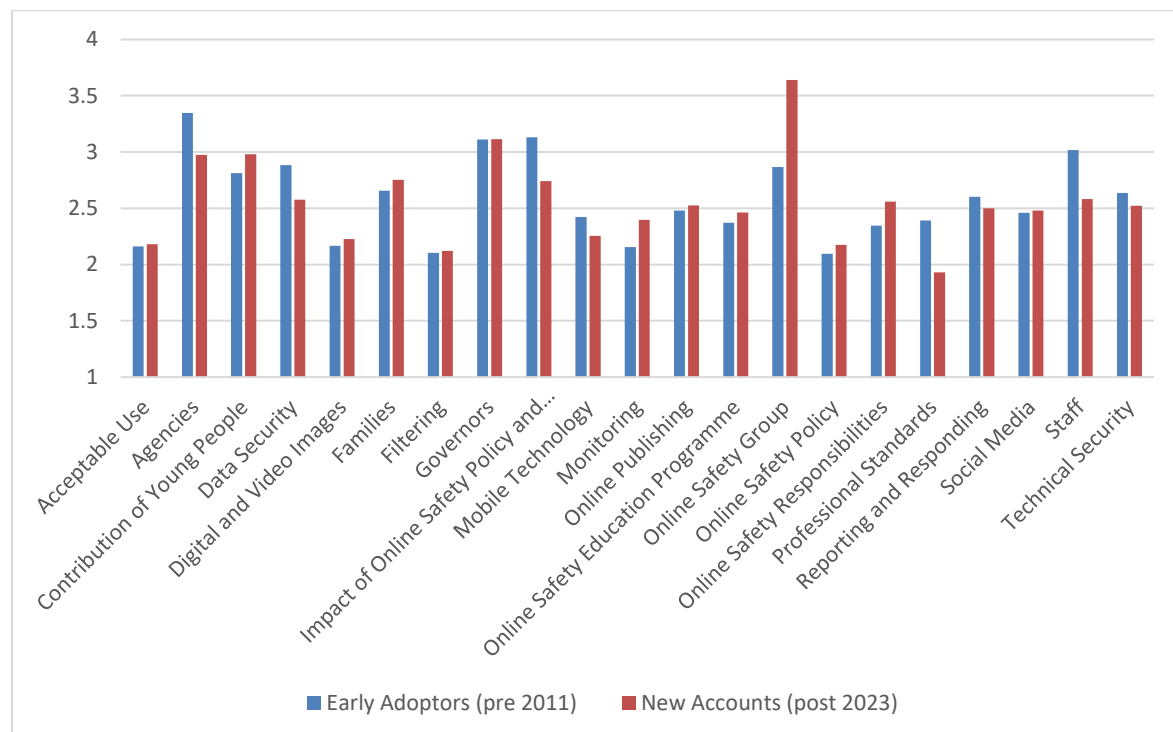


Figure 11 - Comparing Averages Between Early Adoptor Accounts and New Accounts (Post 2023)

If we further dig into early adoptors, we can, however, see the clear value in the use of the tool for school improvement. As we can see in figure 12, the performance of early adoptors now is significantly improved from their profiles when they first used the tool.

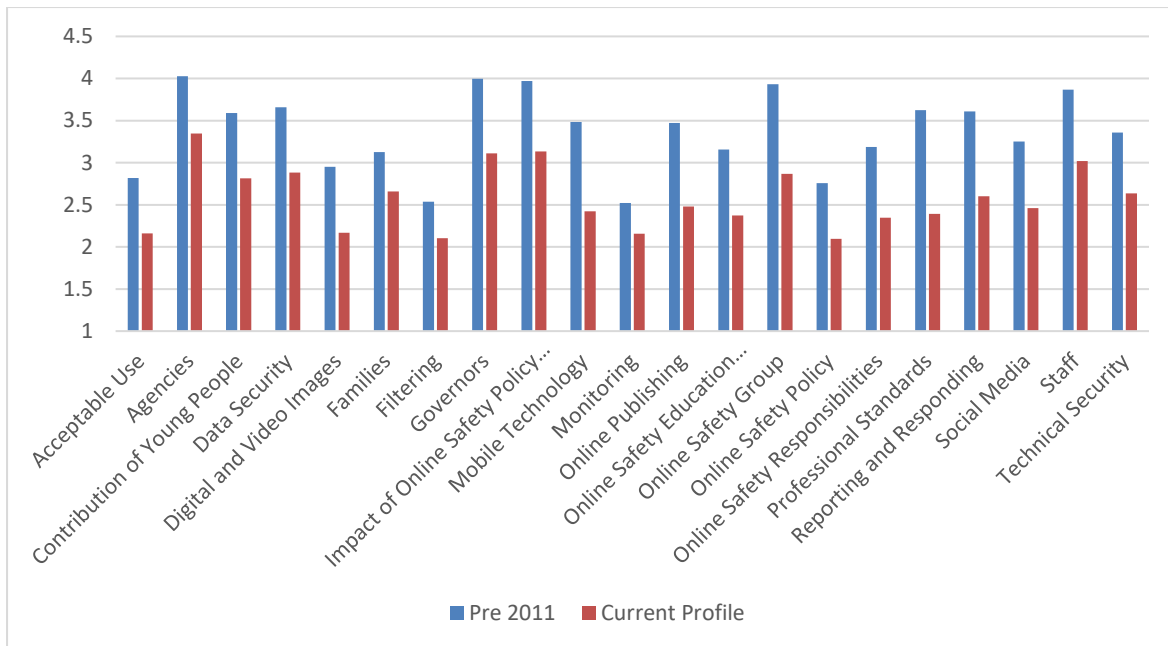


Figure 12 - Aspect Average Change for Early Adoptor Accounts

In all aspects there have been improvements, and as we can see in figure 13, the most significant improvements for early adoptors, and therefore where practice has improved the most, reflects general improvements over time, with aspects such as Staff and Governors improving considerably, along with improved practices around mobile technology (to be expected given advances in mobile technology since 2010) and, again, professional standard. Again, this is a useful reflection on the use of statutory duties in motivating changes in practice in settings.

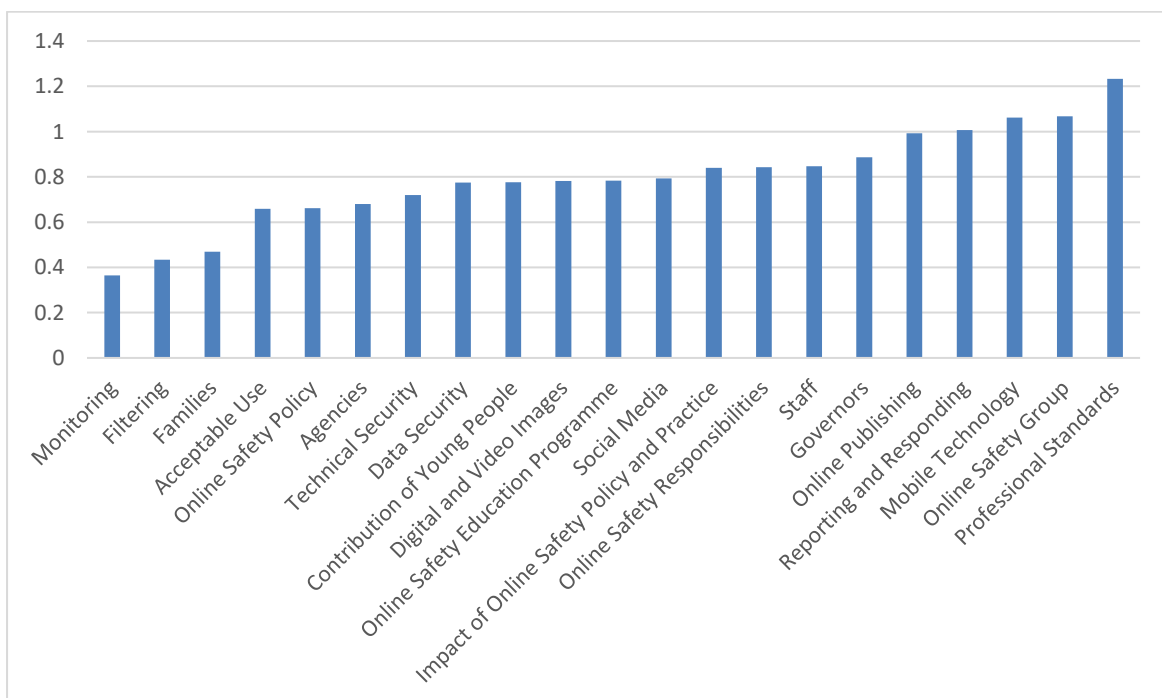


Figure 13 - Aspect Improvement for Early Adoptor Accounts

Another area of significant change is in the comparison of primary and secondary performance. We have discussed above that the difference between primary and secondary

settings is not as severe as it once was, and the charts below reiterate this point. In figure 14 we compare differences pre 2011, and post 2023 profiles. However it is acknowledged that this is not a particularly easy graph to read, so figure 15 provides a more clear illustration.

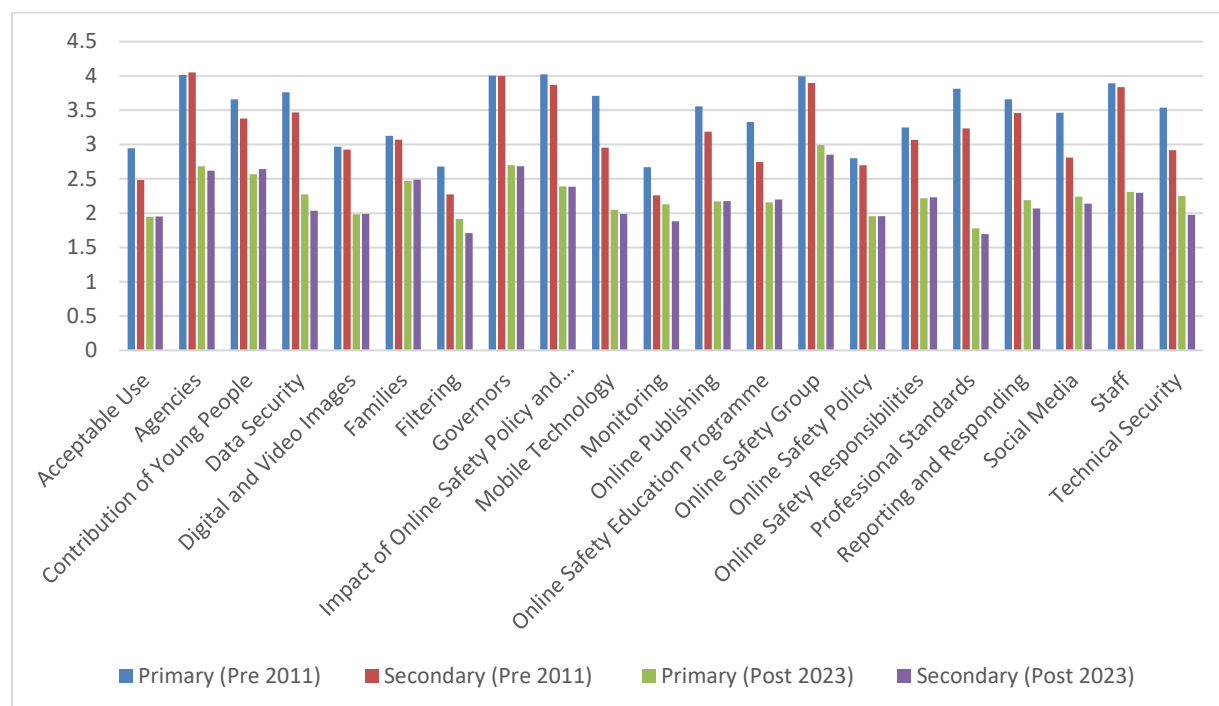


Figure 14 - Comparison of Primary and Secondary Averages Pre 2011 and Post 2023

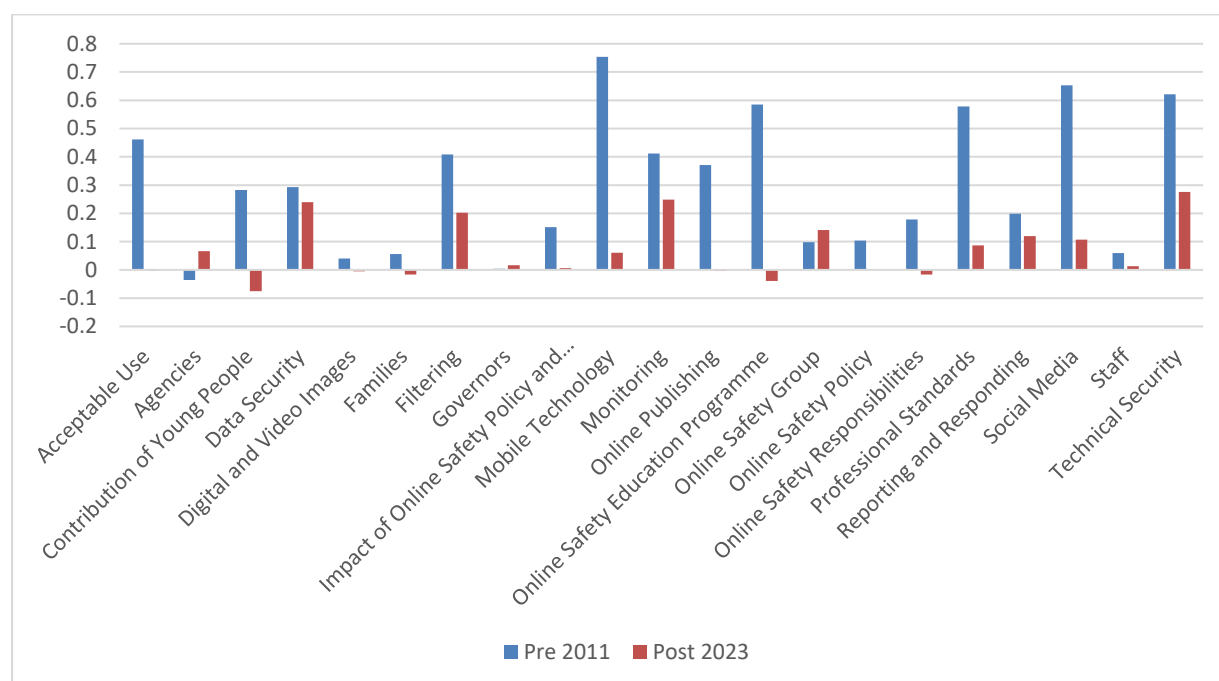


Figure 15 - Differences between Primary and Secondary Performance Pre 2011 and Post 2023

In pre 2011 data, we can see that secondary performance was, in all but one aspect (Agencies), superior to primary schools, sometimes by a large degree (such as Mobile Technology, Social Media and Technical Security). While the age of students and their use of technology might go some way to explaining this, the comparable data post 2023 shows that these differences are all but eliminated – showing both that primary schools are engaged with

issues around mobile technology and social media now, but also, in some areas such as the Contributions of Young People and Online Safety Education, they are slightly better than secondary schools. The main differences remain those aspects that require technical investment that might not immediately be available to smaller primary settings.

A final historical reflection, and one that perhaps most powerfully illustrates the change in online safety policy and practice since the introduction of the tool to how it is used now, is to consider the frequency distributions pre 2011 (figure 16) and post 2023 (figure 17).

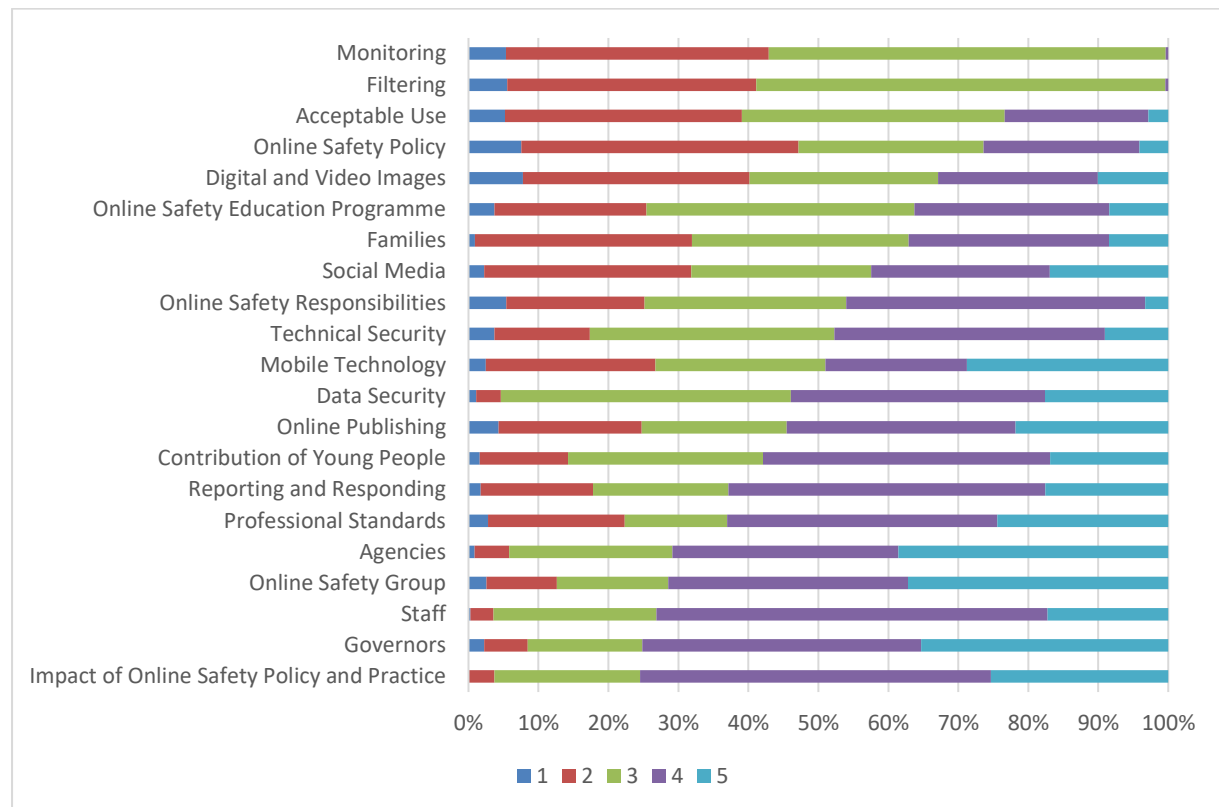


Figure 16 - Aspect Frequencies Pre 2011

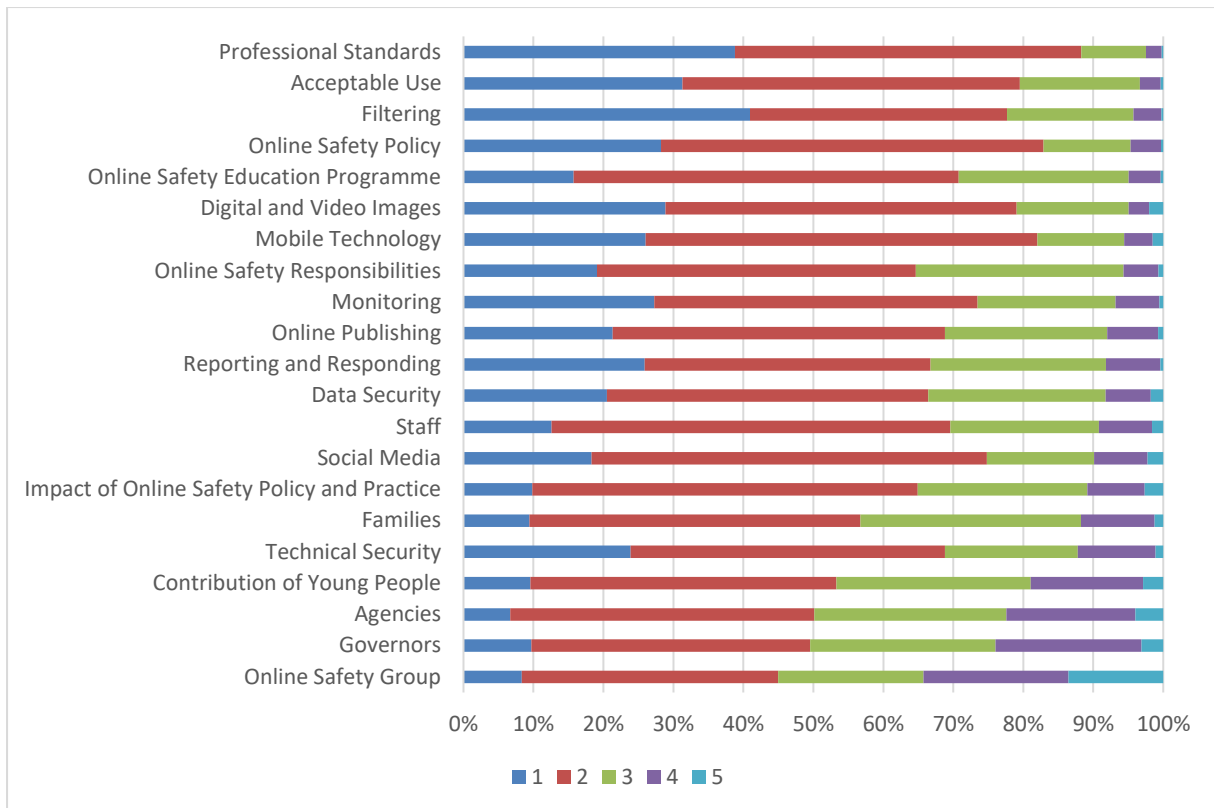


Figure 17 - Aspect Frequencies Post 2023

We can see, very clearly, from these graphs, how the state of online safety policy and practice has considerably improved during the lifetime of the tool, and SWGfL since starting 2025. A final, very clear, illustration of this is to look at the percentage of each aspect returning level 4 or 5 in the pre-2011 data and post 2023. Level 4 or 5 means that the setting has either no implementation of the aspect (level 5) or is planning but currently has nothing in place (level 4). Figure 18 shows the change between these two time periods.

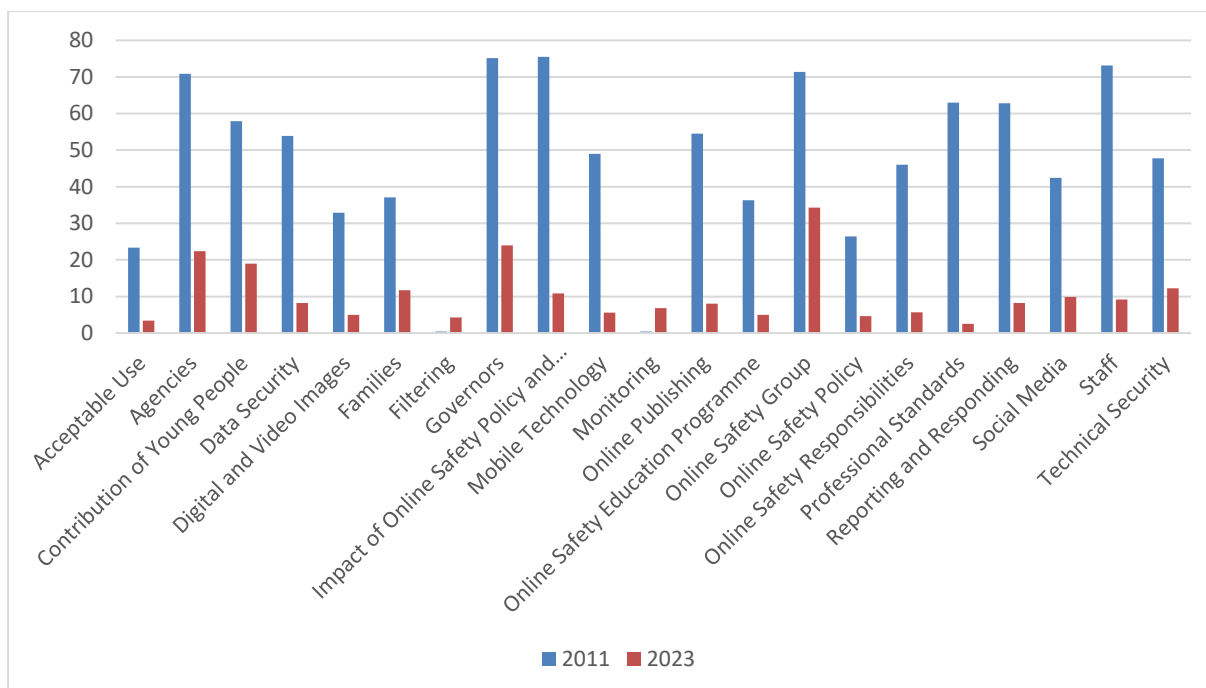


Figure 18 - Difference in percentage of level 4 and 5 per aspect between pre 2011 and post 2023 data

In 2010, over 70% of settings had no staff or governor training in place, whereas now it is less than 10% (for staff training) and just over 20% (for governors). In almost all aspects (except Filtering and Monitoring) there have been at least 20% improvements in the number of schools who do not have practice in place, highlighting very clearly how far we have come.

Conclusions

Over the lifetime of the *360 Degree Safe* tool, the landscape of online safety in English schools has undergone a remarkable transformation. What began in 2009 with limited engagement and significant gaps in staff training, governance, and community collaboration has evolved into a far more mature and embedded culture of online safeguarding. The data clearly show that statutory duties, inspection frameworks, and the promotion of online safety by SWGfL have driven sustained improvement, particularly in leadership accountability, professional standards, and the management of emerging technologies.

Primary and secondary schools, once markedly different in capability, are now much more aligned, with primary schools closing historic gaps in social media, mobile technology, and online safety education. While technical measures such as filtering and monitoring have long been strong, the real story is the broad cultural shift: schools increasingly embrace whole-community approaches, with far fewer reporting no practice at all in key safeguarding areas. This long-term trend demonstrates the value of the tool not only as a self-review mechanism but also as a driver of continuous improvement in keeping children safe online.