

Vital Voices



Rickmansworth Park's Unicef campaign group 2024-25



Welcome to Vital Voices. Rickmansworth Park JMI is a Rights Respecting school and we are this year's campaign group. We want to make sure every child knows their rights and knows that we all have a voice.

UNCRC Article 17

Every child has the right to reliable information from the media. This should be information that children can understand. Governments must help protect children from materials that could harm them.

Round up of 2025: what have we been up to?

If you have been following us via the school website, and also in the local MyCroxley and MyRicky news, you will know that we have been campaigning for greater online safety for children.

We began our campaign by creating a survey for the whole of KS2 about children using social media. After looking at the results, we presented an assembly about it. The results were quite shocking. One of our questions included: Do you know the minimum age for these platforms? Most people got it wrong!

After that, we created a parent questionnaire. Loads of responses came in and we had to analyse and highlight the important answers. There were plenty of worries. Some parents said that they do not allow their child to have much screen time, but we believe that many of these parents have children in the infants, so it is not a surprise.

After reading the parent responses, we wrote to our MP, Gagan Mohindra and also to Peter Kyle MP, Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology. Mr Kyle's office replied to us, saying that the government was taking this issue very seriously. Here is an extract from the reply (the full letter can be read on our website):

We are proud of our campaigning this year. Although we only meet for 20 minutes every couple of weeks, our Vital Voices group has learned a lot about what speaking out can achieve. We have also learned about gathering data and opinions and trying to make sense of people's concerns so that they can be presented to those in power.

Hopefully our small part in putting pressure on government will have played a role in keeping online safety in the spotlight. We know that it is a HUGE worry for parents and we have used Article 12 (Right to a voice) to speak up.

What next for our Vital Voices?

As we head into the summer break, and some of us move on to secondary school, we want to keep using our voices to express the opinions and concerns of children (Article 12 of the UNCRC). We believe the UNCRC is something all children should learn about. Next year, some of us would like to persuade other schools to get involved with Rights Respecting. Maybe this is the way we can use our voices in 2025-26.

You asked if we are aware that underage children are seeing inappropriate and frightening things they should not be seeing, and about the Secretary of State's social media use.

Ofcom research suggests that nearly seven in every ten UK children use social media, including six in ten children between age 8-11 years old and 3 in 10 UK children have seen something worrying or nasty in the last year.

That is why the government is prioritising the implementation of the Online Safety Act, which is a new law to make the online environment safer for its users.

You asked if we are checking what goes on social media and if we make social media companies control what goes on their platforms.

The Online Safety Act ("the act") makes social media companies and search services responsible for the safety of their users. The act requires companies to protect both children and adults from illegal online content, this is content that would amount to certain criminal offences in the 'real' world. It does this by requiring online services to have measures to tackle content that is illegal and to design their service to make sure it is not used for criminal activity. The act also requires online services to protect children from content which is harmful to them, for example bullying or violent or abusive content.

It will also require social media companies to put in place user-friendly processes for children and their parents to report content and activity which is harmful to them, which could include removing harmful videos or banning users from sites.

Ofcom is the regulator for the act and is currently setting out specific details of what companies will need to do under the act. These measures, which will be finalised this month, and will include: checking whether users are adults or children; changing algorithms to filter out harmful content; effective mechanisms so parents and children can easily report and get responses about harmful online content.