

The 2022 study

In 2022, NMSSA explored Year 8 students' use of social media including strategies for keeping safe. Around 500 students participated in this task. This report describes what we did and what we found out.

Further information about student achievement and the factors that impact achievement can be found in the 2022 health and PE Findings reports, and on the NMSSA health and PE data window.
See: <https://nmssa.otago.ac.nz/>



Keeping Safe on Social Media – Year 8 students' strategies

Information from the 2022 National Monitoring Study of Student Achievement (NMSSA)

Illuminating – why focus on social media?

Links to The New Zealand Curriculum

'Identifying risk and describing safe practices in a range of contexts' is a Level 2 achievement outcome described in the Personal Health and Physical Development strand of the health and PE learning area in the New Zealand Curriculum. By Level 4 students should be making and actioning safe choices in a range of contexts. Students at Level 4 should also be able to describe how social messages can affect feelings of self-worth.

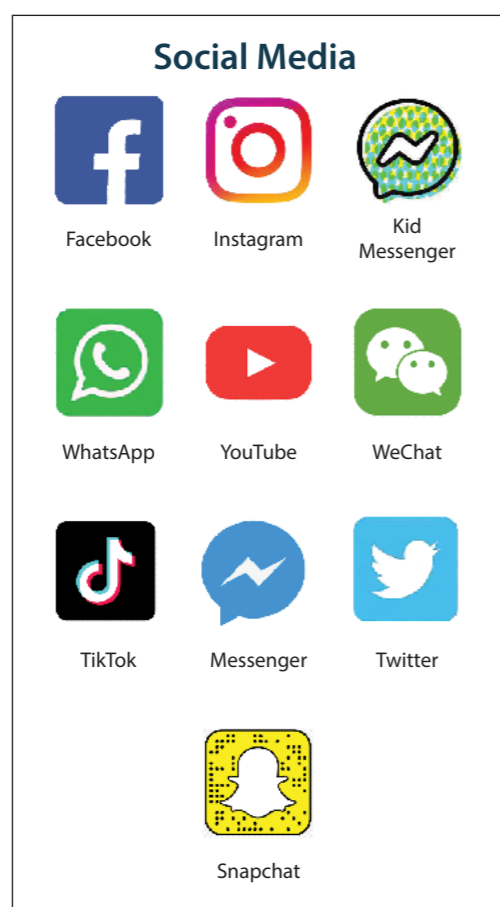
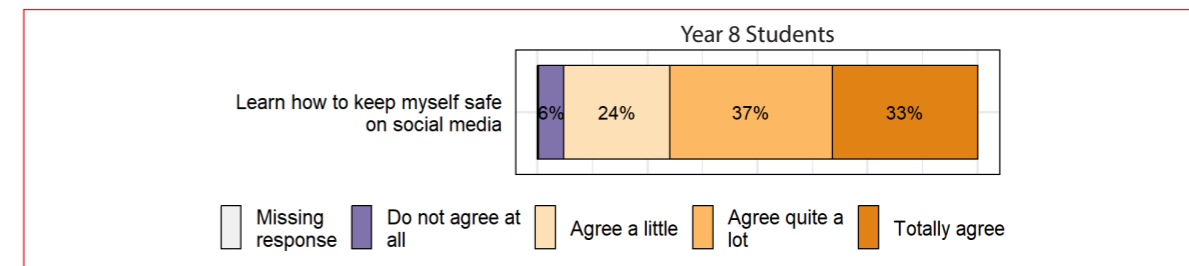
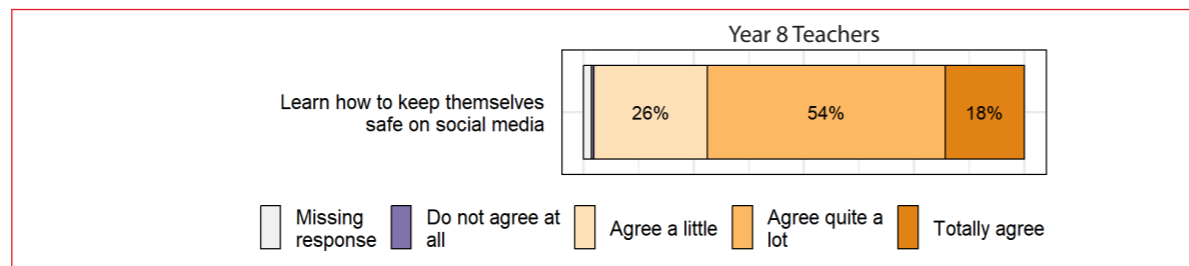
Social media and belonging – an OECD hypothesis

Based on PISA results from 2018, the OECD reported a decline in student's sense of belonging at school. They propose that a plausible cause is the increased use of social media and its impact on effective 'offline' relationships¹.

Informing – what we did and what we found out.

Teachers reported that they offered frequent opportunities for students to talk about keeping themselves safe on social media. 72 % of Year 8 teachers said they 'often' or 'very often' provided opportunities for this.

70% of Year 8 students reported that they 'often' or 'very often' had opportunities to talk about keeping themselves safe on social media.



The task

Look at the icons for some social media apps.

- Circle the ones that you use. If you don't use social media put a tick in the box .
- What do you think is good about social media?
- What do you think is not so good about social media?
Sometimes when people use social media they might have negative experiences that are not good for their wellbeing.
 - Give one negative experience people might have when using social media.
 - How might this experience affect them?
 - If this experience happened to someone you know, what could they do about it? Suggest two things they could do.
- What do people need to think about carefully before they post or share something on social media? Suggest two ideas.

Most social media apps have an age restriction.

- Do you think they should have an age restriction?
YES / MAYBE / NO
- Why do you think that? Justify your ideas and make them as clear as you can.

Q2 Positive effects of social media identified by students

- Being connected
- Making new friends
- It's enjoyable and fun
- It's a great place to socialize
- It makes it easier to keep in touch with people at any time from a distance
- It can raise awareness of things that are happening
- You can share your thoughts and feelings with people who have similar interests to you

Q3 Negative effects of social media identified by students

- Cyberbullying and hate messages
- Potential to inadvertently engage with hackers, scammers and people pretending to be others
- Addiction
- Identity theft
- Measurement against unrealistic images
- Being online limits your physical and social time
- Potential to be exploited
- Difficulty detecting misinformation



Q1



95%
of the students indicated that they used at least one social media app.

Year 8 students use of social media apps

52% of girls used more than 5 apps.
46% of boys used more than 5 apps.



The apps most frequently circled were **YouTube, Snapchat and TikTok.**

¹Have students' feelings of belonging at school waned over time? PISA in Focus #100.

Q4 Students were asked to identify a negative experience that people might have on social media, describe the impact, and suggest an action.

51% of Year 8 students were able to identify a risk or negative experience and provide a **simple explanation**.

43% of Year 8 students identified a negative experience and gave a **thoughtful explanation** that clearly related to wellbeing.

A. Negative experiences most frequently identified by the students included:

- cyberbullying
- receiving dislikes
- accidentally sharing personal information
- getting hurtful comments
- people posting photos without permission
- seeing lots of unrealistic images

B. These are the impacts on people that students described:

- It can lower their self-esteem and they will believe what the person is saying about them.
- They could feel like they have no one, and resort to self-harm or other things. It could affect their mental health by loads.
- They don't think they are as good as other people and start to doubt themselves.
- In extreme cases it can lead to depression and anxiety.
- [The person] Might be very embarrassed, ruin relationships with people, find it hard to socialize again.
- They might scroll past pictures of models and influencers, social media stars etc. This can lead to them subconsciously comparing themselves to these people and developing an unhealthy relationship with their own identity.

C. These are the actions they suggested:

- Turn off and take a break from screens.
- Tell your parents, teacher or police.
- Delete social media platforms to prevent feeling burnt out.
- Go outside.
- Stop using the app
- Do a social media detox.
- Report the misuse to Netsafe.
- Talk to the person and tell them you didn't like it.

93% of students described at least one useful action.

Q5 What do people need to think about carefully before they post or share something on social media?

'Keeping personal information safe' was a frequent suggestion. For example:

- Try not to make your account public
- Don't share your location
- Don't share too much information
- Is it leaking phone numbers, IP addresses?

'Appropriateness of content' was another common consideration, with the following questions posed:

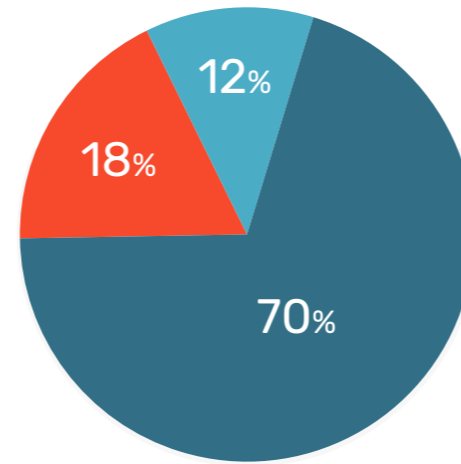
- Is this immature?
- Would I like my parents to see this?
- Is it (an image) in a personal space?
- Do you care if everyone in the world sees this?
- Does it have personal things in it?
- Is it something people need to see?

Students appeared to be equally mindful of the effect of posts on others. They need to think...

- How it might affect someone's mental health – what if it was you?
- Is it offending or harming anyone?
- Make sure it's kind and can't hurt people's feelings
- Have they got a person's permission before posting about them?
- Does the person in this photo want this shared?

90% of the Year 8 students in the study showed that they knew how to act responsibly to support themselves and others in an online environment. They were able to identify one or more questions people could ask themselves, or actions they could take, to ensure that they or others would post 'safely'.

Q6 Students were asked to make and justify an opinion. Should some social media apps have an age restriction? Why do you think that?



12% of students stated an opinion with limited justification e.g. *No because I want to see it.*

70% of students stated their opinion and gave a simple justification. e.g. *Yes, there should be because bad things can happen.*

18% of students provided a deeper justification e.g. *Yes to protect young people's wellbeing and vulnerability.*

	Student responses	Comments on the five responses
E.g.1 Score of 2	<i>With an age restriction, it prevents young children from being exposed to graphic/ inappropriate content. Although it doesn't prevent every one [from accessing it] it's better than nothing.</i>	This student acknowledges the challenges – the decision is qualified by implying that it's worth a try.
E.g.2 Score of 2	<i>Social media apps have to have an age restriction! Firstly because younger children should not be on social media because they might see something inappropriate or get bullied. Secondly you could get hacked, leaked and your privacy could go out the window. Lastly is because it's dangerous out there on the internet.</i>	This example is well structured. The decision is stated clearly. Three clear reasons for the opinion are given. The paragraph has sequence markers – firstly, secondly, lastly which provide cohesion. However, the student resorts to colloquialisms with a punch line to finish.
E.g.3 Score of 2	<i>Children shouldn't have social media – it can get addicting and change how they see themselves and how they think. Their self-esteem can be impacted.</i>	In this response it is unclear who 'children' are. Two reasons are given for the viewpoint – addiction and possible change in self perception. The response mentions self-esteem which is linked to wellbeing.
Eg. 4 Score of 1	<i>I think that having an age restriction is good because older users are more mature and wise.</i>	This response implies people need to be older (and wiser) before they should have access to some apps. There is no specific reference to the impact on younger users.
E.g. 5 Score of 1	<i>Maybe... So like if you're under the age limit but you already know all the nastys- but if you are and you don't, there should be. I just think that there should be a maturity level instead of age.</i>	This response lacks clarity, however the notion of a maturity level is an interesting idea. The student has not considered how maturity might be defined in a way that could be implemented as a gate keeper/ or monitored.

Improving – what does this mean for teaching and learning?

Findings indicate that most Year 8 students were able to:

- identify both positive and negative impacts of social media
- describe a potential harmful online situation and the possible consequences
- suggest some simple strategies people could use in response to negative experiences
- suggest what to think about before putting up a post.

Justifying an opinion or decision was more difficult for the students.

Only 1 in 5 students could provide a deep justification for promoting children's wellbeing by imposing an age restriction (or not), which would demonstrate that they were thinking specifically and responsibly about others. Most students who achieved a score of 1 gave a very simple reason for their opinion, which focused generally on 'inappropriate' content. Whereas they were able to identify a range of positive and negative effects of social media, they did not draw on this thinking when considering potential impacts on children other than themselves. Making and justifying decisions are important processes for health promotion.

In the classroom:

Provide opportunities for students to discuss and debate issues that are meaningful to them, for example, 'Should there be an age restriction on social app access?' 'Should there be a ban on cell phones at school?' Encourage students to justify their own perspectives (opinions and attitudes) and respect alternative viewpoints.

Resources to support teaching:

Fitzpatrick, K., Wells, K., Tasker, G., Webber, M., & Riedel, R. (2018) *Mental health education and hauora: Teaching interpersonal skills, resilience, and wellbeing. Years 7-10.* NZCER: Wellington.

Relationships and Sexuality Education: A guide for teachers, leaders and boards of trustees (Years 1-8). (2020). Ministry of Education: Wellington.

Resources and Teacher Takeaways – *Is social media weakening students' sense of belonging at school?* Education Gazette Vol 98, Nov 2019

<https://netsafe.org.nz/the-kit/resources/> Netsafe schools website

Robertson, J. (2021) Position Paper. *Understanding the Underlying Concepts in Health Education.* NZ Health Education Association. <https://healtheducation.org.nz/resources/>