

Local MP calls for phone ban in schools

Gregor Poynton, MP for Livingston and Chair of the All Party Political Group (APPG) on Children's Online Safety, has called for a minimum age requirement of 16 for social media accounts, backing proposals inspired by Australia's recent legislation.

Speaking in a Westminster Hall debate triggered by a petition signed by over 128,000 people, including 92 of his own Livingston constituents, Poynton warned of the dangers social media poses to young people's mental health, online safety, and attention spans.

"The opportunities and perils of social media are weighing heavily on the minds of parents, educators, and young people themselves," said Poynton. "The widespread concerns reflected in this petition demonstrate how strongly people feel about the issue. While digital literacy is essential, we must ensure that our children have the tools to navigate the online world safely."

The debate highlighted the growing cross-party consensus that the current approach to social media regulation is failing. Poynton pointed to numerous studies linking social media use

to increased anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem among young people. He also stressed the role of social media companies in enforcing existing age restrictions and called for greater accountability from tech giants such as Google and Apple to improve age verification and content moderation.

A key part of the discussion focused on the responsibility of social media platforms. "These companies have prioritised engagement and ad revenue over the safety of young people," Poynton stated. "If we are serious about tackling the harms of social media, then age restrictions must be properly enforced, and tech companies must be held accountable for their failures."

Poynton also used the debate to highlight Scottish Labour's commitment to banning mobile phone use in schools, a policy that will feature in its 2026 Scottish Parliamentary election manifesto. "I was pleased to see Anas Sarwar announce that a Scottish Labour government will ban mobile phones in schools," Poynton said. "This policy will provide clarity for parents, teachers, and young people, ensuring that schools remain environments for learning and social development, free from the distractions and pressures of social media."

The debate took place following Australia's decision last November to ban social media for under 16s, with legislation expected to take effect later this year. The Australian law will see tech companies fined millions if they fail to comply.

Poynton concluded: "The time has come for the UK to take decisive action. We need a social media age limit of 16, and we need to ensure the existing age restrictions are actually enforced. Alongside Scottish Labour's commitment to banning phones in schools, this is about safeguarding our children's mental well-being and giving them the best possible chance to thrive."



Gregor Poynton MP