

The Telegraph

Schools to analyse children's drawings to help catch pedophiles



Primary schools in England and Wales will use technology to detect when a child is being radicalisedCREDIT: PA

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New software to help catch pedophiles by analysing pictures and stories produced by British schoolchildren aged as young as nine will be trialed in primary schools.

The system uses keyword algorithms and image detection software and will automatically alert teachers if the software detects they could be at risk.

Two thousand children at six primary schools in Essex, London, Stoke, Birmingham and South Wales will participate in the trial of the technology ahead of a planned rollout in England and Wales later this year.

Children will create their own "online journals" and interact with cartoon characters, who will prompt them to answer questions about their emotions and their safety online.

"The technology takes the burden off of the teacher and means that children that are falling under the influence of criminals are likely to be noticed," said Sharon Doughty, founder of Dot Com Children's charity.

The technology, created by Essex Police, charity Dot Com Children's Foundation and technology consultancy DataArt, can also detect if a child is being radicalised by racist

gangs. Schools will be able to share information with the police or social care services if concerns are raised.

The technology, called Dot Com Digital, would help schools to comply with the government's new duty of care requirements to teach the prevention of online harms to children.

The programme's aim is to give young children the confidence to recognise warning signs and reach out to an adult for help.

The threat from right-wing extremism has grown in recent years, with domestic groups in the UK forming international networks with hate-filled groups in Europe.

Figures released by the Home Office last year showed that 841 children under the age of 15 were referred to the Prevent programme over activities related to right-wing extremism in 2017/18.

The Government is set to create a new independent regulator to enforce the duty of care with far-reaching powers to require firms to protect children from extreme content online and protect them from dangerous adults.

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