

Dear Parent / Carer,

Social media and internet use has become more prevalent during and following lockdown, as students have spent more time on their devices, this had had an impact – Ofcom have said “the pandemic has radically changed online behaviour”. As a school, we are increasingly dealing with the consequences of children behaving in an inappropriate or dangerous manner online. This is happening outside of school, causing extreme upset to those involved and further in school due to the impact on peer relationships within and outside the classroom. In the last month, we have dealt with issues including students sending sexually explicit photos; harassment and bullying. We take our role in supporting students who are targets of bullying and cyber bullying very seriously, as well as our dual role in the education and rehabilitation of those acting as ringleaders and those behaving inappropriately online. However, we also recognise that parents /carers are the prime educators for children on many of these matters and aim to work in collaboration with you to ensure that students understand the consequences of their behaviour.

It is therefore, important to acknowledge our limitations in resolving the wide range of issues that present themselves in school, if a student’s online behaviour goes unmonitored. As a school we are unable to routinely check a student’s phone and we rely heavily on parents ensuring that their child/ren are behaving responsibly and appropriately whilst online with the smart device that as parents / carers you have supplied.

I know many parents are extremely confident in managing, checking and ensuring their children’s appropriate online behaviour. However, there may be some parents who would welcome some additional guidance on how to ensure students maintain a safe, healthy and age appropriate relationship with their smart device. **Please do not feel you are invading their privacy by checking their phones, you are taking an active role in keeping them safe.**

Please see below a series of measures that you can take to support your child to act responsibly online:

1. Set up an agreed contract with your child that outlines acceptable use – it could include some or all of the following:
 - Limit access to phone’s in bedrooms / avoid overnight access. A separate alarm clock is advised so that children do not need to use their phone.
 - Set up parental controls that set time limits regarding app access and schedules down time for your child.
 - Allow access to apps that are appropriate to the age of your child.
 - Check your child’s phone regularly and routinely. This is to check they are not being bullied as well as ensuring they are behaving responsibly. There is no need for your child to be part of a learning group WhatsApp group. As a school we do not support this as the recommended age is 16y.
 - Have a routine established where children balance access to IT with a digital black out. School work or household chores should be completed first. Digital downtime should happen at least two hours ahead of bedtime.
 - Encourage real relationships through facetime/ calls rather than social media platforms where children are speaking to a large number of followers.
2. Remind your child that they are responsible for their online behaviour, having a smart device requires trust that they can behave responsibly.
3. Discuss the content of this letter to reinforce the legalities of their online behaviour, including sexting.

Legalities relating to possible student behaviours

- The ‘Malicious Communications Act 1988’ covers communications sent via social media and may involve the commission of a range of offences against the person, public justice, sexual or public order offence. If students are feeling alarmed, distressed and harassed by texts, or other public electronic communication, the individual concerned is likely to be committing a criminal offence. Many people do not know that a constant bombardment of text messages from someone, when you have asked them to stop, is harassment and harassment is a criminal offence and civil wrongdoing.
- It is illegal for a child (under 18years of age) to take a sexually explicit image of themselves or another child.

- There is no consent to be given (because it is illegal) and the child who has taken the image has committed an offence by making and possessing that image.
- If any child then sends the image to another child, they have committed a further offence of distributing the image and the person who receives the image will also be liable for an offence of possessing the image. This is why we always tell students that if they have received something that they did not wish to receive, they should report it to a trusted adult.

If situations like this occur in school and when we believe a criminal offence may have been committed, we have a role to play in contacting the police.

With Christmas fast approaching and the likelihood of many technology based presents for many young people, this could be the ideal time to reset current arrangements with enhanced clear boundaries; so that your child is able to enjoy all the benefits of the internet, whilst also safeguarding and protecting their emotional health and wellbeing.

We look forward to your continuing support,

Yours faithfully,



Rebecca Overfield
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Designated Safeguarding Lead