

9th March 2022

Dear Parents/Guardians of Upper Junior Pupils,

In the last few weeks, staff in school have dealt with an increasing number of issues regarding social media sites which children are accessing outside of school.

Unfortunately, we have been made aware that some of our pupils are accessing the following apps:

Tik Tok (age 13+)

Instagram (age 13+)

WhatsApp (age 16+)

SnapChat (age 13+)

Facebook (age 13+)

YouTube Account (age 13+)

The age restrictions on all of the above sites mean that primary aged pupils **should not** have access to these sites.

Whilst we are aware that many pupils have increasing access to technology beyond the school, primary age children are not emotionally mature enough to independently manage online relationships safely, which is why these age restrictions are in place. Frequently, we are finding that friendship issues escalate and these issues are then brought into school. This takes adults away from supporting pupils with learning. In addition, it leads to unnecessary distress and anxiety for all the pupils involved. We are extremely concerned that children are feeling less safe **IN** school because of what is happening **OUTSIDE** of school.

We are committed to keeping our children safe, and promoting safe, responsible use of the internet. We therefore need to raise this concern as a matter of urgency.

1) Individual Profile Problems

We have identified the following issues with social media profiles:

- Some children's accounts are not properly secured, meaning absolutely anyone can see their profile;
- Some children have given the impression they are aged 13 through owning an account and this has allowed them to befriend much older children/adults;
- The children have had access to content which is wholly inappropriate in terms of language/images. Even if your child's account is appropriate, being 'friends' with someone who has a profile means *your* child can see it.

2) General Social Networking Issues

Apps such as WhatsApp and Instagram have been specifically devised for children over the age of 13. There are a number of possible risks children under 13 can encounter:

- Facebook uses 'age-targeted' advertising and therefore your child could be exposed to adverts of a sexual or inappropriate nature;

- Children could accept friend requests from group chat members without knowing the people in real life. This can increase the risk of inappropriate or dangerous contact or behaviour;
- Language, games and group content is not moderated and therefore children can begin to share or be exposed to offensive, illegal or unsuitable content;
- Photographs are not moderated and therefore children could be exposed to inappropriate images or share their own;
- These sites do not verify their members and therefore it is important to remember that if your child can lie about their age when they are online so can anyone else.

More recently we have needed to spend an increasing amount of time addressing inappropriate engagement with peers in unsupervised apps beyond the school day. We have received reports of:

- children saying unacceptable and hurtful things to their peers;
- using offensive language;
- acting in a threatening or aggressive manner;
- sending inappropriate images;

This is behaviour we simply do not see in school.

Whilst we respect that it is a parental choice how you manage your child's access to the internet beyond school, we would like to raise our concerns with the number of incidents we have had to deal with. The fact remains that these issues are brought to us as a school to resolve which is almost impossible under these circumstances. We strive to ensure all our children have good mental wellbeing and it is very clear that accessing sites beyond their years is leading, in many cases, to a number of unhappy children.

We urge all parents to rigorously monitor their child's access to accounts online and to check the content regularly. We will continue to ensure that the children receive regular e-safety teaching in school through our rigorously planned curriculum which is adapted to the needs of our children.

If you feel you, or your child, needs further support in keeping your child safe on the internet, please make an appointment to see your child's class teacher as soon as possible. E-safety advice always features in the weekly newsletter and can be found on our school website.

Because of our duty to all the children in school, we will take action (which may involve the police) if a problem comes to our attention that involves the safety or wellbeing of any of our pupils.

Thank you for your continued support.

Miss L Trim

Upper Juniors Phase Leader

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'That they may have life; life in all its fullness' John 10:10

