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Principal Mr. N Watson

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Dear Parent,

We want to help keep all of our children safe and that includes making sure you and they are aware of the issues around electronic communication.

We've chosen the term 'electronic communication' carefully to include phones, computers and other devices like tablets and game consoles like WII or Xbox/PS4.

We have had a few incidents happen outside school using electronic comms that concern us. Parents are not always aware of what their children are doing online or who they are talking to. Many parents are unaware of the fact that children can talk to others online through a variety of social media and games. There are issues with privacy that you need to be aware of.

In essence the issues can be put into four main categories:

1. **What devices does your child have access to?**

   Phones, tablets, games consoles and computers all have the capacity to allow communication with others. They may also, depending how privacy settings are managed reveal information about your location and personal details to other users.

2. **What sites, apps and games is your child using?**

   Many social media apps allow for the sharing of messages, information about your life and where you live. They also often allow photo and video sharing and may have a live webcam facility. The big well known social media apps such as Facebook and Twitter are familiar to most of us but there are <u>many</u> more. You need to be aware of the sites your children are using, what the privacy issues are with these sites and whether you're happy for them to be using them.

3. **Is your Child Capable of Understanding/coping with the stresses and strains of online communication?**

   Children are not only at risk from grooming or encountering inappropriate communication from strangers but also – and this is a big issue – from each other. Kids are, by definition emotionally vulnerable and immature. Harsh words in the playground or street are bad but harsh words written down can be worse – they can be read again and again and they can also, in the context of games and social media, be read by others or copied by others. We are all vulnerable to abusive behaviour by others online and children are clearly more vulnerable.

4.   Age Appropriateness

On more than one occasion we've heard parents say that they allow their children to have social media accounts or play games even though the age limit for them is higher. We have also had instances of children having social media accounts that their parents haven't been aware of.

Social media sites like Facebook and Instagram are not for children younger than 13. There are good reasons for this regarding privacy and data protection. If you child *has* an account are you fully confident that you have controls in place to ensure they are physically and emotionally safe to use it?

Online gaming can be fun and there are learning benefits from games if they are used appropriately. However, if your child is playing games rated 15 or 18 you need to be aware that the age ratings relating to depictions of sex and violence for video games are the same as with films. Would you allow your child to view an 18 rated file unsupervised?

We strongly encourage you to check out the web link below

http://www.nspcc.org.uk/fighting-for-childhood/news-opinion/Parents-missing-vital-information-in-online-safety-talks-with-children/?utm_content=buffer95e58&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=buffer

We also urge you to think about the following basics:

Talk to you child about online safety. You wouldn't allow them to head off into town and talk to strangers and share their pictures, addresses and other details without supervision so make sure it's not happening online.

Make sure they understand that electronic messages – texts, messages, forum chat threads and images that are uploaded can be copied, forwarded and saved. Perhaps the simplest analogy is to say that if you wouldn't put it in the local paper, don't put it online.

Keep track of the devices your child has and know what they can do. Most phones have as much computing power as the PC's we were using just a few years ago.

Be aware of the sites your kids are visiting. Yes, it's hard to keep up and a hassle but it's something we have to do. Again, you wouldn't allow them to read any old book or magazine or watch any movie. The online world is the same. It's probably fair to say that if you don't understand it and you feel you can't control it your child shouldn't be on it.

Find out what to do if things to go wrong. The web link above will help get you up to speed in terms of how to report concerns to the authorities. If the issue relates in some way to school you can talk to us.

And finally, IT and Social Media have many positive benefits and can be used to educate, inform and include people so it's not all bad. Like any form of media or communication however, they can be used inappropriately or maliciously and as with such behaviour in any other aspect of life we need to help to equip our children to deal with the bad points as well as the good.

Yours sincerely

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