

20th March 2013

Dear Parents

**E SAFETY: Social Networking Sites / email / MSN / Facebook/ Twitter etc**

We have again received concerns and complaints from some parents and staff about some pupils who are using the above computer based applications improperly and in many cases against the published rights and responsibilities / guidance of the host. The complaints centre around home computer use where some are using offensive words, pictures and comments. These are being made and recorded about other pupils and their friends, and in some cases family members. I must emphasise pupils do NOT use such applications at school.

It is not the responsibility of school to 'police' these issues or act as a 'go between' with parents when things have gone wrong or when we have evidence of such 'activity' - however it is fair to say we have a duty of care regarding pupil safeguarding and that the associated pupil issues and family disputes resulting from such use can impact on our work as they can be brought into school and divert attention from our daily class work. I would therefore ask parents to discuss the appropriate use of such sites (and other areas such as text messages and email) with their child and raise the importance of proper use and dangers as described above. It is in some cases a criminal offence to post and produce offensive items and send offensive texts and emails and in some cases police have become involved and prosecutions have taken place following such activity - our children need to be aware of this and how serious it can be.

Linked with this, we have spoken to all children from Year 4 to 6 once again to alert them to some general and more specific issues, and other particular dangers which can arise from the use of such sites, as have been reported widely in the media. Parents will know in one case a Facebook user was murdered (in our area) as a result of her meeting up with another user via Facebook. Although this is an extreme and rare case it is worthy of our attention for obvious reasons. This was broached VERY sensitively with the children - specific details not explored and was based on our previous experience in dealing with sensitive matters and resulted in me discussing the general subject of 'stranger danger'.

It is worthy of note that it is a condition of use of such sites as 'Facebook' and 'Twitter' that users are at least 13 years old and therefore it is clear that false information is being put on the site by some users to gain access to the facility by entering false dates of birth or names. This of course is misrepresentation to others who use the site and can cause big issues.

As a general point it is considered good and safe practice to ensure any computer use at home is carried out in a family area where parents can see what their children are up to. Use of laptops and computers in a private area such as a bedroom can present potential issues.

We hope parents appreciate this is not an easy area for the school to engage in and would like to thank parents for their cooperation and understanding in this very delicate matter. The school will continue to keep an eye out for any areas where we feel parents need to be aware of, and recognise that such issues can be extremely delicate and potentially upsetting to pupils and their families. In the context however of such potential serious consequences it is seen as prudent sometimes to face these head on, and be upfront with all in our school community.

Yours sincerely

Mr C Twiby

Mrs A Cullum

Mr J Holmes-Carrington

Headteacher

ICT Coordinator

Designated ICT Governor