

Monday 11th January 2016

Dear parent / carer

There have been a few incidents and comments recently that have alerted us to the fact that a lot of the Y6 children are using social media on their smartphones and other devices.

As we know, technology is changing all of the time and our children are being exposed to more and more online. There is no doubt that technology is a great asset to them but it is very easy to overlook the fact that it can be misused or abused and therefore putting our children at risk. The popular apps that children are using are:

“Instagram”



“Snapchat”



“Facebook”



(please bear in mind that children are not meant to have a Facebook account until they are 13)

Along with these apps, a lot of the children are using game consoles to chat to other people as they play against them. This means that the safety messages we need to give the children have to be broadened beyond social media apps. With this in mind, we must work together to ensure that they are safe while still using technology to its full advantage. I would like to take this as an opportunity to alert you to some incidents that we are aware of and also give some advice as to how we can prevent social media and other apps being misused.

Over the past week we have been alerted to the following:

- at least five of the children in Y6, possibly many more who are not identifiable from usernames, have been involved in online chats which have been inappropriate
- within chat rooms there has been explicit language used and disturbing images directed towards individuals
- a child has stated that they have seen something on Instagram that has made them feel sick
- some bullying behaviour towards others

As a school, this has concerned us as we know how much input these children have had regarding staying safe online. They seem to have the impression that they can say what they like while on a device, saying things that they would never say face to face to someone and also it seems that there are people involved in the chats who are unknown to them.

As a parent of a teenager, I follow the steps below to ensure my child is safe and not being exposed to inappropriate material. Please consider taking the same precautions:

- check your child’s phone or device every day (or at least on a regular basis)
- within social media apps there is a private message function where chats can be set up and where private messages can be received – on “Instagram” it is an icon in the right hand corner after you log in (see right). Check this on a regular basis to make sure that the content is appropriate and that your child is chatting to people they know
- it is harder to check “Snapchat” because the messages just appear for a very short time. Open “Snapchat” and it will open up as camera; swipe left to right and then you can see who they’ve been messaging and then you can swipe left to right on the name and then you can scroll up and down to see the messages



- don't check without telling your child; make sure they know that you are going to be checking their phone or device on a regular basis
- randomly ask your child who certain people are so that you are confident that they know them
- make sure that their status on any of these apps is private
- talk to your child about the dangers of talking to people online who they don't know
- make sure you know the log in details for any apps that they use
- be aware that games for younger children (eg "Moviestar Planet" or "Club Penguin") have chat room facilities as well
- talk to your child about what they are doing – ask questions, show an interest
- take your child's devices off them at bedtime and put in another room

Many of you will be following this advice already, if you are not checking what your child is doing while online, you need to start doing so. It is essential that their online usage is safe and age appropriate. This includes making sure that any computer games they are playing are age appropriate.

If you have any questions regarding any of the above, please come in and have a chat.

We continue to teach the importance of online safety within school but this needs to happen at home, too. Please work with us to keep your child's online activity safe.

Thank you.

Clare Weekes
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