11 March 2019

Dear Families

Social media update: Keeping your child safe

I am writing to you because of increasing concerns regarding the misuse of social networking sites amongst some of Year 7 students, most recently on sites such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok.

We live in a society where social media is developing rapidly, having the ability to impact the way in which we communicate and express our thoughts and opinions. There are clearly many benefits to this, and as a school we are exploring how we can best harness the power of social media to improve our teaching and raise standards for all. However, you will also be aware that there have been many troubling incidents reported in the media regarding young people's use of the internet.

Recently, we have been made aware, by both students and parents, that a small number of students in Year 7 have been engaging in situations where social media has been the vehicle for inappropriate behaviour. Primarily, these occurrences happen outside school hours, when children have access to websites that are blocked in school. However, the resulting fallout in these situations can have major implications for harmonious relationships within school and a resulting negative impact on teaching and learning, causing school staff to spend a disproportionate amount of time trying to manage issues and situations, rather than focus on teaching and learning.

The responsibility for monitoring a child's use of social media, or indeed the internet in general, must lie with families. We strongly encourage you to discuss issues around this with your children. When in school, I want to assure you that if any aspect of ICT is misused on our equipment, or if there is any misuse of the school email system either in or out of normal academy hours, we **will** identify and address this misuse. Fortunately, this type of misuse is rare and this is helped by the fact that students are not able to access any social media sites on the school network.

We know that social media platforms are popular with young people but they do come with dangers, which is why they have age restrictions. The minimum age to open an account on most social media sites is 13, with WhatsApp more recently increasing this to 16. **Therefore all students in year 7 should NOT have any accounts on these sites and by allowing access to these sites you are potentially exposing your child to unnecessary risk.**

There is a growing body of research which demonstrates that excessive use of digital devices and social media is harmful to children and teens. Social media use by teens is linked to significantly higher rates of depression; with those who spend an hour a day chatting on social networks reporting less satisfaction in every aspect of their lives. Younger children are simply not ready to have social media accounts. They are not old enough to negotiate the complexities of online relationships, which often lead to misunderstandings and conflicts even among mature users. Young people do not have a fully developed understanding of privacy, including what is appropriate to share with others and who has access to conversations, locations, pictures and videos.

Social media networks are here to stay. Whilst we try to embrace the positives this brings, we must also continue to educate young people about the potential risks involved. I hope that I can count on your support and have included some advice below for how to further protect your child. I will continue to promote this during my weekly assemblies and via tutor time.

Yours faithfully

Ms S Thornley
Head of Year 7

Parents can support by:

- Refusing or restricting access to certain social networking sites. Follow the recommended age guidelines for help in managing this.

  INSTAGRAM 13+   HOUSEPARTY 13+   SNAPCHAT 13+

  WHATSAPP 16+   Youtube 13+   TikTok 13+

- Having regular conversations about appropriate use, including how the anonymous or instantaneous nature of online communication can change the way people behave.
- Ensuring that, where possible, privacy settings are adjusted so that posts on social networking sites are only seen by those selected.
- Supervising activities online, especially on social networking sites. At a minimum, you should have access to username/password for sites such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok.
- Undertaking regular checks of all online activity.
- Checking location settings are not automatically turned on.
- Keeping Up With Changing Technology; young people are often very knowledgable.
- If your child experiences or witnesses online bullying, tell them not to respond. The best option is to take a print out or screen shot of the offending post and then report it, block the person and potentially delete the "app" and the account.
- Please report incidents of online bullying to us or encourage your child to do so. Reports can be made to any member of staff, but usually to the pastoral team, form tutor or head of year.

Further advice on what to do in case of abuse can be found here:

http://ceop.police.uk/safety-centre/Parents/

Teddington School will continue to support by:

- Educating students of the dangers of inappropriate use of the internet through the PSHCE programme
- Holding targeted assemblies to raise awareness
- Inviting the community police team in to deliver bespoke lessons
- Continuing to monitor the use of any form of ICT in normal school hours and the use of the school email system at all times, addressing anything deemed inappropriate
- Referring anything that we believe could be defined as, or could potentially lead to, a Child Protection issue to the appropriate external agencies
- Continuing to support parents with advice on how to tackle inappropriate use either by their own child or others
- Offering further interventions, and sanctions when appropriate, for those who are known to engage in misuse of the internet