

3rd May 2024

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Social media is increasingly playing a role in the lives of our pupils and for the majority of time, this is a positive thing. However, we are increasingly seeing how social media can have quite a negative impact on our pupils and in some cases, the impact has been quite significant.

We need to work together to harness all of the positive aspects of social media (and there are many) and to cancel out those aspects which can do harm. Whilst it is easy to focus on the fact that the age guideline for most sites is 13, it is also recognised how difficult it is to stop children from accessing these especially when all of their friends are using a certain platform. Perhaps a more realistic place to start is to ensure that, if social media sites are to be used then they are set up in a way which helps to protect privacy. For example most platforms allow you to:

set an account to private (many of our pupils don't do this and some have been approached by people they don't know

not allow friend requests – again, some pupils have had friend requests from unknown users

hide the user's location – worryingly, so many pupils share their location and with the development of ever more sophisticated software, it is becoming relatively easy to pinpoint exactly where the social media account is being used from (without sharing any address details).

Changing the settings to not allow the issues highlighted above to happen takes a few minutes and can significantly improve the level of online safety when accessing social media.

		
Talking to your child about online safety	Online wellbeing	Parental controls
<small>Advice on how to start the conversation and get</small>	<small>Helping young people to manage their mental wellbeing online.</small>	<small>Get advice on setting up parental controls to help keep your child safe online.</small>

The NSPCC site 'Keeping children safe online' really is excellent and I would urge all parents and carers to access this:

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/>

This week we have also seen reported that South Wales Police are concerned about the rapidly growing number of 'sextortion' cases involving young people. This is where individuals are targeted and threatened that inappropriate images of themselves that they have previously uploaded of themselves will be shared unless money is sent. This is obviously extremely worrying and the first action must be to ensure that no such photographs or videos exist – and, if they do so, they must be deleted immediately. The advice to parents and carers from South Wales Police is as follows:

- **Don't pay, do stop contact and block:** you may be tempted to pay, but there is no guarantee that this will stop the threats. As the offender's motive is to get money, once you have shown you can pay, they will likely ask for more and blackmail may continue. If you have paid, don't panic but don't pay anything more. Help your child to stop all communication with the offender and block them on any accounts that they have been contacted on.
- **Avoid deleting anything:** try not to delete anything that could be used as evidence such as messages, images, telephone numbers, and bank account details.
- **Report to the police or CEOP:** call 101 or 999 if there is an immediate risk of harm to your child. Or you can use the [CEOP Safety Centre](#) to report any online blackmail attempts.

Again, the NSPCC website is also a very good source of information and support should you require it.

Finally, in common with all other schools in the LEA, we have developed a Lockdown policy and set of procedures to follow should the need arise. In the coming week, we intend to test this out in school but, rest assured, I will inform you before we do this as I would not want you to think that an actual incident was occurring (If this was the case, you would be contacted via Classcharts immediately and provided with updates throughout). I am sure you will agree that undertaking this exercise is vitally important for us at the moment.

Thank you for your support and have a good bank holiday weekend.

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Headteacher