

28 March 2019

Dear Parent/Carer

Social Media

In today's society the use of social media and online gaming is becoming the accepted norm, with many of our students using these platforms to interact with one another. These games and apps can be a useful means of staying in contact; however, some of our students have been on the receiving end of some quite unpleasant interactions via these media platforms.

We would, therefore, like to take this opportunity to offer some advice to parents about some of the more popular apps young people are using and the minimum ages users should be, according to the platforms' terms of use. Many students enjoy using mainstream social media platforms such as **Snapchat**, **Instagram**, **Twitter** and **Facebook**. If used responsibly there isn't an issue; however, it should be noted that the minimum age stipulated by the platforms for all of these apps is **13**. It is important to ensure that privacy settings are reviewed regularly and that your child is encouraged to not interact with anyone they don't know. **TikTok** (formally **Musical.ly**) is an app that allows users to record short videos of themselves 'lip synching' to popular songs that can be shared with other users and commented on. Whilst this may on the surface appear to be quite innocent and a bit of harmless fun, it has been widely reported in the media that **TikTok** is a platform that has been used by paedophiles seeking to groom young people.

Many of our students use **Whatsapp** to communicate with one another outside of school and it can prove quite useful to be part of a class group when it comes to checking homework etc. However, many parents (and indeed staff) are unaware that in 2018 **Whatspp** altered its terms of service and increased the age limit from **12** to **16**. That means in a school setting it would only be students in **Year 11** and above (dependent on birth dates) that are old enough to use the app. Perhaps the most worrying aspect of **Whatsapp** is how it has been used by some of our students to incite teasing which can rapidly become bullying if left unchecked.

All of the apps and platforms mentioned above have caused varying issues in school and, put simply, we have limited resources to deal with such matters. Whilst the school does have a duty of care to protect students, ultimately the responsibility surrounding safe phone and internet use lies with parents and carers. It is our recommendation that if you choose to allow your child to access apps and games (particularly if they are below the recommended age limits) similar to the ones mentioned above that you monitor them closely. With new apps and games being developed at a rapid rate it is important that you keep yourself informed so that you are best placed to guide your sons.

You will also be aware the school operates a 'no phone policy' during school hours. The school does appreciate that parents may wish for their sons to have a means of communication with them especially if they are reliant on buses and trains, however the policy states that phones must be switched off between the hours of **8.40am** and **3.40pm**.

For further information on the issues raised here, we would recommend the following websites as excellent sources of advice and guidance:

www.internetmatters.org

<https://parentinfo.org/>

<https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/>

Yours faithfully

The Heads of Year Team