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Head of School: Mr Jason Rhodes

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Dear Parent/Carer,

Potentially harmful misuse of online devices

Our pastoral teams have recently seen a rise in behaviour incidents and safeguarding concerns that come around as a result of students misusing phones and/ or social media. Nowadays, young people have access to technology that can pose a risk to their physical and mental wellbeing, and that of their peers, and can have profound consequences on school behaviour.

Since the students have returned to school, we have been informed of a few issues where children are using abusive and threatening language on social media towards each other. Although this bullying activity is not happening on the school site, it then affects behaviour, anxiety and subsequently lesson time and the learning of pupils in school. Please speak to your child about the Anti-bullying assemblies conducted last week.

We cannot regulate the online access that pupils have outside school, but if an issue of cyberbullying is reported to us, we have a duty of care to inform the parents of the children involved. There is clear guidance on the appropriate age ranges for certain online apps and I would like to draw your attention to these below.

WhatsApp recently announced a change to their terms and conditions for users based in Europe. Users *need to be 16 to use WhatsApp.*

Nearly all other social media services require users to *be at least 13 years of age* to access and use their services. This includes Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, Instagram, Tik Tok, Musical.ly and Skype.

Whilst there is no age restriction for watching videos on YouTube, *users need to be 13 or older to have their own YouTube account* (enabling them to subscribe to other channels, like videos, post comments, share their own content and flag inappropriate content).

The online world is a minefield for children and the situation has changed significantly in the last 10-15 years, as a whole range of unlimited content, both good and bad is a few clicks away. Once something has been posted on social media, it is very hard to get rid of.

I would ask parents/carers therefore, to be vigilant and monitor what children are posting online at this current time when children are not able to take part in their normal social activities. Threatening and abusive content *could result in police involvement if a child is over the age of 10.*

As parents/carers, you may already be having conversations with your child about the technology that they use. To support you in this, I have linked here a "Digital parenting" booklet to help answer questions you may have to keep your children safe.

We would like to suggest some conversations starters that you may find helpful when discussing this booklet with your child:

- How many friends they have online that they share personal information with, especially those they have never met in person (*see page 6 of the booklet*).
- As a society, we value tolerance. This should be reflected in their online conversations. Recent examples of misuse we have seen include the use of racist, homophobic and highly sexualised language.
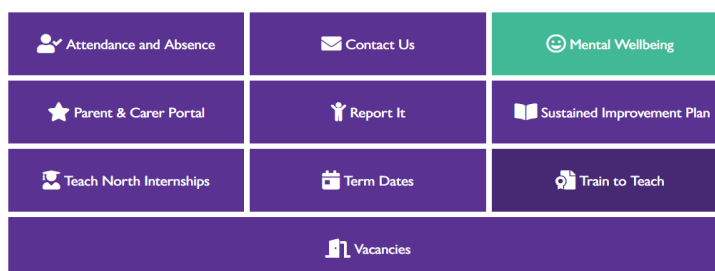- Respect for the filters put in place on devices and networks to keep children safe

The use of VPN's and extensions to manipulate these boundaries is strictly prohibited in school and this message should extend to at home. You can find out more about how to set restrictions on your home internet provider networks here

https://www.saferinternet.org.uk/advice-centre/parents-and-carers/parental-controls-offered-your-home-internet-provider

- What they should do if they see something that makes them feel uncomfortable

We do, of course, work with our students to highlight many of the above, as part of our Assembly and Life programme. As well as bespoke interventions for those students who struggle at times to demonstrate safe and responsible online behaviours, however your support is invaluable. You can also find advice on the school website on how to deal with online issues from fraud to bullying.

Finally, to support your child there is a new link on the Academy website to report concerns you may have at school linked to bullying, behaviour, issues affecting you or your child's studies or if you need help and are not sure who to turn to. Students have themselves received access to a QR code (below) to report, anonymously, any issues relating to bullying and/ or unkind behaviour, parents/carers will need to use the 'Report it' button on the website shown below.

Attendance and Absence	Contact Us	Mental Wellbeing
Parent & Carer Portal	Report It	Sustained Improvement Plan
Teach North Internships	Term Dates	Train to Teach
Vacancies		

Yours faithfully,

Mr J Rhodes
Head of School