



Together we learn, we care, we grow.

LONDON BOROUGH OF MERTON
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Dear Parents/Carers,

Letter to Year 5 Parents: Re: Internet Safety and the use of Social Media

Hatfeild Primary School is committed to promoting the safe and responsible use of the internet and as such we feel it is our responsibility to raise this particular issue as a growing concern, due to the increase in inappropriate use of WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, Tik Tok and other messaging sites. Many of the issues that have been brought to our attention recently have involved the use of:

- **WhatsApp** – An instant messaging app for smartphones. The user agreement requires users to be **age 16 or older**.
- **Snapchat** – a photo and messaging app which deletes itself after you open it, unless someone screenshots their screen but the recipient gets alerted if it happens. You are required to be at least **13 years old** to have this app.
- **Instagram** - an online mobile photo sharing, video sharing and social networking service which enables its users to take pictures and videos and share them on a variety of social networking platforms. You are required to be at least **13 years old** before you can create an account.
- **Facebook** - a social networking site. You are required to be at least **13 years old** before you can create an account.
- **Tik Tok** – a site where videos can be shared. Some of these videos can be very graphic and inappropriate for children. To be eligible to sign up for this service, you must be at least **13 years** of age.

We feel that it is important that you, as parents, know the different types of concerns we are dealing with on a day to day basis. Below we have outlined just a few of the 'issues/concerns' that have arisen relating to social media apps:

1. There have been a growing number of situations where school have been made aware that some students have been using social media to be unkind to others/threaten others. What starts as something seemingly harmless takes no account of how those on the receiving end might feel nor does it recognise how quickly things can get out of control and become extremely unpleasant.
 - *We advise that you carefully monitor your children's social media accounts and check messages that they are sending and receiving.*
2. Children have been using social media apps at inappropriate times with some evidence showing that some of our children have used a social media app in the early hours of the morning.
 - *We advise that, at bedtime, children have their devices turned off. Children are most vulnerable when they are using their devices unsupervised in private areas such as their bedrooms.*



3. Children are sending and receiving an incredible number of messages through social media apps and in some cases children turning on their device to find that they have hundreds of notifications. Often these notifications are due to private conversations between just two people and/or conversations with no purpose e.g. silly images, singular words and emojis.
 - *We advise that if children need to contact each other directly that they do so through other means e.g. a text message or a telephone call. We do not promote private conversations in a group format. We have found that these types of group chats lead to arguments and disagreements amongst our children as they become involved with discussions which they should not be part of.*
4. Children are misinterpreting some messages that they read and then fall out and have disagreements with their friends. The same message can be read in many different ways; with many different meanings. For example, a simple comment such as “I don’t want to go!” might be perceived as someone shouting and in total resentment of something when actually the person who wrote it might just be stating that they don’t want to go somewhere.
 - *We advise children are educated in how some messages are misinterpreted; through our PSHE lessons we will tackle this subject but we feel that you, as parents and carers could provide some advice to your children too as they become increasingly involved in communication which is not face to face.*
5. Children have been making and then uploading videos of themselves using social media platforms such as Tik Tok. Unless they have their settings on private, this can be seen by anyone across the world. This can make children very vulnerable.
 - *We advise that, if you allow your child to use this type of App, then their settings are switched to private. We also advise that your child should not show anything on the video that can identify them, such as where they live, how old they are or what school they go to.*

We understand that there is only so much control we have on what the children access at home but we urge you to be extra vigilant of your child’s use of social media in its many different and ever growing forms. Additional information about social media apps can be found here: www.thinkuknow.co.uk

Although we are constantly educating children about the importance of using the internet safely, we do not have the resources or the jurisdiction to resolve every issue that takes place out of school hours. In order to maintain the safety of the children of Hatfeild Primary School, it is vitally important that we work together to raise awareness and increase understanding of the potential dangers in this area.

Primarily, these occurrences and reported incidents of misuse of social media sites happen at home, after school hours when children have access to web sites that are blocked in school. With this in mind, and in response to concerned parents who have asked for advice regarding internet safety, we feel it important to point out to parents the risks of unregulated use of such sites, so you can make informed decisions as to whether to allow your child to have a profile or not and when and how to monitor their use, particularly at night time. We strongly advise a device free bedroom policy after bedtime to allow for uninterrupted sleep and rest and the removal of Apps that are not age appropriate, particularly WhatsApp and Snapchat, where we see most of the issues occurring.

We cannot govern matters occurring out of school hours which is a parental responsibility. However, we feel it is our responsibility to draw your attention to the age restrictions on the social media apps that some children have been using and offer advice and support on how best to keep your children safe online.

Many thanks for your continued support with this matter.
Yours sincerely

Anita Saville
Executive Headteacher

