23rd September 2024

The use of Social Media

Dear Parents and Carers

Today's young people are growing up in an increasingly complex world, living their lives seamlessly on and offline. This presents many positive and exciting opportunities, but also challenges and risks.

At All Hallows RC High School we are committed to working with our parents/carers collaboratively to ensure the best outcomes and the highest levels of achievement and well-being for all our pupils.

As our society becomes more technology based, we understand that the use of social media is central to the lives of many young people. In school, we work to build resilience in all our pupils to help them both embrace the digital era and protect themselves online. We place much emphasis on respect, dignity and inclusion throughout our curriculum and highlight the importance of these values when educating our children about the use of technology.

Learning how to act safely when using the internet is an incredibly important part of safeguarding our pupils and working together we can make a significant difference. At All Hallows we teach our pupils about keeping safe online through the PD and IT curriculum, assemblies and tutor time. We spend time discussing stranger danger, online grooming, risk taking behaviour and consequences.

We ask that parents are aware and monitor their child's social media use. This includes encouraging open conversations about people they may meet online. We reinforce with our pupils that not all online friends are who they say they are. We explain that these strangers can be adults pretending to be young people with the intent to sexually or criminally exploit them. We encourage pupils to make a trusted adult aware if they have any concerns.

As you are aware, the use of social media is commonplace and with this in mind, we would like to provide some advice that is intended to help safeguard your child.

School across the country are experiencing an increasing number of incidents where pupils are using social media platforms to post both comments and pictures, which are offensive, inappropriate and totally unacceptable.

Most social media sites set an age restriction for users of their site, for example WhatsApp app aged 16, TikTok and snapchat 13+. However, there is no verification and we know some young people often ignore the terms and conditions of use, unaware of the risks it might pose.

The following are safeguarding concerns relating to the use of social media platforms:

- shares your location if you don't use 'ghost mode';

- young people may be coerced into sending inappropriate pictures, believing the pictures will disappear after so many minutes;

- people can screen shot images that individuals/groups share;

- you can receive messages or requests for sexual images from people you don't know;

- can be used to bully others.

- Pupils could be putting themselves and others at serious risk when they:

- upload inappropriate, offensive or even illegal content;

- post photos and material which could damage their own or others' reputations;

- post inappropriate comments and pictures on other people's profiles that are humiliating or result in bullying;

- create false profiles and accept friend requests or engage with people they do not know.

There are occasions however, when things said in the virtual world are at best unhelpful and at worst, may constitute harassment, bullying or intimidation, which could ultimately lead to Police involvement.

In the interest of safeguarding your child in the online world, we would recommend the following:

- Have a conversation with your child about appropriate use, including the impact of 'peer pressure' when with friends, how anonymous or instantaneous online communication can change behaviours and online 'stranger danger' can occur.

- Ensure your child understands how their actions can affect others and the impact it may have on individuals both mentally and emotionally.

- Remind your child that things posted or said online forms part of their digital footprint.

- If you choose to allow your child to use online social networking sites, set privacy settings and block anonymous posts.

- Encourage your child to tell you or school about anything that makes them feel 'uncomfortable'. Or to report it using the CEOP button or directly to the social media site.

- Refrain from posting anything that could damage reputations or be considered offensive, inappropriate or illegal.

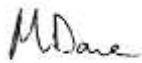- Report and block any activity that is inappropriate or risky.

The online world develops and changes at great speed. New opportunities, challenges and risks are appearing all the time. This can make it difficult for parents to stay up to date with the latest devices, platforms, apps, trends and related threats.

Please do not hesitate to discuss any concern with us in school or if you prefer, consult the following for further advice, or visit our school website.

- https://www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre/
- https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/
- www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents
- www.childnet.com

At All Hallows RC High School we take the safeguarding of our children and staff very seriously. If we have knowledge of risky online behaviours, we will report it to parents, the safeguarding unit and if necessary, the police. By working together, we are keeping all members of our school community safe through promoting wise and responsible use.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Done (Assistant Headteacher/Designated Safeguarding Lead)