CHESSWOOD JUNIOR SCHOOL
Home of Bright Sparks
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SAFEGUARDING: Managing online and phone communication for children

Dear Parent,

In recent months we have had increasing reports of unacceptable online behaviour between children. The most concerning communications have been on 'Whatsapp' and within the upper year groups. Most of what has been shared with me simply could not be repeated here as an illustration of the problem because it so offensive in so many ways. Although all of the incidents reported happened outside of the school premises, the fall out from the online communication can have a significant effect on children's emotional state and readiness to learn, once they are back in school. On that basis, we will typically need to address the arising issues from outside of school using school behaviour management processes whilst always involving parents in the resolution.

It is also fair to say that:

- the destructive nature of such communication for a child should not be underestimated.
- there is no pattern or specific trait that suggests any individual child or group are likely to:
    - be at risk of being the victim of communication to a greater extent
    - be more likely to send harmful and hurtful content
- any child owning or using a connected mobile phone, computer, tablet or games console is broadly at equal risk.

Whilst each incident has been resolved satisfactorily, it seems like a good time for school staff to join forces with parents to improve children's welfare by:

- reducing the risk of children communicating in an unacceptable manner towards others;
- reducing the risk of children being exposed to explicit and harmful terms either directly or indirectly.

Increasingly, I think of this issue in terms of driving a typical family car and then being given a formula 1 car to drive unexpectedly with little supervision, coaching or guidance. Almost certainly, the F1 car would be wrecked, causing enormous damage to the driver, the car and any bystanders by the first corner. Whilst the technology & excitement of the F1 car would be incredible, it needs a large support crew, clear rules and a driver that has built up to that experience over a period of years to manage it without disaster! Successful child online communication requires similar support, supervision, rules and team work between parents, children and school.

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The table below sets out initial guiding actions and expectations for school, parents and children:

School

- The ability to bring a mobile phone into school is a privilege and it is at the school's discretion. Wherever, a child has used the phone to communicate hurt or harm to others; or has indirectly introduced discriminatory or sexually inappropriate material it is likely that a ban on bringing the mobile phone into the school premises will be undertaken for a period of time or permanently depending on the specific incident.
- Large group chats for classes or year groups are not permitted for children in school – we recommend group chats are for close friends only.
- Undertake termly assemblies that focus on different aspects of managing online communication.
- Review the current computing and PSHE curriculum to ensure children have been taught the knowledge and skills to manage appropriate online communication.
  - How to manage receipt or exposure to harmful or worrying content online
  - How to avoid exposure to such content
  - Guidance on online group communication
- Always contact parents of children who have communicated in an unacceptable way
- Determine which children may have been hurt or harmed by unacceptable communication and contact parents to ensure the current issue can be resolved and that sufficiently robust monitoring can take place from home in the future (the guide below will act as a framework for safeguarding children from future harm).

Parents

The aspects below are intended for parent guidance and based on many experiences and learning in school when things have gone wrong, sometimes badly! They are shared in good faith for the benefit and safeguarding of all children with online access, particularly those with increasingly independent use. It is however, for parents to set their expectations for their child, we hope this will be helpful in that regard.

Set out:
- the ground rules, expectations and responsibilities for your child when using a phone or online
  - timing of communication – use at expected bedtimes… and early in the morning; store phone etc away from bedrooms.
  - communication methods
    - be conscious of which online methods have been used, including any new and arising methods.
    - remove children from any large 'multi-way' communication groups e.g. Whatsapp groups
    - do not permit children access to 'Tick Tock', 'Facebook' or any similar online platform designed for 13+.
    - do not permit children to play online games that are rated 13+ e.g. Fortnight. Fortnight is often found to underlie many of the issues that come into school – it is a really effective place for children to learn some of the most offensive, discriminatory and inappropriate words and terms – often completely unsupervised by any adult and practised for many hours each week.
    - Where parents do allow access to 13+ content this should be done in a highly supervised and restricted environment.
  - sharing any and all communication with parents (despite the protests that some children mount, this is a normal expectation for the vast majority of families and keeps children safer as a result)
    - regularly – at least weekly (random checks should also be a normal expectation for a child)
    - In response to any worry or upsetting incident.
  - reviewing online content with a parent that has been searched and or experienced by the child including online videos, songs and song lyrics.
  - Ensure appropriate filters are in place for online devices but know even when they are this is NO substitute for frequent parental oversight.
- the sanctions for not meeting those (ensure these are reasonable)

Do not hesitate to use the reasonable sanctions in response to behaviour that falls below expectations.
Monitor your child's communication regularly (at least weekly):
- Who are they communicating with?
- Do you know them?

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- If you do not know them – how does your child know them? Which school do they go to? Are they in the same year group? When children are communicating with others 2+ years different – risks of exposure to inappropriate content increase markedly.

Share significant concerns with school
- If your child has received harmful communication and it is likely to impact on their readiness to learn or their emotional state in school email: concern@chesswood.w-sussex.sch.uk
  - Include the context of the communication and screenshots, wherever possible (and however offensive!)

Further Information:

https://www.commonsensemedia.org/
https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/online-games/
https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/child-safety-online-a-practical-guide-for-parents-and-carers/child-safety-online-a-practical-guide-for-parents-and-carers-whose-children-are-using-social-media
https://www.getsafeonline.org/safeguarding-children/
https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/
https://www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre/

Children

- Follow the Bright Sparks Community Code when online:
  - Be the best we can be, at all times
  - Respect the rights of others and take our responsibilities seriously
  - Show courtesy, care and kindness at all times
  - Hold high expectations of ourselves and others
- Remember
  - Avoid any large (larger than 3-5 children) 'whatsapp' groups – rarely do they create anything other than upset and anxiety for children.
  - behaviour on-line should be at least as good as in real-life – if you wouldn't say or write something in front of your parent or a teacher you should not say it or write it!
  - 'least said soonest mended' – do not respond to hurtful or inappropriate content online until you have shared it with a responsible adult. This applies to content directed at you
  - leave any group immediately it becomes abusive or inappropriate – screenshot content for a responsible adult to see as soon as possible.
  - Bringing a phone into school is a privilege that can be removed in response to unacceptable online behaviour.
  - Online behaviour that has hurt, harmed or introduced unacceptable content to another child at this school or other school may lead to school sanctions even when the incident happened outside of school.
- Expect parents to check any and all communication on all online devices randomly and at least weekly to keep you safe.
- Only use age appropriate content and online platforms – anything 13+ is inappropriate and should not be used, including but not limited to Fortnite – particularly when playing online.
- Only add a child to a group with their permission in real life first; only add close friends to a group.
- If a child has left a group you are in then they can only be added again when they have agreed to that in real life, and only then when they are genuinely happy to do that with no pressure from others.
- Report any and all abusive or inappropriate material, comments or written communication towards you, others or that you have accidentally seen to your parent, IMMEDIATELY.
- Report any and all concerns where a child you know has shared they have been harmed or they want to or have hurt themselves to your parent, IMMEDIATELY.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Jolly

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