

Social Media/Chat Groups: Important Clarification

It is important to clarify the school's approach to the misuse of social media. With more and more students having access to technology, we are seeing more and more issues with the misuse of social media by school age children. **To minimise incidents in school we have a zero tolerance on the use of mobile phones on the school grounds for pupils in Year 7 - 11.** This step has become necessary because, like many schools, we find ourselves in a number of challenging and avoidable situations due to some pupils' inappropriate use of social media.

We have been made aware, by both pupils and parents, of several incidents of the misuse of social media/messaging, sometimes by our pupils and other times where they themselves have been the victims of misuse. Many of these begin with initially trivial comments or events which are then escalated beyond all proportion by pupils (who were not originally part of the situation) who feel it is appropriate to continue aggravating the situation by either passing messages between 'sides', or encouraging students to resolve their differences either physically or verbally. On some occasions parents/carers have become involved which has escalated some of these incidents even further, making it very difficult for us as a school to resolve issues.

I want to assure you that if any aspect of ICT is misused in our school or on our equipment, or if there is any misuse on our system either in or out of normal school hours, then, due to the sophisticated filters in operation, we will identify and address this misuse. Fortunately, this type of misuse is incredibly rare and this is helped by the fact that pupils are not able to access any social media sites on our network.

The majority of inappropriate internet use is done from home or on a pupil's mobile device/s during evenings, weekends and holidays. ***Please note: Staff have no jurisdiction to deal with this and cannot investigate it.***

It should be recognised that in many cases, a young person may put themselves at considerable risk due to the misuse of social media accidentally. E.g. giving personal details, publishing photographs, etc. to a 'friend' who then distributes this information more widely. They need to be fully aware of this risk. **The responsibility for monitoring a young person's use of social media, or indeed the internet in general, must lie with parents and carers.** We strongly encourage you to discuss issues around this with your child. I have included a link for advice intended to support you with this.

<https://www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/parents-a-z-mental-health-guide/social-media/#:~:text=Discuss%20different%20social%20media%20platforms&text=Remind%20your%20child%20that%20every,things%20that%20aren't%20appropriate.>

If your child is the victim of inappropriate use, then we strongly recommend that you, as a parent/carer, report the matter to both the website developer and to the police by calling 101. As stated earlier, unless an issue manifests itself during the normal school day, our staff are not able to address this.

However, to support you and your child, we will:

- Continue, through PSHE, ICT and assemblies, to educate students of the dangers of inappropriate use of the internet
- Refer anything that we believe could be defined as, or could potentially lead to, a Child Protection issue to the appropriate external agencies
- Continue to support parents with advice on how to tackle inappropriate use either by their own child or others.

I hope that you find this document and website link useful, and by working together, I trust that we can keep all our pupils safe and well.

Thank you for your continued support.