Social media, on-line gaming and its impact in school

Social media (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Snapchat, WeChat) along with on-line gaming (Xbox live, PlayStation) has transformed the manner in which we communicate with each other as well as 'changed' how children spend their spare time out of school. There are clearly many benefits to these for us both as individuals and also as communities but there is also a downside.

Unfortunately we are experiencing an increasing number of situations where both social media and on-line gaming has been the vehicle for inappropriate, unkind behaviour by our pupils. Whilst this manner of communicating is now part of everyday life for many children, there are occasions when things said in the virtual world and behaviours displayed towards others are at best unhelpful and, at worst, may constitute harassment, bullying or intimidation which could ultimately lead to police involvement.

There have been a growing number of situations where we have had to deal with our pupils using social media to be unkind to 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. Whilst things have taken place off the school site and outside school hours, the resulting 'fallout' in such situations can have major implications for harmonious relationships within school and a resulting negative impact on teaching and learning. Some recent examples of ill-considered use of social media have caused school staff to spend a disproportionate amount of time trying to manage issues and situations. We would much prefer if this time could be focused on our pupils' education.

How can parents help?

The responsibility for monitoring a child's use of social media, on-line gaming or indeed the internet in general, lies with parents/guardians. We strongly encourage you to discuss issues around this with your child – useful resources are available on our website.

- Ensure that if your child is communicating with others via social media/on-line gaming, they are considerate in the way in which they express things and avoid language that others might consider to be abusive, aggressive or threatening.
- Supervise your child's activities online, especially on social networking sites. Monitor their usage and comments (made and received) and we recommend that you should have their username/password for sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Xbox Live etc.
- Ensure that, where possible, your child adjusts privacy settings so that posts on social networking sites are only seen by those he/she chooses.
- Talk to other parents if issues arise so that you can collectively manage this.
- Delete apps or confiscate devices if your child is found to be using them inappropriately.
- If your child experiences or witnesses unkind comments, inappropriate use or online bullying, tell them not to respond. The best option is to take a print out or screen shot of the offending post and then delete the "app" and the account – **then we recommend that you as a parent/guardian report the matter to both the website developer and to the police.**
- Seek further advice: http://ceop.police.uk or https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/

We want to encourage and promote positive role models in both the digital world as well as the real world. Whilst our pupils may be the more knowledgeable in using modern communication technologies, it is the partnership of schools and parents that can help them to use it wisely, safely and responsibly.

Comberton Primary School staff and governing body