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Guidance in relation to Primary Age Children using Social Media

Please remember that social networking sites such as those below, are targeted at older teenagers and adults. All have a strict registration policy as detailed in their privacy policies and procedures are in place for reporting under-age use.

- As part of its Terms of Service, **WhatsApp's minimum age of use is 16 years old.**
- **Facebook requires everyone to be at least 13 years old** before they can create an account. Creating an account with false information is a violation of their terms. This includes accounts registered on the behalf of someone under 13.
- **YouTube requires account holders to be 18, but a 13-year-old can sign up with a parent's permission.**
- **Instagram is not for children under the age of 13 years.**

Despite these clearly stated and published age restrictions, we are aware that a large and growing number of children in the school are using social media networks, often with their parent's knowledge and consent.

Children are becoming technologically knowledgeable at increasingly younger ages but this doesn't necessarily mean that their brains are developing at the same rate as their digital acumen. Research shows that it takes children about 12 years to fully develop the cognitive structures that enable them to engage in ethical thinking. Before this time, it can be difficult, if not impossible, for a child to fully grasp the impact of their actions upon others, online or otherwise. Despite this, young children are increasingly joining social networking sites, sometimes even putting themselves in harm's way by becoming victims of online harassment, solicitation, and cyber-bullying before they are ready to respond appropriately.

To be clear, we do not want you to feel that, as a school, we are 'against' social media. We recognise that social media often present opportunities for communication & self-expression and we know also that the majority of online users are safely and responsibly engaged in the social media environment. However, we along with many other schools, have a number of growing concerns. The following is not an exhaustive list but includes:

- The unsafe disclosure of personal information in which children can provide potentially dangerous or damaging personal information without a full understanding that what is posted in social media communities is public, potentially permanent and accessible to many more people than the user intends
- Addiction whereby a child spends an excessive amount of time online, to the detriment of their education, well-being and health
- Cyber-bullying - involving the sending or posting of harmful and sometimes malicious material online
- Risky sexual behavior whereby a child is exposed to inappropriate content and images, or predatory influences

Clearly, there are no miraculous solutions to these difficulties; the best approach is, we feel, a comprehensive one with ongoing education in online safety and responsible use by all who are responsible for your son or daughter's welfare, very much including parents - with whom we wish to work in very close partnership.

Further advice:

For advice on handling social media, screen time and how to use parental controls and privacy settings to keep your children safe online visit Vodafone's Digital Parenting Guide and consider taking up the family pledge and by setting digital house rules.

<https://www.vodafone.co.uk/mobile/digital-parenting>

O2 have partnered with NSPCC to provide a hub which contains information about a number of issues including online bullying and a guide to what "apps" children are using. This site is designed to help adults understand what kids really do on their mobiles and the internet. There is also useful information to help you talk to your children about the risks so they know how to protect themselves.

www.o2.co.uk/help/nspcc