Ms Suvi Mohey [Principal]

Monday 13th March

Dear Parents / Carers,

Re: Appropriate and Safe Use of Social Media and the Internet.

I would like to share with you some important information and guidance about how to keep your child safe online. Social media clearly has many benefits for us both as individuals and communities, and at Park Academy we are exploring how we might best utilise the power of social media to engage even better with our parents and students.

However, there has been an increase in non-school related issues that are impacting on our students and their education. This spike in the inappropriate use of social media has increased unkind behaviour towards peers and we would like to ask parents/ carers to support the Academy in ensuring that your children are not only using social media and the internet appropriately, but also safely. We encourage and are proud of our right to freedom of speech, but there are too often occasions where things are said in the virtual world that are, at best unhelpful and, at worst, may constitute harassment, bullying or intimidation which could ultimately lead to police involvement.

Unfortunately, there has also been an increased in strangers targeting young people through social media platforms, including gaming sites, to deliver false information and coerce them into dangerous views and actions. It is vital that you monitor who they are speaking to and what they are discussing online. The NSPCC also has advice on what to do (https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/).

Known risks to young people using social media and the internet unrestricted or unmonitored are:
- Risk of online bullying or harassment by peers
- Young people who are isolated or struggle social are more at risk to look for friends or comfort online, this can lead to online grooming. Online grooming ranges from gang culture, sexual predators to extremist radicalisation.
- Unrealistic sense of body image or reality. This includes access to pornographic content that is not monitored.
- Fake news, hoaxes and misinformation
- Promotion of self-harm, suicide and eating disorders. Often these look like challenges that can lead to risk or harm to your child.
- Violent or distressing content. Unfortunately, a lot of content is not filtered or check before it is uploaded to public forums. This can lead to children witnessing very distressing content that can lead to de-sensitisation and mental health concerns.

Finally, we would ask that you support the Academy in ensuring your child is using social media appropriately by checking they are not part of a group chat of more than 3 or 4 people. This greatly the reduces the chances of your child seeing inappropriate content shared by an unknown group member, being involved in online bullying or harassment and being exposed to harmful links.

Perseverance ♦ Aspiration ♦ Respect ♦ Kindness

If you have any concerns, you can contact the police on 101 or your child's Academic Mentor for advice. We are also updating our website with guidance on how to stay safe online.

Yours sincerely

Ms L. Povey
Assistant Principal and Designated Safeguarding Lead