

Bramley St. Peter's C of E (Aided) Primary School

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Tuesday 18th April 2023

Re: Increasing concerns about the misuse of social media and gaming platforms in Years 5 and 6

Dear Parents/Carers,

There are many ways to connect with others but the use of social media especially, using Apps like WhatsApp and Snapchat or connecting through online gaming, has increased as more children and young people have smart phones of their own or the latest games consoles. We recognise, as a parent/carer, this can be a difficult aspect to navigate in raising your child. You want them to be independent and to 'fit in' with their friends, however, the use of social media and online gaming can sometimes cause a range of issues and lead to situations involving high levels of risk - mentally, emotionally and physically.

We are currently finding a number of issues with the use of specific social media apps and online gaming and the repercussions of these 'chats' within school. We want to alert you to a number of aspects:

- All the phone apps used by the children are for children aged 13 or above (WhatsApp is 16 or above). Therefore, NONE of our pupils should be using these apps. These age limits are set by the providers themselves and are set for a reason. When chats start to go wrong the children need to be mature enough to know what to do. We are seeing that this is not the case, even with the most mature and sensible of our pupils.
- Online gaming can involve chats with multiple users and the focus of conversations can go beyond the game being played.
- These chat groups can be extensive, both in terms of how many people can be in a group but also in the number of groups that exist.
- We are finding these groups can contain children from outside our school so, whilst a group may start off as a Y5 group, they can very quickly involve a number of people that your child may have never met or have knowledge of. This is a safeguarding risk.
- Children are inviting whoever they want into these groups. This has included older siblings (used as 'protection' in some cases) and much older people. This is also a safeguarding risk.
- It is very difficult to identify specific people in chats as they are not always using their own names.



- The language used, as seen in some of the chats, is also of grave concern. There is regular swearing from some individuals and some language has been racist and/or homophobic and threatening harm.
- We have seen evidence of cyber bullying and abuse towards others. This has included group chats being set up with a child's name in it and offensive words. The comments I have seen and heard (voice memos are also being used) are incredibly worrying and totally unacceptable.
- Content on chats has become very intense and has then led to face to face repercussions in some cases with children being assaulted or threatened with assault the next day or following days in school.
- Groups are being set up and deleted quickly, therefore leaving no evidence trail of content.

We recognise that social media and the world of online gaming can be a minefield and very confusing - particularly for parents/carers less confident or less familiar with the range of apps available for chat groups or how an online gaming platform can be used beyond the game itself. We live in a rapidly changing technological society and it can be difficult for parent/carers to consider the implications for child safety that the use of social media or online gaming brings. In school we regularly teach and cover many aspects of e-safety to support pupils' knowledge and understanding about appropriate contact, content and conduct and this includes aspects of using social media and online gaming. As a parent/carer, however, you are ultimately responsible for your child's use of their mobile phone, social media and gaming platforms to ensure that they are safe by setting out clear expectations and monitoring how they are following these.

Please seriously consider:

- Whether your primary age child(ren) should have a phone and/or access to social media given the age recommendations/limits advised.
- Whether your primary age child/ren should be left unsupervised to play games online that involve multiple users.
- Checking your child's phone regularly to monitor the apps they have been using and the contact, content and conduct on them. Your child/ren could be sat in the same room as you or even next to you but you may not be aware of everything they are typing/accessing.
- Increasing your awareness of the content of conversations taking place between participants in online gaming.
- If you do not know how to use any apps yourself, then do not let your child use them.
- Checking who your child is 'friends' with in groups or when online gaming and asking them who specific people are if you are not sure.
- Talking to your child about what to do if they see or hear something upsetting/offensive. You need them to be able to speak up and deal with the situation appropriately should it occur.
- Increase your knowledge about any apps used, including how to block people and how to take a screen capture of a conversation (evidence even if the chat/group is deleted).



- There is lots of supportive information on our school website: <https://www.bsp.leeds.sch.uk/online-safety-3/> and <https://www.bsp.leeds.sch.uk/letters-and-newsletters-support-for-parentscarers/>
- We send out monthly newsletters which highlight different apps. These can be found here: <https://www.bsp.leeds.sch.uk/online-safety-newsletters-and-support-for-parent-1/> January's newsletter contained information about WhatsApp. The Parental Controls booklet gives helpful advice about a number of apps and devices.
- The NSPCC also have some useful support on offer.
WhatsApp: <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/online-safety-blog/2023-01-12-is-whatsapp-safe-for-my-child/>
Snapchat: <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/online-safety-blog/is-snapchat-safe-for-my-child/>

If you would like to ask any questions or seek our advice about any of the aspects raised in this letter, please do speak to one of the Child Protection team (Mrs Lambert, Mrs Newlands, Mrs Finn or myself) or another member of staff in school.

We need to work together to safeguard your children. Thank you for your continuing support.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs Ruth Esplin
Headteacher

Mrs Lehana Newlands
Online Safety Lead

