

“It takes a whole community, to bring up a child”



Ark Boulton Academy

27 June 2018

Dear Parent/Carer,

At Ark Boulton, the safety and welfare of students and staff is paramount. The internet is a revolutionary tool that has changed the way society communicates and interacts. However, the age of the internet, mobile devices and social media has made keeping children and young people safe more complex.

Young people are influenced by what they see in the media and from what they see older students and adults taking part in, so they have also joined social media apps such as Snapchat, Instagram and Facebook. In many cases this will be fairly harmless and these platforms provide a way for young people to communicate with friends and family both near and far.

The use of social media in itself is not a bad thing, however aside from issues to do with mental health and wellbeing coming from the overuse and dependency on social media and mobile device usage, there is another greater threat that comes from **those out there who misuse social media to connect with, influence and ultimately harm children and young people.** Parents should be aware that the unregulated and unmonitored use of social media is in fact exposing children to these potentially dark and harmful elements.

As part of our routine support for children we have uncovered that many students have been contacted regularly by an unknown individual (or possibly by a group). **Based on seeing some of these online conversations the nature of this contact is likely to be intended to groom young people with the intent to cause them harm.** We are working closely with West Midlands Police on this matter but I would urge parents to take steps to safeguard their children.

Sometimes young people behave in a way on social media that they would not in real life. **We try to educate children about the dangers of social media misuse and about online safety and would ask that as parents you do the same at home.** If your child/children make use of social media or online gaming then speak to them about who they are online with. Ask them if they know the people they are in contact with. Ask to see their phone, go through their contact lists, and ask how they have been using social media apps. Go through their previous chat history and see if there is anything in there that doesn't seem right or causes you concern. Check their photo albums for pictures that they have taken which might compromise them or photos that they have received which may be inappropriate and could be exposing your child to harm. Being in possession of inappropriate images of minors and passing these on to others could be regarded as a criminal offence.

Parents should routinely monitor their child's online activity. If you are in any doubt that your child might be at risk of being contacted and influenced by an individual to behave inappropriately or to put themselves at risk of harm then you should contact the police. We are always happy to provide support and guidance for parents so please do not hesitate to get in touch with us.

Regards,

P Horner, Vice Principal

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“Growing together, reaching higher”