

Ref: SM/PG

28th January 2020

Dear Parents/Carers,

I am writing to you to clarify elements of the school's policy on the misuse of social media and sending inappropriate messages, pictures and videos. As you will be aware, over time, we have spoken to pupils about this on numerous occasions. Recently, we have been made aware, by both students and parents/carers, of several incidences of the misuse of social media, sometimes by our students and other times where our students have been the victims of misuse.

I wanted to assure you that if any aspect of ICT is misused in school on our equipment, or if there is any misuse of the school email system, either in or out of normal school hours, we will, due to the sophisticated filters in operation, be able to identify and address this misuse. Fortunately, this type of misuse in school is incredibly rare, which is helped by the fact that students are not able to access any social media sites on our network.

Indeed, most of the inappropriate use of the internet is carried out from home or on students' mobile devices during evenings, weekends and holidays. Recently, many incidents have taken place when the students are alone and not being monitored closely.

Staff at the school have no jurisdiction to deal with this and cannot investigate it fairly.

It should be noted that, in many cases, a child may put themselves at considerable risk due to the misuse of social media accidentally. Examples are giving personal details, publishing photographs, etc. to a 'friend' who then distributes this information more widely. They need to be fully aware of this risk. The responsibility for monitoring a child's use of social media, or indeed the internet in general, must lie with parents/carers. We strongly encourage you to discuss issues around this with your children.

Unfortunately, we are experiencing an increasing number of situations where social media has been the vehicle for inappropriate behaviour by both students and parents/carers. This involves a circulation of inappropriate text messages, images and videos that have been recently shared amongst our students. It has been found that certain apps such as: Instagram, Facebook and Snapchat have all been the root of issues dealt with recently. An image / video on Snapchat, for example, disappears after it has been viewed and therefore cannot be traced. On this app, you can also discreetly store pictures and videos in an album called "My Eyes Only", which may require a password (created by the user) to open and see them. This is how some parents/carers are missing indecent images that are being taken, screenshot taken and stored, which can lead onto being recirculated later. Just to highlight, the sharing of inappropriate images is a criminal offence and is taken very seriously.

Love Lane, Cleobury Mortimer, Shropshire DY14 8PE

Tel: (01299) 270312

e-mail: admin@laconchildeschool.co.uk

www.lacon-childe.org.uk

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There has also been speculation that some students have been sending images and videos to other 'social media users' that they do not know. Please can you continue to stress the importance of only being friends with people they know on social media, only allowing friends to follow them and only engaging with people they know to be genuine and who they already know personally. This is paramount for their safety both in and out of school.

We live in a society where we are proud of our right to freedom of speech and would not wish to suggest that this should be curtailed in any way. There are occasions however, when things said in the virtual world are at best unhelpful and, at worst, may constitute harassment, bullying or intimidation, which could ultimately lead to Police involvement. Sharing indecent images of anyone under the age of 18 is against the law – it is vital that students understand the severity of these actions before they send, for their own safety and wellbeing. Once an image or video is sent, there is no saying where it could end up and when it may resurface in future – which could lead to detrimental challenges for the student.

If your child is the victim of inappropriate use, then we strongly recommend that you as a parent/carer report the matter to both the website developer and to the police. As stated earlier, unless an issue manifests itself during the normal school day, our staff are not able to address this. However, to support you and your child, the school will:

- Continue, through PSHE days and assemblies, to educate students of the dangers of inappropriate use of the internet
- Always continue to monitor the use of any form of ICT in normal school hours and the use of the school email system, and will deal with anything deemed inappropriate
- Refer anything that we believe could be defined as, or could potentially lead to, a Child Protection issue to the appropriate external agencies
- Continue to support parents/carers with advice on how to tackle inappropriate use either by their own child or others

If your child is contacted for inappropriate images by another student or an unknown user account, we would highly recommend that, in the first instance, you log your complaint of concern to the police by dialling 101. This will allow them to investigate by gathering all information to give a clearer picture of what has happened and who is responsible. Another way of reporting concerns online is by making a complaint the CEOP website, accessed at:

<https://www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre/>.

CEOP is a law enforcement agency and is here to keep children and young people safe from sexual exploitation and abuse.

I hope that you find this document and attached website links useful and by working together, as outlined in this letter, I trust that we can keep all our students safe and well.

Yours sincerely,

The Pastoral Team
Lacon Childe School