



Great Bardfield Primary School

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Headteacher: Mrs Alison Kerrell

Friday 8th November 2019

Dear Parents and Carers,

SAFEGUARDING OUR CHILDREN

Our school's, and in fact every schools', number one priority is keeping their children safe. As you are aware this is more complicated than ever, with the added dimension of on-line safety.

As a school governor I subscribe to weekly safeguarding updates from a safeguarding specialist called Andrew Hall. What never ceases to amaze me is that every Monday morning there is an abundance of new information and guidance, as there are so many perspectives and scenarios to consider.

This Monday, one particular item in Hall's newsletter caught my attention because it related to how we as parents and carers can help our children set boundaries around online behaviour. I have very deep concerns around what our youngsters are exposed to via social media and through mobile messaging apps, and with what they consequently have to contend. I therefore planned to share this item with you on Friday's school newsletter

However, before Monday morning was over, the urgency to get this guidance to you was accelerated as the school was made aware of a serious group messaging incident, involving pupils' unacceptable conduct. The police were alerted and have taken it very seriously, such that today they have been in to talk with all our year 5 and 6 children. I sat in on the class discussion with PC Holmes and it was very enlightening. Most interesting I think was his explanation to the class about their 'Digital Footprint' - what ever they message, forward on or share, is there forever and can be traced. Deleting a message does not mean it is gone. Threatening or abusive messages are an offence.

Despite primary school children being too young to use any group messaging app (to use Facebook Messenger, Instagram, SnapChat or Tik Tok they should be at least 13 and for WhatsApp they must be at least 16), our children are IT proficient and are putting themselves in environments where, if we are not vigilant, we will not see or know what's going on. Children are sending and/or being exposed to unacceptable, offensive and intolerable content.

For some reason and it is well documented, that when on social media and group messaging apps, users do not respect usual social etiquettes and our children sadly replicate this behaviour. They say or see the unacceptable being said and I fear this normalises abhorrent behaviour. We may well think we know our children and know they would never say anything offensive or hurtful, but do we know if they are witnessing others saying unimaginable things? Do we know who is in their group chats, or who's got access and who's responding to videos they post?



Jan Oller

Group conversations invariably stray and our children can be drawn in, unfortunately either becoming the bully, thinking it's "cool" and wanting to be part of the gang or they can be bullied, being subjected to offensive and intolerable banter.

Our primary school children are very young, yet whatever they say or do online right now will potentially be with them for life. They may not realise that anything said or done, even in a private chat can be shared over the internet, it may ultimately be seen by anyone and will be there for forever.

In accordance with our school values we and our children should respect everyone, to this end Childnet's updated Parent and Carer Toolkit, is the item I want to share with you.

Childnet's toolkit may help you have conversations about online safety. Their booklet 'Let's talk about life online' includes ten key messages that should be shared with children:

1. "You can always come to me if you need help."
2. "What would you do if this happened...?"
3. "Remember that not everyone is who they say they are online."
4. "Keep your personal information safe, and other people's too."
5. "Be respectful to others online."
6. "Think before you post."
7. "Remember to ask if it's okay."
8. "Remember not everything is true online."
9. "The things other people post online might not always show what their life is really like."
10. "Recognise how going online makes you feel and take a break when you need to."

The Parent and Carer Toolkit can be found here: <https://www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers/parent-and-carer-toolkit>

I thank you for your support and trust that this may help or encourage you to have discussions with your children.

Yours faithfully,



Jane Tillotson

Chair of Governors
Great Bardfield School