



Head Teacher: Gillian Powe
Deputy Head Teacher: Joe Emissah

Friday 20th October 2023

Dear Parents / Carers,

Update Letter – Mobile Devices

Earlier this term, we invited parents and carers from Yr 4–6 to an evening to discuss the use of mobile devices. For parents who were unable to attend, the summary below may support you as you consider your child’s journey into the digital world. In school, Mr Lescure and Miss Walker, our Online Safety Lead and Growth and Reflection Lead teachers, have undertaken a review of our approach to online safety and are implementing changes and developments to our curriculum. You can also find useful information about practical approaches to online safety with your children on our website [pages here](#).

The internet provides a wealth of opportunities for our children. Their engagement with technology has been greatly accelerated in the past few years for reasons that were outside of our control. Educators, parents and children alike are learning to navigate a new environment in which children’s online lives continue to change rapidly. Social norms for new technologies will take time to emerge and many people believe we are yet to see appropriate social conventions established around the appropriate use of mobile technology for children and young people at the primary age. While we wait to catch up with all these changes, it is worth taking time to reflect on how we can guide and protect children in this important area. These can be difficult topics to work through and any advice shared is non-judgemental as we know our children are the first generation to go through primary years with such considerations. It can sometimes feel like trial and error and we often learn from issues that have arisen with our older children who may be further on in navigating the online world.



Challenges

The online world has huge benefits, but it is not designed or moderated for children. Children have not developed the emotional maturity and resilience to manage many aspects of the online environment, especially social media Apps, many of which are 13+ age advisory. Getting on and falling out is part of the process of maturing but the nature of online dialogue introduces many added challenges to managing communication that even many adults find very challenging to negotiate. As well as social media, children's exposure to harmful content including pornographic, misogynistic, homophobic and racist language, images and ideas is on the rise as children spend increasing amounts of time online. The majority of children's time spent online (72%) is accessed on a mobile phone, which can be used in a bedroom or out of sight spaces.

Recent reports from OFCOM and The Children's Commissioner highlight that:

- 84% of children report being bullied online
- 36% report seeing worrying, nasty or harmful content
- 20% of children use privacy search features such as incognito
- 19% delete their search history

Good news

Whilst there is a complex picture in relation to risk and harm, the approaches to minimising it are manageable and there is lots we can do to aid our children in their use of technology. Whilst we may have started down a route, it is possible to adapt our thinking and take on some different habits around device use. You might think about any number of the following:

1. **Delay.** Resist parental or children's peer pressure to get a mobile phone until you believe they are ready. Children build and sustain positive relationships in the real environment in school. These are sufficient for them to flourish. Just because a few friends might have phones doesn't mean your child will be socially disadvantaged if they don't have one.
2. **Shared devices in shared spaces.** A tablet, laptop or PC in a living room or communal space dramatically reduces the opportunity for children to encounter content that, once seen, cannot be unseen. It also encourages them to raise concerns when they arise as you are likely to be there.
3. **Non-smart phone.** If your child walks home from school, a phone may provide limited safety benefits in contrast to the online harms a smart phone exposes them to. If you think a phone is essential, a non-smart phone reduces the risks substantially.
4. **Get a phone box.** Buy a small box/basket where phones can be kept in a communal room. This aids boundary setting around where, when and for how long phones are used in the home.
5. **Review and revisit.** Set a note in your diary to review and discuss your approach so that, as your child develops you continually evaluate how this is going. Software, filtering and monitoring are valuable tools but trusting and open conversations with our child is vitally important as they grow.

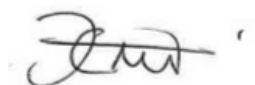
If, like many parents, you feel there are things you may want to change in this area, take courage and begin the journey. Just because an older child may have had a device at particular age does not mean you can't review your approach and make a different decision for your next child.



We are very hopeful that parents can take on positive approaches to online safety and build attitudes and habits that enable children to enjoy the benefits of the internet whilst limiting their exposure to some of the more problematic issues that are on the rise for increasingly younger pupils nationally, locally and indeed at our school.

Thank you for your ongoing support.

Yours sincerely,



Joe Emissah
Deputy Head

