

MONEYREA PRIMARY SCHOOL

Internet safety and the use of Social Media

Dear Parent,

In recent years we have become increasingly aware of the potential dangers posed by the uncontrolled and unmonitored use of the internet by children. To that end, we invited officers from the PSNI to talk to our senior pupils about this very subject. However, it has come to my attention that some of our pupils use 'group chats', where they have come in contact with inappropriate language and comments. I would strongly advise parents to monitor their children's use of such forums.

At Moneyrea we are committed to promoting the safe and responsible use of the internet by our pupils. I therefore feel it is my duty to raise this issue as a growing concern, due to the possibility of children making inappropriate use of OoVoo, Skype, Instagram, Facebook, Whatsapp and other texting/messaging sites.

We understand that it is increasingly difficult to keep up with the ways in which our children are using new and ever changing technologies. Our children are immersed in a society that has become dependent on laptops, including smart phones, iPads, interactive online games and virtual communities.

- OoVoo** OoVoo is a video and messaging app, it allows video chats of up to 12 people at one time, **on a totally random basis**; anyone can be talking to your child.
You are required to be at least **13 years old** before you can create an account.
- Skype** A video and messaging app.
You are required to be at least **13 years old** before you can create an account.
- Instagram** An online, mobile photo sharing, video sharing and social networking service which enables its users to text and to take pictures and videos and share them on a variety of social networking platforms.
You are required to be at least **13 years old** before you can create an account.
- Facebook** A social networking site.
You are required to be at least **13 years old** before you can create an account.
- WhatsApp** An instant messaging app for smartphones.
The user agreement requires users to be age **16 or older**.

When monitoring your son/daughter's internet use, please remind yourself of these issues around the use of social media:

Children create 'groups', to which other children are invited to join. This means that all information is shared with anyone who is in the group, so privacy is lost and, in some cases, **strangers or imposters may be added to the group; whose intent is never wholesome.**

Websites such as Facebook, Instagram, Skype, Whats App, Viber and OoVoo are created with an audience in mind, especially sites such as Facebook and Instagram, which are specifically for those over 13 years old.

Many sites use 'targeted' advertising, consequently your child may be exposed to adverts of a sexual or other inappropriate nature, depending on the age they stated when they first registered. They may have lied about their age to get an account, making them appear older than they are, thus increasing this risk.

Young people may accept friend requests from people they don't know in real life, which increases the risk of grooming, inappropriate contact and inappropriate behaviour. The general rule is, if they aren't friends in real life, they shouldn't be 'virtual friends' online.

Social media sites cannot and do not verify their members, therefore, it is important to remember that if your son/daughter can lie about who they are online, so can everyone else.

Underage users are less likely to keep their identities private, and lying about their age can expose them to further risks regarding privacy settings and options.

Language, games, groups and content posted or shared on social media is **NOT** moderated, and therefore can be offensive, illegal or unsuitable for young people.

Photographs shared by users are **NOT** moderated and therefore young people could be exposed to inappropriate images or even encouraged to post their own.

Social media sites are regularly exploited by bullies and for inappropriate contact.

Generally, the misuse of social media sites happens at home, after school hours, when children have access to web sites that are blocked in school. With this in mind, and in response to parents who have asked for advice regarding internet safety, we feel it important to point out the risks of unregulated use of such sites. Hopefully this information, which is by no means exhaustive, will help you as parents to make informed decisions about whether your child should have an internet profile or not, and when and how to monitor their use, particularly at night time.

We strongly advise a device free bedroom policy at bedtime, to allow for uninterrupted sleep and rest.

Although we cannot, or would not seek to govern matters occurring out of school hours, which are a parental responsibility, we **will** take action if a problem comes to our attention that involves the safety or wellbeing of any of our pupils, including reporting the use of inappropriate images of young people to the police, as this is a child protection matter. This also refers to inappropriate text messages.

Should you decide to allow your child to have an online profile we strongly advise you:

Check their **profile is set to private** and that only their friends can see information they post.

Monitor your child's use and **talk** to them about safe and appropriate online behaviour such as not sharing personal information and not posting or messaging offensive/inappropriate messages or photos.

Monitor your child's use of language and how they communicate to other people, ensuring profanity is discouraged.

Have a look at advice for parents on the social media sites you allow them to use.

Set up your own profiles so you understand how the site works and ask them to have you as their friend on their profile, so you know what they are posting online.

Make sure your son/daughter understand the following rules for safe use of the internet:

- Always keep your profile private.
- Never accept internet friends you do not know in real life.
- Never post anything which could reveal your identity or where you live, including named photographs wearing school uniform.
- **Never post anything you wouldn't want your parents to see.**
- Never agree to meet somebody you only know online.
- If you see something mean or inappropriate online then **report** it, **block** the person and **tell** a parent or another trusted adult.
- Always tell someone if you feel threatened or someone upsets you.
- Be kind online: before you say what's on your mind, ask yourself, 'Is it kind?'
- Respect each other's differences online; we are not all the same, and that's what makes us great!

We recommend that all parents visit the CEOP, 'Think U Know' website for more information on keeping your child safe online:

- www.thinkuknow.co.uk
- www.net-aware.org.uk
- www.getsafeonline.org

Through classwork, assemblies, guest speakers, and PSHE lessons, we do our best to provide our children with the awareness and knowledge they need in order to recognise and avoid dangerous, destructive, or unlawful behaviour and to respond appropriately. However, it is only through a collaborative effort between parents and teachers that we will succeed in creating responsible and safe, cyber citizens.

I trust this information is helpful. Thank you for your support in this matter. Together we can help make the internet a safer place!

Roy Greer
Principal