



Friday, 3rd February 2017

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School is committed to promoting the safe and responsible use of the Internet and this is actively taught throughout the school. It has come to our attention that an increasing number of our Junior School children are using social media tools such as Instagram even though the permitted minimum age to use the site is 13, according to the sites terms and conditions. Due to this increased use in social media activity amongst our young pupils, we feel that it is our responsibility to raise this particular issue as a concern.

Social media tools such as Instagram or Facebook offer amazing communication and social connections; however, they are created with their audience in mind and this is specifically over the age of 13. Possible risks for children under 13 using such social media include but are not limited to:

1. Instagram uses usernames as the public identity of users, as does SnapChat and Twitter. Many people use the same username for all of their social network accounts and this means that they can be easily found across all these online services.
2. Instagram or Facebook use "age targeted" advertising and therefore your child could be exposed to adverts of a sexual or other inappropriate nature, depending on the age they stated they were when they registered.
3. Children may accept friend requests from people they don't know in real life which could increase the risk of inappropriate contact or behaviour.
4. Language, games, groups and content posted or shared on Instagram or Facebook is not moderated, and therefore can be offensive, illegal or unsuitable for children.
5. Photographs shared by users are not moderated and therefore children could be exposed to inappropriate images or even post their own.
6. Underage users might be less likely to keep their identities private and lying about their age can expose them to further risks regarding privacy settings and options.
7. Instagram or Facebook could be exploited by bullies and for other inappropriate contact.
8. Instagram or Facebook cannot and does not verify its members therefore it is important to remember that if your child can lie about who they are online, so can anyone else.

We feel it important to point out to parents the risks of underage use of social media, so that you can make an informed decision as to whether to allow your child to have an account with these services or not. These profiles will have been created away from school and sometimes by a child, their friends, siblings or even parents. We will take action (such as reporting under aged profiles) if a problem comes to our attention that involves the safety or wellbeing of any of our pupils.

Should you decide to allow your child to have a profile on any social media tool we strongly advise you to:

- Check their profile is set to private and that only real life friends can see information that is posted.
- Ensure that they do not use a picture of themselves as their profile image; this means that they are instantly identifiable as being children.



BLACKBURN

- Monitor your child's use and talk to them about safe and appropriate online behaviour such as not sharing personal information and not posting offensive messages or photos.
- Ask them to install the CEOP (Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre) application from <https://www.ceop.police.uk/> on their profile. This places a bookmark on their profile to CEOP and the Report Abuse button which has been known to deter offenders.
- Have a look at the advice for parents/carers from Instagram or Facebook.
- Set up your own profile so you understand how the site works and ask them to have you as a friend on their profile so you know what they are posting online.
- Make sure your child understands the following rules:
 - Always keep your profile private.
 - Never accept friends you don't know in real life.
 - Never post anything which could reveal your identity.
 - Never post anything you wouldn't want your parents to see.

Allowing your child unsupervised access to the Internet can leave them open to being sexually exploited; children are simply unable to 'risk assess' the people that they speak with online. It is therefore also important that you consider a means to monitor and to 'filter' the content that your child is able to view online whilst browsing the world wide web. You can do this in a number of ways:

1. Ensure that internet enabled devices such as laptops, tablets, smartphones and games consoles are not used in bedrooms.
2. Apply parental controls through your internet service provider (most provide this service free of charge). You can usually do this by logging into your account or via the customer help portal on your provider's website.
3. Use a parental control app to filter and monitor usage and content on your child's mobile device, such as Kidslox.

Finally, to help you keep up-to-date with technology, CEOP have a website designed for parents that provides advice and information to enable you to help keep your child(ren) safe online. We will be holding a workshop for parents and guardians next half-term, which will provide you with further information and practical ideas about how to protect your child(ren) online. Further information about this will follow in due course.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'VA Dodd'.

Ms VA Dodd
Head of Computing

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K O'Donoghue'.

Mrs K O'Donoghue
Acting Head of Junior School