King Edwin Primary School

Head Teacher Mr Callaghan-Wetton
Fourth Avenue, Edwinstowe, Notts, NG21 9NS
Tel: (01623) 822111 Fax: (01623) 825707
E Mail: office@kingedwin.notts.sch.uk
Website: www.kingedwin.notts.sch.uk

Friday 10th February 2023

Year 6 - ONLINE SAFETY

Dear Parents Carers,

Online Safety is such an important part of keeping children safe at our school and whilst we feel we are reasonably successful at teaching our KingEdwinners about the positive and negative attributes of using new digital technology, **we do have a few concerns about recent trends identified especially in our Year 6 cohort**.

Obviously, children can accidentally or deliberately be exposed to unwanted or unpleasant content or comments online. We are all faced by issues surrounding peer pressure; ease of access to devices and of course; the very fact that children are learning and will naturally make mistakes as they explore the digital world.

Recently we have established a growing concern around inappropriate use of social media sites and 'group chats'. The children in Year 6 have openly discussed their regular use and concerns about what they see specifically on 'WhatsApp and SnapChat'. We feel that it is our responsibility to draw attention to these concerns and ask all parents to be much more aware of the issues children are faced with.

Many of the issues that have been brought to our attention recently involve the use of:

WhatsApp – an instant messaging app. The user agreement requires users to be age **16 or older**.

TikTok – a social media app that lets you watch, create and share videos. TikTok is public by default. TikTok requires that users be **at least 13 years old** to use the app and that anyone under the age of 18 must have approval of a parent or guardian

Facebook - Facebook is an online social media platform that has over 2 billion users across the globe. Anyone over the **age of 13** is able to join the platform. **Despite requiring users to be over 13**, there are no age verification measures and children can easily create an account. It's therefore important that parents familiarise themselves with the main features of the platform to ensure their young ones remain safe if and when they use it.

Facebook Messenger - Facebook Messenger is a communication and chat application which is part of the wider Facebook platform as well as a standalone app. It allows both one-to-one conversations and group chats, has a 'stories' feature and provides the ability to set up a video call session with up to 50 people at a time through its latest update, Messenger Rooms. It has the potential risks of cyberbullying and secret conversations.

Snapchat - an instant messaging app. One of the principal features of Snapchat is that pictures and messages are usually only available for a short time before they become inaccessible to their recipients. Users are required to be **at least 13 years old** to access the app

Instagram - a photo and video sharing social network. The app allows users to upload media that can be edited with filters and organised by hashtags and geographical tagging. Posts can be shared publicly or with preapproved followers. Users are required to be **at least 13 years old** to access the app

We are particularly concerned about the vulnerability of children that create social 'groups' to which other unfamiliar people are joining. This means that all information is shared with anyone who is in the group, so privacy is lost.

These occurrences and reported incidents of misuse of social media sites mostly happen at home, after school hours, when children have access to web sites and other Apps that are blocked in school. With this in mind, and in response to concerned parents, we feel it important to point out the significant risk of **unregulated use** of such sites and the digital world.

We hope that the information shared today helps our parents to make informed decisions as to **whether to allow your child to have an online profile or not** and when or how to monitor their digital footprint/usage, particularly in the evenings. We _**strongly advise a device free bedroom policy after bedtime**_ to allow for uninterrupted sleep and rest. We are very aware that the use of social media occurs outside of school but any negative repercussions often impacts the children in school. Some features of specific platforms make our 'investigation' of any issues quite challenging … and sometimes impossible.

The risks are very real and we are not exaggerating the issues experienced in our community. Without wishing to scare parents, there have been incidents in our village locality (not necessarily in our school) of grooming, abuse, bullying, accidental observation of inappropriate material, sexting and other concerns of a serious nature (sometimes with police involvement). Predominantly, our children are not directly involved but issues are becoming more common and we are being contacted regarding issues that current and past KingEdwinner children are being exposed to.

We want all of our KEPS families to work together on this particular matter. We value your support and we will continue to make online safety a key priority through lessons, assemblies and other avenues. We aim to provide children with an awareness and knowledge so they can respond appropriately to any dangerous activity, bullying or unlawful cyber behaviour.

In response to the recent concerns we have we have attached the age restrictions for different media platforms for your information - https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/social-media/

As a school, we also publish many weekly links on our own social media pages from NOS (National Online Safety), an organisation that we subscribe to in order to help deliver the essential messages to children and families in our community.

As a parent myself, I can strongly recommend that all **KEPS parents download the free NOS Mobile App**. Children are spending more time than ever online. As adults, we need to do everything we can to keep them safe in the digital world. But with new apps, games and platforms emerging every day, how can you stay in the know?

The National Online Safety mobile application is created by experts and has all the online safety knowledge available at your fingertips, empowering parents and teachers to understand and address online safeguarding risks – anytime, anywhere. It is described as the world's most comprehensive online safety app, packed with insightful courses, explainer videos, webinars and guides on topics that will help you protect the kids you care about when they're online.

Kind regards,
Mr Callaghan-Wetton, Headteacher