



23 November 2022

Dear Parents and Carers

I am writing to you all this morning to reassure you and ask for your support with a very concerning matter regarding childrens' use of social media.

I am incredibly grateful to those of you that reported this concern to us in school and would like to remind you all of how you can raise safeguarding concerns. At St Katherine's School we know that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and this includes all adults that work at the school but also parents, carers, the wider community and the students themselves. If you are ever worried about a child you can call school on 01275 373737 and make it clear to your receptionists that you need to report a safeguarding concern. Our receptionists know that these messages need an urgent response and will get a member of the safeguarding team to ring you back. You can email me directly at crockerk@skdrive.org and make it clear in the subject line that it is a safeguarding concern. You can also use the Tell Someone form that you can find on our website. This allows anyone to report a safeguarding concern and this can be done anonymously. It is important that if you do this that you provide us enough detail to investigate and act.

The reason I am writing to you is that we were made aware that large numbers of our students in Years 7-9 are members of group chats on SnapChat or WhatsApp that include large numbers of children. In these group chats images and messages have been shared that contain pornographic images. We understand that large numbers of children will have seen these images and may have been upset, worried or frightened by them. We are also aware that some children have shared these images to other group chats and so widened the number of children exposed to them. In addition, some of the messages that children have sent one another contain abusive language, bullying behaviour and in one instance a threat of rape. Again, we believe that many children will have seen these messages and may have suffered harm as a result.

We have taken steps in school to identify who is responsible for sharing these images and messages and have followed our behaviour policy and guidance from the Department of Education in our response. Where we believe that children may be responsible for sharing these messages, we have met with parents and the students have had a sanction and education about keeping themselves safe online. Where appropriate we would always involve other agencies such as social services and the police to support us in our safeguarding work to make sure that children are protected from harm.

In writing to you today, I am asking that you speak to your child this evening about what they may have seen and give them space to discuss what they are worried about. Many parents already routinely check their childrens' phones both with and without their knowledge and I am asking that you do this this evening. Please look through their SnapChap story, WhatsApp messages and camera roll including recently deleted items.

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Please remove them from any group chats that contain messages or images that are not appropriate and talk to them about keeping themselves safe online. Please delete any apps that are being misused or that are not age appropriate. We have just marked Anti-Bullying Week in school and as part of our work we talked to children about 'bystanders' and 'upstanders'. We want our children to know that when they witness bullying behaviour and do not call it out, they are taking the role of a bystander and this can worsen the impact on the child being targeted. We have encouraged our children to be upstanders and in this case we would expect children to leave any group chats that are used to be unkind to other people and to find a safe way to call out or report anyone that is being unkind to others. We appreciate this can be difficult for some children and are always looking for how to make it easier and safer for children to speak out.

We hope that powerful conversations can take place between parents/carers and their children so that we can reduce the harmful behaviour that we are dealing with in school this week and raise awareness of the impact and consequences of cyberbullying as well as reminding children of their responsibilities in terms of their conduct online.

To help support these conversations, I am sharing with you some really useful links to organisations that we use in school that are designed to help parents be better informed about social media platforms and guide conversations about difficult issues such as pornography, consent and the law.

If you have any concerns as a result of your conversation with your child, please do not hesitate to contact us at school so that we can investigate, support and educate.

Your sincerely

Mrs Katherine Crocker

Designated Safeguarding Lead

Useful resources for parents

- UK Safer Internet Centre:
<https://saferinternet.org.uk/guide-and-resource/parents-and-carers>
- NSPCC talking about difficult topics
<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/support-for-parents/talking-about-difficult-topics/>
- Talking to children about pornography NSPCC
<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/inappropriate-explicit-content/online-porn/>
- Talking to children about consent - Action for children
<https://parents.actionforchildren.org.uk/stages-development/social-emotional-development/healthy-relationships-consent/>