

Re: Internet safety and the use of Social Media

Dear Parent/Carer,

Nicol Mere Primary School is committed to promoting the safe and responsible use of the internet and as such we feel it is our responsibility to raise this particular issue as a growing concern, due to the increase in inappropriate use of Instagram, Facebook and other texting sites. Many of the issues that have been brought to our attention recently have involved the use of:

- **OoVoo** - a video and messaging app which allows video chats of up to 12 people at one time. 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 to have an account.
- **Instagram** - an online mobile photo sharing, video sharing and social networking service which enables its users 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 before creating an account.
- **WhatsApp** – an instant messaging app for smartphones. The user agreement requires users to be age 16 or older.
- **Musical.ly** - a free social network app popular for viewing and creating short music videos. Children can record themselves lip-singing to popular songs for others to view. You are required to be at least 13 years old.
- **YouTube** - a video sharing website and app that allows users to share, view and upload videos. YouTube has a specific area of the site that allows viewers to watch, create and upload live videos. You can register for a YouTube account from the age of 13 in the UK, however you do not have to register with YouTube to view most videos.

Children are often creating 'groups' to which others are joining. This means that all information is shared with anyone who is in the group so privacy is lost and in some cases strangers have been added to the group. We understand that it is increasingly difficult to keep up with the ways that our children are using new and ever changing technologies. Our children are immersed in a society that has become dependent on powerful computers, including smart phones, iPads, interactive online games and virtual communities. Websites such as Facebook, Instagram, Skype, Whats App, Viber and OoVoo, to name but a few, offer fantastic opportunities for communication and social connections, however they are created with their audience in mind especially sites such as Facebook and Instagram which are specifically for those over 13 years old.

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

- Many sites use 'targeted' advertising and therefore your child could be exposed to adverts of a sexual or other inappropriate nature, depending on the age they stated when they registered. They may have lied about their age to get an account, making them appear older than they are, increasing this risk.
- Young people may accept friend requests from people they don't know in real life which could increase the risk of inappropriate contact or behaviour. The general rule is, if they aren't friends in real life, they shouldn't be 'friends' online.
- 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 post their own.
- 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.
- Social media sites can be exploited by bullies
- Social media sites cannot and do not verify its members, therefore, it is important to remember that if your son/daughter can lie about who they are online, so can anyone else.

Live streaming is also a popular feature online which is the broadcasting of real-time, live videos to an audience over the internet. Many of the apps outlined above present the opportunity for live streaming, allowing people to share live videos across the world. This presents a huge risk to children as live streaming can be unpredictable and hard to moderate. The CEOP Think U Know website provides a detailed insight into live streaming online at <https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/articles/live-streaming-responding-to-the-risks/>.

Most of the reports of misuse of social media sites happen at home, after school hours when children have access to web sites that are blocked in school. With this in mind, we feel it important to point out to parents the risks of unregulated use of such sites, so you can make informed decisions as to whether to allow your child to have a profile or not and when and how to monitor their use, particularly at night time. We recommend that all parents visit the **CEOP Think U Know website** for more information on keeping your child safe online at www.thinkuknow.co.uk.

Through lessons provided at school, assemblies, guest speakers, and PSHCE 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 joint effort between parents and teachers that we will succeed in creating responsible and cyber safe citizens.

If you would like any further information or have any concerns, please do not hesitate to contact myself, a member of the Senior Leadership team or your child's class teacher.

Thank you for your continued support.

Mrs R Parkinson
Computing Lead