

THA/ZMOS

31 March 2020

Dear Parent/Carer,

I am writing to you with information relating to “sexting” and youth-produced sexual imagery. Although students receive regular guidance and advice through Life Ready Days, assemblies and form time on the need to protect themselves online. It is important that we work together to keep your child safe from exploitation, if they are inappropriately using their mobile devices and computers.

The content of this letter may be challenging to deal with at home, but I feel that it is important to share this information with you. It may keep your child safe online and ensure that they do not commit any criminal offences. You may have come across the term ‘sexting’. This is when one person creates indecent images of themselves or others and shares them with another person. Between two consenting people over the age of 18, the law sees no offence. When children are involved, there are laws in place to protect them. If a student is caught sending, receiving, sharing or possessing indecent images or videos of another person using any device, they will be disciplined in school and this may result in an exclusion. We also have a legal duty where we may have to report it to the Police and Children’s Services. Discussing sexting and its legal and social consequences with your child may prevent and reduce incidents, in addition to protecting your child. It causes a lot of emotional distress for the student(s) involved and often has legal implications.

We must inform you as parents/carers that creating and sharing sexual photos and videos of under-18s is illegal, even if the subjects of these images consent to their production and circulation. The law does not recognise this consent from a person under the age of 18. The types of incidents that may lead to criminal prosecution are not limited to, but include:

- A person under the age of 18 creates and shares sexual imagery of themselves with a peer under the age of 18;
- A person under the age of 18 shares sexual imagery created by another person under the age of 18 with a peer under the age of 18 or an adult;
- A person under the age of 18 is in possession of sexual imagery created by another person under the age of 18.

Children under 13 are given extra protection from sexual abuse. The Sexual Offences Act 2003 clarifies that sexual activity with a child under 13 is never acceptable and children of this age can never legally give consent to engage in sexual activity. Sexual activity includes participating in sexting. All young people who share sexual imagery of themselves are breaking the law.

We encourage you to engage in conversation at home with your child(ren) about this topic. I would be grateful if you would reiterate the following messages, provided by the UK Council for Child Internet Safety:

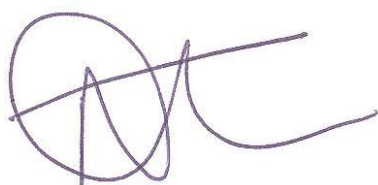
- The law: it is a criminal offence to make, possess or distribute indecent imagery of children. This law exists to protect young people. Creating and sharing sexual photos and videos of under-18s is illegal.
- Where young people share images of themselves, they expose themselves to the risk of embarrassment, bullying, blackmail and increased vulnerability to sexual exploitation.
- All incidents of youth-produced sexual imagery are dealt with by the school as safeguarding concerns in the first instance, but police may become involved.
- Young people should not be deceived into thinking that uploading photos into apps such as Snapchat is a safe way of sharing images; if someone has sight of a compromising image, they can screenshot it, and are then in control of your image.
- Similarly, direct messaging or texting a close friend a compromising image is unsafe behaviour – you are no longer in control of that image.

For their own protection, at all times it is important that your child does not create and share inappropriate images of themselves; furthermore, they should not link with, or accept requests from, 'virtual' friends whom they do not know in real life. It is important that students remain healthily suspicious of any requests for contact from accounts they do not know and that they do not assume that an account holder is 'safe' just because another friend is linked with them.

The pressures on young people to use social media platforms, potentially in an inappropriate way, should not be underestimated; however, with responsible use, following the guidance above, social media can be made much safer.

Thank you, in advance, for your continued vigilance in helping to keep our community safe.

Yours faithfully



Ms A Thandi
Assistant Headteacher: Pastoral