

Friday 8th March 2024

Use of Online Digital Platforms and Technology by Pupils

Dear Parents and Carers,

I am writing to you to highlight a growing area of concern for KMPS staff (and one that concerns schools up and down the country). Your child is at an age where they may have independent access to a phone, tablet, computer or games console and whilst this opens up a range of positive opportunities, it also comes with an increasing number of dangers and negative possibilities. It is imperative that everyone is aware of these and what we can all do to avoid them.

Key Areas of Concern

Over the last few years we have seen the following issues involving pupils from our school. These take place outside of school time but can sometimes affect relationships within school. They mostly affect children from Year 4 upwards and are sadly becoming more frequent:

- Being very unkind and sometimes using very unpleasant language when communicating with others on Whatsapp groups or other messaging platforms (including gaming platforms). This can include swearing, name calling, deliberately leaving others out of groups (and making this obvious to the excluded person).
- Impersonating other people to either get that person in trouble by posting inappropriate content or leaving unpleasant messages anonymously.
- Deleting or altering content that others have created on gaming platforms (e.g. Minecraft).

Other areas of national concern that the use of this technology can bring for all ages can include:

- **Cyberbullying:** According to recent studies, a significant increase in cyberbullying cases has been observed among school-aged children. Cyberbullying can have severe consequences on mental health, leading to anxiety, depression, and even, in extreme cases, self-harm.
- **Online Predators:** There has been a rise in incidents involving online predators targeting vulnerable children through social media platforms. Predators often exploit the innocence of children, posing a serious threat to their safety.
- **Excessive Screen Time:** Research warns against excessive screen time, as it has been linked to issues such as sleep disturbances, decreased physical activity, and impaired academic performance. Smartphones and social media contribute significantly to this concern.
- **Inappropriate Content:** Despite various safeguards, children can easily access inappropriate content online at home. This exposure can impact their psychological development and influence their behaviour negatively.

What we are doing in school

We work hard in school to educate children about how to use technology appropriately. This includes lessons each year on e-safety as part of the computing and PSHE curriculum. Year 6s build on this with their visit to 'Warning Zone', where they immerse themselves in a variety of digital scenarios and are guided through how to navigate the risks that technology can have.

Our use of technology in school is extensive but carefully managed. We have put in place clear systems for monitoring and filtering of device use and will add further restrictions where there are concerns about pupil conduct. Mobile phones are only allowed to be brought into school by Year 5 and 6 pupils, where needed, and these are switched off on entry to school and locked away for the day by class teachers.

When negative behaviours take place outside of school hours, it will always very difficult for us to police these and respond. Whilst we will get involved to mediate and remind children about how best to behave through digital forums, we do not have the ability to investigate to the same level and apply sanctions as we would if it had happened whilst under school rather than parental supervision. Where a bullying complaint is made, this will be treated in line with our anti-bullying policy procedures.

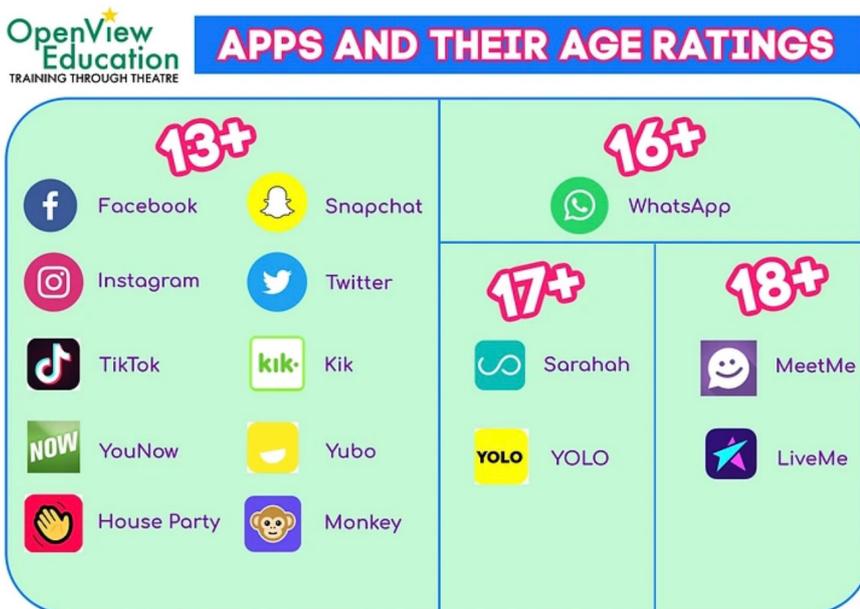
What you can do at home

Managing children's access to devices and online content is complex and time consuming but it is imperative that parents and carers prioritise this in order to protect their child/ren and others that they come into contact with. **The following are seen as essential to this:**

- If buying a new device, build in parental control at this stage. This will give you the ability to control and monitor what your child accesses. Doing this at the start will make it easier in the future.
- Look at what tools your broadband and mobile phone providers have in place to support you.
- Be prepared to say no. There is no expectation that children should be able to have a phone before going to secondary school or access chats (and our general view is that they should not). In many cases, the apps that many children access, are restricted to ages older than theirs (see below).
- Foster an open line of communication with your child. Encourage them to share their online experiences, both positive and negative, without fear of judgement.
- Establish clear rules and boundaries regarding screen time and appropriate online behaviour. Regularly monitor your child's digital activities to ensure their safety and conduct.
- Stay informed about the latest apps, social media platforms, and online trends. This knowledge will empower you to guide your child effectively and recognize potential risks.
- Visit the '[Keeping Your Child Safe Online](#)' Section on our website for advice.

Popular App Age Ratings

It is worth noting that these have these ratings for a reason. This is partly due to the maturity needed to manage their use positively and the potential for mature content. This chart may help with your 'no' conversations.



Yours Faithfully



Elliot Howles – Headteacher