

March 2019

Dear parents, carers & families

Re: student use of social media outside of school

I am writing to highlight the school's concerns about the use of social media by our students. Staff here at DCC are spending an ever-increasing amount of time dealing with issues that stem from inappropriate use of social media at home, and request the full support of families in helping us stop these issues before they get to the school gates.

Young people today have an incredible amount of technology at their fingertips, and it is essential that they are equipped and supported in the use of it. We educate the students about online safety in various ways: IT lessons teach online safety skills; PSHE develops their emotional toolkit, to help them make the right decision and handle difficult situations; form-time, assemblies and drop-down days are used to reinforce these messages; we have our pastoral team to support students; our rules on the use of mobile phones within school are very clear; and we have recently trained some student Digital Leaders to work with local primary schools. We also try to support you, their parents and carers: there are now regular online safety tips in the parents' bulletin; there is a section of the school website dedicated to online safety advice and we have run Parent Awareness workshops looking at online safety. All of this should give your children the skills to stay safe and behave appropriately online, and give you the confidence to support them.

So what more can be done? I have put some questions below for your consideration:

- 1) **Is Social Media right for your son/daughter?** Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook and other social media platforms are only for those aged 13 and above – this age limit is there to protect them. Older students will still need your support and guidance to ensure that they can stay safe. We would not let our children 'hang out' with strangers and adults in the real world – we need to be just as careful online. This is all the more important as people behave with fewer inhibitions than they do in the real world and any unpleasant comments are very public. The technology makes it easy to act without considering the consequences – and these can be very serious. We know the pressure on parents to give children access to social media, but please do seriously consider the age limits, and the need for support even when they are 13. We have had incidents where parents had no idea what their sons/daughters had been saying online and where the young people actually wanted to ask for help and advice from their parents – but neither felt confident to ask the first question. This website has some good ideas to get those conversations going at home: <https://www.saferinternet.org.uk/advice-centre/parents-and-carers/have-conversation>

- 2) **How do you follow up any inappropriate behaviour online?** School cannot be expected to deal with all the online actions of young people in their spare time, just as we would not be expected to deal with all other out-of-school incidents. Our duty is to ensure young people receive an excellent education, not to police the internet – though of course we will always support parents and put consequences in place if needed! Parents and carers are the most important people when it comes to following up poor behaviour, whether that be bad language, looking at inappropriate websites or something more serious. Many families find that ‘no mobile devices in bedrooms’ is a useful rule, even for older students. A great way to be proactive is to model safe and sensible online behaviour yourself. The online footprint left by young people is something they should think seriously about - when they apply for jobs in the future, companies may well scan the internet to see what they have said, and bad language or behaviour will be discovered – and they will learn good habits from seeing parents and families behave with courtesy online. It really is worth thinking about Social Media as an online CV rather than simply a place to chat.

If you are concerned the law has been broken (eg grooming) then the <https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/> website has advice and also a direct way of reporting concerns to the police.

- 3) **Are you sure they have the right privacy settings?** Each different Social Media site will have its own privacy settings and it is important these are set tightly. Having public accounts can cause particular problems. Anyone can find users and start a conversation, information can be seen by anyone and even user locations can be discovered. It is worth remembering that any photograph can be kept as a screen-shot even if settings are private. The website <https://www.net-aware.org.uk/> is a great place to find out more about how to set the different privacy settings, and is regularly updated.
- 4) **What online safety controls have you set at home?** Most search engines can have a password protected safe search put on them which will limit the images and sites that can be accessed. If you have bought your son/daughter a mobile phone on a contract, you can tell the company that it is for a young person and they will set controls on it for you – the contract is with you, not the young person. Many of the big Internet service providers have family-friendly internet filtering as part of their basic service now – if you contact, them they will tell you how to set it up.

The rapid changes in IT have led to the current situation where young people have technology that they are not emotionally mature enough to handle alone; one where the parent-school partnership is vital to meet the challenge it brings. We need your support in making sure that our young people stay safe and behave responsibly online so that we can maintain our focus on giving them the high-quality education you expect of us here at Denton Community College. We certainly understand that this is not an easy part of modern parenting and know that mobile phones in particular can be a point of conflict. However, we hope that by working together to ensure clear boundaries and strong guidance we can reinforce the positive values we aim to develop in our young people, support them to safely navigate the online world and reduce the number of issues we are seeing come into school.

Yours faithfully



Mr D Cumming
Deputy Headteacher