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### **Online safety**

Dear Parents,

We would like to bring a few important matters to your attention with regard to the safe and proper use of the internet. We would like to clarify the roles, responsibilities and boundaries for teachers, parents and children with regard to what is an ever-changing and increasingly complex online world. We hope you understand that we are doing this to try and protect the professional and personal reputations of both parents and members of staff whilst also highlighting the protection that needs to be in place for your children.

Firstly we would like to make clear that all school have been asked to follow the guidance laid out in the DCSF publication 'Guidance for Safer Working Practice for Adults who Work with Children and Young People'. The following rules relate to teachers communication with parents and pupils. School staff should:

- not give their personal contact details to children or young people, including their mobile telephone number and details of any blogs or personal websites;
- only make contact with children for professional reasons and in accordance with any organisation policy;
- not use internet or web-based communication channels to send personal messages to a child/young person;
- ensure that if a social networking site is used, details are not shared with children and young people and privacy settings are set at maximum;
- have no secret social contact with children and young people or their parents;
- consider the appropriateness of the social contact according to their role and nature of their work;
- always approve any planned social contact with children or parents with senior management;
- report and record any situation, which may place a child at risk or which may compromise the organisation or their own professional standing;
- understand that some communications may be called into question and need to be justified.

In the light of these requirements we do ask that parents resist the temptation to invite members of school staff into social networking groups or engage in personal electronic communication either via email or by mobile phone. This will place members of school staff in an awkward position. If an existing out of school friendship exists between a member of staff and a parent this will be highlighted to either Ruth or I by the member of staff in question and can clearly continue.

We would also ask parents to think very carefully about how any images and communications placed on facebook, twitter, bebo etc may be interpreted, and whether they cross any social boundaries. For example please consider gaining consent from other parents if you plan to make available a photograph on a social networking site that contains images of their children. This may seem over protective to some of you, but the inappropriate use of images of children does happen and we would not want any of you to find yourselves in a difficult position in this respect. The way that several of these social networking sites work does not enable security of such images.

The other matter that has come to our attention is that of pupil accounts on facebook and similar social networking sites. We are aware that in order to be eligible to sign up for Facebook or Bebo,

users must be 13 years of age or older. To sign up for Myspace users must be 14 or older. Many of our pupils appear to have these accounts at a very much earlier age than these limits. We are concerned that some of our pupils may be placing themselves in a potentially dangerous position. We therefore request that you disable these accounts or at the very least engage in a detailed dialogue with your children about online safety and fully supervise their use of any such sites. If the school becomes aware of a pupil having an account under the required age, through attempted communication with school staff or through other means we will report these accounts to the social network provider.

A recent piece of UK research shows that a quarter of a 8 to 15 year olds polled have social networking sites and have communicated with strangers online. A fifth of that figure also said that they have met these strangers they befriended online. The poll found children spend an average of one hour a day on social networking sites, often without parental knowledge.

If you are happy with your child communicating online then you may find the following internet safety guidance for parents helpful.

- Help your children to understand that they should never give out personal details to online friends they do not know offline.
- Explain to your children what information about them is personal: i.e. email address, mobile number, school name, sports club, arrangements for meeting up with friends and any pictures or videos of themselves, their family or friends. Small pieces of information can easily be pieced together to form a comprehensive insight in to their lives and daily activities.
- Make your children aware that they need to think carefully about the information and pictures they post on their profiles. Inform them that once published online, anyone can change or share these images of them.
- It can be easy to forget that the internet is not a private space, and as result sometimes young people engage in risky behaviour online. Advise your children not to post any pictures, videos or information on their profiles, or in chat rooms, that they would not want a parent or carer to see.
- If your child receives spam or junk email and texts, remind them never to believe their contents, reply to them or use them.
- It's not a good idea for your child to open files that are from people they don't know. They won't know what they contain—it could be a virus, or worse - an inappropriate image or film.
- Help your child to understand that some people lie online and that therefore it's better to keep online mates online. They should never meet up with any strangers without an adult they trust.
- Always keep communication open for a child to know that it's never too late to tell someone if something makes them feel uncomfortable.

Or download a parent guidance leaflet from  
[http://www.childnet-int.org/downloads/cn\\_parentleafletV2.pdf](http://www.childnet-int.org/downloads/cn_parentleafletV2.pdf)

If you would like further advice or wish to discuss any of the issues raised in this letter, please do not hesitate to contact the school. Thank you for your support and understanding in this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Andy Matthews  
Co-headteacher Hardwick Community Primary School