

November 2011

Dear Parent

Safe Use of the Internet Information

We have written to you previously regarding our concerns about the use of social network sites. We are writing again to reiterate our concerns and also to invite parents to a conference on Using the Internet Safely.

The conference is a presentation delivered by Childnet and takes place from 7.00 – 8.00 pm on Tuesday 6 December. This has been offered to parents in previous years. If you have not yet attended then please consider doing so. This presentation is one of a series of Parent Conferences that we will be offering. A separate letter with more details has been sent to you.

Students at Wycombe High School do not have access to social network sites, such as Facebook and MSN at school. Indeed communications via 'forums' can only be made as part of our VLE (Moodle). Such 'forums' have an academic focus and are closely monitored. Our school network is tightly controlled to prevent inappropriate access to internet based social network sites.

Increasingly we are being alerted to the inappropriate use of such social network sites by students, at home, in particular Facebook and Formspring. These two sites are currently very popular but please be mindful of the fact that new sites are created and therefore we advise that you monitor for new sites as well as internet usage. Formspring itself can be a particularly damaging site as users can be, and often are, anonymous.

It has recently been brought to the school's attention that there has been a significant rise in cyber bullying on Twitter via anonymous profiles. It seems that as fast as a profile is deleted a new one is created. Recent profiles have been, 'BucksBroadcasts', 'BucksDailyBait' and 'BetterThanBait'. These profiles have been anonymously tweeting abusive and damaging messages and publicly humiliating teenagers in Buckinghamshire. We advise all WHS students not to sign up to receive tweets from sites of this nature and to report any concerns to school staff as soon as they arise.

For some students the inappropriate use of social networking sites, such as Facebook, can be about posting personal / hurtful comments. Another form of inappropriate use can often be related to the amount of time spent 'socialising' on such sites, at the expense of school work. For some students it can become almost 'an addiction'. For all students, providing too much personal data and / or exposing data about themselves and their whereabouts to strangers, is a real concern and a real danger.

When used inappropriately social network sites cause great harm. In their extreme form, contact with strangers can be made and this poses inevitable dangers. In their less extreme form, but none-the-less highly damaging, arguments / disagreements started in, or out of, school can be carried on in the evenings amongst a wider social group (and often across schools). Such arguments / disagreements are often part of the normal growing up process. However, without adult guidance (from schools, parents etc) these arguments / disagreements, when carried out on social network sites, become exacerbated. Students may often lack the maturity, and/ or skills, to avoid saying something which they will regret or is inappropriate and hurtful to others. We need your support to stop your daughter using these sites until such times as she is old enough to use them sensibly.

/cont'd

Additionally, social networking has also opened up many new doorways for cyber-crime, and with all the people on social networks who are relatively new to technology, it is more important than ever to make sure you and your daughter are aware of the risks. There has been an increase in scamming on social networks where people steal or use personal information; information that can be used for potential crime such as identity theft or fraud. Common security questions for bank accounts etc often include date of birth, first school, place of birth etc; all information that many students post freely on their profiles. There are also websites that are set up to appear to look like social network sites in order to steal passwords. Once someone has the password they can use it to destroy the person's profile or send out spam messages and viruses, which could do irreparable damage to their online reputation.

There is an increasing trend for universities and employers to study the use of social networking sites by prospective applicants when deciding whether someone is suitable for a place or job. Students posting photographs of themselves drinking, smoking etc or commenting or acting inappropriately on Twitter or Facebook may find that they are damaging their future prospects.

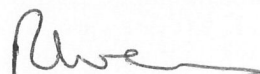
Students are often taught, at Wycombe High School, the importance of keeping e-safe and how to behave on the internet. I am delighted that the majority of Sixth Form students seem to use sites, such as Facebook, sensibly. Both in and out of school they embrace the ethos of Wycombe High School, one of mutual respect and enjoyment, based on our motto Fortiter, Fideliter, Feliciter (courageously, faithfully and joyfully). My concerns are for the minority of Sixth Form Students, who do not yet seem ready to use such sites sensibly.

Please note, if it is brought to our attention that your daughter has been involved in using a social network site in an inappropriate way that impacts our school community and / or her safety, work or progress, we will send a letter home to enable you to have an appropriate conversation with her and we will except the material to be removed. Your daughter also risks sanctions as detailed in our Behaviour Management/ Anti-Bullying Policy.

We will also inform your daughter's form tutor to ensure that the message from school is heard; no student should use a social network site inappropriately or in avoidance of studying. Additionally parents do, of course, have the right to inform the police if their daughter becomes a victim of internet abuse.

We very much hope that you will continue to work with us to ensure that your daughter's use of the internet is appropriate and sensible. We look forward to seeing those of you who wish to attend the Childnet presentation on Tuesday 6 December.

Yours sincerely



Mrs Ruth Green
Acting Head of Sixth Form