

9th May 2019

Dear Parent/Carer

I am writing to ask for your support. I would like to make you aware that in the last four weeks we have experienced several small-scale examples of students choosing to use the internet to spread derogatory and hurtful remarks, predominantly on Instagram or similar sites.

As a school, and following the DfE guidelines, we are committed to supporting students to understand and avoid, posting inaccurate and harmful information about another person. Despite the main use of Instagram occurring outside of the school day, we know that online abuse can affect a student's whole life and as a school we will work with you tackle this. We are also fully aware that by the age of thirteen, any child posting such negative messages is at risk of a police investigation and a criminal charge.

Up until this week, we have dealt with each case as an individual circumstance and our normal course of action has been to speak to the individuals and their parents. However, this week I have decided to write to all Parents in Year 8. The remarks on social media have reached a new peak of concern and the vitriol and vehemence of the comments is exceptional. Our biggest concern is that students are using a new website, which makes posting comments anonymous. This new website has left us with very little capacity to identify who has been involved in the hurtful comments that have been posted.

Attached is information regarding the website, which allows students to post comments anonymously, without having to record their identity. Access to this site has spread via Instagram, not only are individuals able to post on the website, this site also allows them to post on various web pages with anonymity.

Over the last week, we have witnessed an increase in activity on this website and Instagram. The anonymity seems to have bred almost a frenzy of postings that are quite frankly, abhorrent. Within the torrent of postings that have appeared, we have had one child, who has lost their mother, subjected to comments around the loss, including threats to the extent that he or his family should die. Alongside this, a series of students have had information posted that is wholly inaccurate but seeks to belittle at such an extreme level, which as a Headteacher, I have not experienced before.

I dislike writing this letter on mass to all students, as 95% of Year 8 will be getting things correct, however, the anonymity seems to have released a tiny minority of extremist views, that our children are accessing daily. I have been in contact with our Police Community and am inviting them in to talk to our students. I am also speaking to all Year 8 today.

Please would you discuss this letter with your child and take the time to talk to them about this site, and guide them to make the right choices with their internet use. Information about how to protect children from cyberbullying and warning signs to watch out for can be found at www.internetmatters.org/cyberbullying. Thank you for supporting your child and the school in helping them to navigate the internet and its darker side.

Assuring you of our best intentions.

Yours sincerely



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