

Thursday 18th November 2021

Dear Parents in Middle School,

I am writing to all parents in Middle School about our pupils being safe and respectful online. Whilst the vast majority of pupils in Middle School consistently make good choices inside and outside of school, I wanted all parents to be aware of the issues that pupils are facing when it comes to the use of smartphones and online apps. Navigating the modern world of smartphones and social media is hard for pupils and for parents and I hope this letter gives you clarity about the issues at hand and how you can support the school and make sure your child is safe.

Concerning behaviour online

A small minority of pupils have engaged with behaviour online recently which constitutes defamatory, rude and unkind behaviour. This has sometimes included offensive posting towards other pupils or family members and sometimes towards staff in the school, using a social media platform called TikTok.

There are many schools that over the last month have been impacted by these issues as this sort of posting has become publicised and normalised. The offending posts have included images of individuals. They represent bullying and harassment and undermine the strength of the community. These postings have been reported to Tiktok and removed. This is a relatively straightforward process and hopefully these incidents will not take place again. Advice is being taken from the police and appropriate next steps will be taken regarding illegal behaviour. Where appropriate the behaviour will be dealt with through our behaviour policy.

Why are Social Media apps like TikTok so damaging to your child?

Apps like Tiktok allow pupils to operate anonymously, posting hurtful language and images without feeling accountable for them. It is, sadly, common for pupils to create an account and then delete it once they have done something inappropriate. A record is kept by the platform and is accessible by the police, but pupils are often left thinking that a deleted account removes the harm done by this behaviour. It does not. Sadly, this facility means that pupils may behave in a way which they would never behave in 'normal' life, however there can be very severe consequences of their actions.

Tiktok and other platforms expose your children to inappropriate content. Images and video of a sexual nature are very easy to access on these platforms. These platforms are simply not a safe place for pupils to have unregulated access to which is why these apps are not allowed on the Ark laptops that have been distributed. Given all pupils have access to a safe laptop, there is no need to give your child access to an unregulated device. Pupils in Middle School are at a particularly impressionable age and should have safe behaviour modelled to them and enforced by parents. We have seen many instances of pupils staying up late until the night interacting on these platforms. Some pupils are posting images of themselves on these platforms that are not private and so

these images can be accessed by anyone and pupils can be approached by people they don't know. This is very concerning.

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What should parents do?

We strongly advise parents to take the following approach:

1. Only give access to a smartphone to your child when they are old enough to navigate the internet safely without supervision. This will vary between pupils but will be 14 at the earliest.
2. Where pupils have smartphones they should not access Tiktok or other apps which give access to inappropriate content. The age rating for Tiktok is 13 years and above, so a pupil in years 7 and 8 can only access this if they have been untruthful about their age when setting up an account. You should make it clear to them they should not be on this app.
3. If your child has a smart phone, look at it **now** (before your child comes home)
 - Look and see if it has Tiktok or similar apps (snapchat, etc). Open these apps and review what content your child is accessing.
 - Delete **the accounts** and the apps such as TikTok. They are not appropriate for children in Middle School.
4. Do not allow your child to take a smartphone into their bedroom in the evening. All use of phones should happen under your supervision and the phone removed at bed time so that pupils can get a good night's sleep.

What are the most common apps which allow anonymous inappropriate content?



Parents should delete **the account** of each of these – if parents just delete the app, the app can simply be downloaded again.



A reminder that smartphones are not allowed on the school site and that any smartphones will be confiscated until the start of the next half term. Pupils can bring “brick” phones and lock it in their locker if their parents need to talk to them outside of school hours.

This technology was not available when you were growing up. It is therefore sometimes hard to understand the impact it is having on children. It is a frustrating aspect of modern life that this is such a big part of children’s development, but I hope you can understand from this letter the hugely damaging influence that this technology is having on many young people and that you will act to ensure your child is not involved in unsafe online behaviour.

Thank you for your support with this serious matter. If you have any concerns about your child or anyone else, please email parents@kingsolomonacademy.org

Yours sincerely,

Max Haimendorf
Principal