Thursday 2\textsuperscript{nd} March 2023

Dear Secondary parents and carers,

We are writing to you to share concerns around pupil use of smartphones outside of school. King Solomon Academy does not allow smartphones onsite, because they are very distracting, can be used to photograph and video people without consent, and can be used to interact in unkind ways, often anonymously.

We are noticing an increasing number of concerning breakdown of friendships and bullying incidents which have originated online due to the use of these devices outside of school.

What is happening?

Generally conduct between pupils in school is supervised by staff and pupils behave well towards one another. Too often though, positive relationships in person are becoming negative ones due to interactions online. This has sometimes involved pupils creating a Whatsapp group, where they add other pupils, and then are unkind to them while they are in the group chat (GC).

Inappropriate and unkind behaviour

We know that many pupils who use smartphones are part of many different Whatsapp groups, to share advice about homework or to talk to friends. This can be a good thing for pupils, if this is a positive space, but often this is really a mix of friends and other people. In these large groups where some of the children know each other well and some don’t, there is a real risk of inappropriate or unkind behaviour. Unfortunately, there have been instances of bullying, harassment, and racist and sexist discrimination that have been directed from pupils to pupils online.

Late night messaging

We also know that some pupils message each other in the middle of the night, between 11pm-5am. These pupils need our support to manage their technology use, and they will need adults to set boundaries around when they use their phones.

Anonymous accounts

There are further issues for young people in creating different identities online that are different to how they present in real life. This leads to pupils being unkind because they think they can do so anonymously.

Keeping your child safe

We would like to advise parents that WhatsApp is designed for adult communication. It is totally private. You can be added to a group chat with anyone – you do not need to have them saved as a contact.

This puts pupils at risk of cyberbullying, online grooming, and other adult activities. Therefore, this should be a supervised activity for pupils in Years 7-11.
A quick check

Please take some time to check on your child’s level of communication online.

1. Talk to your child about how authentic their online identity is compared to their real identity. For example, asking, ‘Would you say what you say online in real life?’
2. Are they using their phone late at night, and unsupervised? Many parents set a boundary where the pupil hands you their phone when they go to bed, so it is not in their bedroom, this can prevent unsupervised late night messaging.
3. When you open WhatsApp, can you see any group chats, or are they all empty? If they are empty, this means your child is regularly deleting them. Ask them why.
4. Talk to your child about what they are watching, and who they are speaking to. Make sure they are able to talk openly with you. If they had a friend at home, you would be able to supervise them. Therefore, you should be able to supervise them when they are online too.
5. Do you know what other chat services your child is using? Discord? Snapchat? TikTok and Instagram?
6. If you have concerns about how other pupils are being treated via online platforms, we would appreciate you sharing these concerns with staff members, through the use of screen shots.

Please reach out if you have any questions about this letter. You can contact your child’s head of small school or their head of year, and email parents@kingsolomonacademy.org.

Yours faithfully,

Max Haimendorf
Principal