Montpelier Primary School
North Down Rd, Beacon Park, Plymouth, PL2 3HN
Tel: 01752 216160
e-mail: admin@mpsplymouth.net
Web site: www.montpelierprimary.co.uk

Dear Parents/Carers

Social media is a term for the online platforms that people use to connect with others, share media content, and form social networks. It can be a vital aspect of children's social and creative lives. It is apparent that many of our children use social media to have fun, make and maintain friendships, share interests and explore identities. It is an extension of their offline and face-to-face interactions. Yet conversely, we are conscious of the negative impact it can - and is having - on children's wellbeing, self-esteem and relationships.

Throughout recent times, the aspect of interactions over social media applications has become an ever-increasing conversation within our school and has prompted me to consider the question; whose responsibility is it to respond to issues deriving from interactions through such channels? The schools? Or the child's family? I have to say I am not clear in my own mind, but what I do know is social media is here to stay and education is the key to its successful use, alongside a joined up approach when keeping up with the digital world.

Social media interactions take place outside of school, when children are in the care of their families, yet such issues are making their way into the classroom and influencing school based relationships.

It's important for your child to agree to:

- not uploading or sharing inappropriate messages, images and video or themselves or others
- being cautious about the information that they share
- being a responsible digital citizen by showing respect in posts and when sharing content – for example, if it's not OK to say or do something face to face, it's not OK online.

For all the advantages, social media sites can also pose risks. For your child, these risks include:

- being exposed to inappropriate or upsetting content like mean, aggressive, violent or sexual comments or images
- uploading inappropriate content like embarrassing photos or videos of themselves or others
- sharing personal information with strangers – phone numbers, date of birth…
- cyberbullying

Our recommendation would be checking whether your child's social media choices are appropriate for their age (please consider the eldest child at our school is 11). The age restrictions set for having a social media account with Snapchat, Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube is 13. For WhatsApp, it is 16. In most circumstances anyone under the age of 18 must have approval of a parent or guardian. These guidelines are in place as safety measures to counter social maturity and safety online.

As children spend an increasing proportion of their time on the internet, schools have an important role to play in helping pupils to use it in a safe, responsible and positive way. Schools will often use digital devices as a tool for learning, so it is essential for schools to teach children about managing any risks.

It is our view that an effective approach to online safety can empower a school to protect and educate the whole school community in their use of technology. As a school we are, amongst other things:

- training school staff in online risks and safety issues, and on how to protect and support children online
- working with pupils from an early age to develop effective digital safety skills, policies and procedures to help children stay safe online both inside and outside of school
- talking openly about cyberbullying to help children understand what behaviour is not acceptable online, what the consequences are for violating these rules, and how they might report cyberbullying.

However the school cannot do this alone, we need support and understanding from the families that we serve. Talking about social media use is the best way to protect your child and ensure their internet safety. Talking gives you the opportunity to help your child:

- work out how they want to behave and be treated by other people online
- understand the risks involved in using social media
- understand the dangers involved in sharing content and personal information – this includes not only content that your child shares but also images of your child that other people share, or posts and images that others tag your child to
- learn what to do if people ask for personal details, are mean or abusive online, post embarrassing photos of her, or share information that links back to them

Know:

- when it's OK to use social media and how long your child can spend on social media
- whether it's OK to use social media during homework time, family meals and so on
- where it's OK to use social media – for example, only in family areas of the house, not bedrooms.

The use of social media applications is most definitely here to stay, regardless of the recommended age guidelines. Our hope is that together we can move forward with openness, a better understanding and reduced numbers of incidents as a result of conduct and behaviour online.

Kind Regards

Aaron West

Deputy Head Teacher