Highfield Hall Primary School



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Dear parents and carers,

We are becoming increasingly aware that many of the children in school, but particularly Y6s, are using social media very regularly. We are led to believe that “almost all” of the Y6s are using Tiktok, and many are also Snapchat/WhatsApp/Messenger and Instagram. Legally, children should be at least 13 to use Tiktok, Snapchat, Instagram and Messanger, and 16 to use WhatsApp. If your child is using those then they must have stated that they are older than they are.

As a parent, I understand that children will want to be on social media, and they can be a great resource for keeping in touch. However, we have a number of specific concerns. These include:

1. Many of the accounts (e.g. Tiktok ones) are not private, and can be viewed by anybody who wants to find them. We were made aware of an account that had the school’s name in the title, and to find this all I had to do was search for the school name. I was then able to click on the accounts of some of those following that account to easily find several of your children’s accounts, many of which were not private. It would be very easy for others to do the same and find out where your child goes to school, what time school finishes (from the school website), what your child looks like from their video, and other information about them e.g. songs they liked.
2. Those open accounts can be viewed, but the content can also be screen-grabbed. At that point your child loses all control of that image and can never prevent it being shared, even if they delete the original.
3. On the messaging service, we have been made aware that several of the children have used incredibly rude and aggressive language towards each other. This is not language that we would tolerate in school, and I know that some of the parents who have brought messages to our attention have been shocked by the content. This, unfortunately seems to be widespread, with the children behaving online in a way which they would not ‘in real life’. However there have also been instances where children have had arguments online which have then spilled over into conflicts in school.
4. On Tiktok, some of the content is also very inappropriate. This is particularly with children lip-synching to lyrics which are either explicit, or use other inappropriate language (e.g. the ‘n word).
5. We have now had three instances where children in Y6 have created accounts that have used images copyrighted by the school. This is illegal, and all the children are all above the age of criminal responsibility.

We understand that children can become defensive when discussing their online habits (including the amount of time they spend online). We also know that this can be a source of arguments at home, for example over privacy. However, the Y6s are still 10 or 11 years old and we feel you need to be aware of the potential risks involved in what some of them are doing and sharing.

We would always advise that you try to have open and honest conversations with them about what they are looking at or creating online, in a non-judgemental way. This might include talking together about the issues raised above and making sure that they are being safe with any privacy settings, or asking them about how others’ comments make them feel (which could lead to a conversation about how they are also behaving). There is a list here of lots of websites giving parents guidance about how to support children with their online behaviour: <https://www.parentsprotect.co.uk/internet-safety-links.htm>

We will continue to work with the children in school about staying safe online, and know you will continue to support us too.

Kind regards,

Dr Mike Bywaters

Headteacher