Dear Parents/Carers,

We write to express our concern over worrying trends on Facebook, WhatsApp, Tik Tok and other social media platforms; especially concerning our youngest students in Years 7 to 9.

It has been brought to our attention that some of our children have Facebook, Instagram, and other social media profiles even though the permitted minimum age to use these sites is **13 years old**, according to their terms and conditions. The minimum legal age for the use of WhatsApp is **16 years old**.

Whilst the use of social media was encouraged during lockdown as a means for children to communicate with their friends, we are now sadly finding the frequency of unkindness and issues such as fake profiles, 'trolling' and 'bully rooms' is reaching an alarmingly high rate. We see screenshots of conversations using language that the children would never use at school or at home and incidents of cruelty and bullying presented to us regularly, which is extremely saddening.

This comes at a time where school staff are working harder than ever to support students emotionally, academically and in responding to Covid-19 in general. Neighbouring schools have already put severe sanctions in place for students who have made defamatory statements or videos against or about members of staff or students online. As school leaders, we have limited control over what anyone posts online, however, we are appealing to our students' sense of community and self-respect to #be kind.

We also appeal to our parents and carers to monitor closely the online activity of your children. We already have a growing list of student names who are viewing posts and posting comments, and through methodical (and time-consuming) investigations, we can identify the culprits and impose serious sanctions accordingly. We are also encouraging our students to provide anonymous information to help with our investigations.

In school, we teach students about online safety, we also try and develop students' respect for one another and themselves. Every member of our school community has the right to feel safe, comfortable and confident while at school and at home. With that right comes the responsibility – for students and parents - of ensuring that social media is used carefully and sensitively.

If you have any questions, please refer in the first instance to your child's Year Manager.

Social Media and keeping your child safe:
E-safety - key information for parents/carers

The permitted minimum age to use these sites is **13 years old**, according to their terms and conditions. The minimum legal age for the use of WhatsApp is **16 years old**. If your child is below this age and has created an account; they are socialising online as someone older than them. This brings with it a range of risks and dangers.

Individual profiles

If your child is over the legal age limit and they do have a social media profile, you must ensure that:

- The profile is properly secured with privacy settings that mean that they (and you) can choose who can see their profile;
- The profile does not have pictures of them (or other children) in their school uniform; this makes them easily identifiable and means people can work out where they will be
- The language and/or images on them is appropriate for their age: this includes the profiles your child is linked to: being 'friends' with someone who has inappropriate content on their profile means *your* child can see it.

General social networking issues

Websites such as Facebook offer benefits for communication and social connections, however they are created with their audience in mind and this is specifically over 13 years old. Possible risks for children under 13 using the site may include:

- Facebook using "age targeted" advertising and therefore your child could be exposed to adverts of a sexual or other inappropriate nature, depending on the age they stated they were when they registered.
- Children may accept friend requests from people they don't know in real life, which could increase the risk of inappropriate or dangerous contact or behaviour
- Language, games, groups and content posted or shared on Facebook is not moderated, and therefore can be offensive, illegal or unsuitable for children.
- Photographs shared by users are not moderated and therefore children could be exposed to inappropriate images or even post their own.
- Underage users might be less likely to keep their identities private; lying about their age can expose them to further risks regarding privacy settings and options
- Facebook cannot and does not verify its members; therefore it is important to remember that if your child can lie about their age and who they are online, so can anyone else

Parental responsibility

We feel it is important to point out to parents the risks of the underage use of such sites, so you can make an informed decision as to whether to allow your child to have a profile or not, and you can support your child in keeping safe online.

Should you decide to allow your child of any age to have a Facebook profile, we strongly advise you to**:**
- Check their profile is set to private and that only friends can see information that is posted
- Monitor your child's use and talk to them about safe and appropriate online behaviour such as not sharing personal information and not posting offensive messages or photos
- Ask them to install the CEOP (Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre) application from www.facebook.com/clickceop on their profile. This places a bookmark on their profile to CEOP and the Report Abuse button which has been known to deter offenders
- Have a look at the advice for parents/carers from Facebook http://www.facebook.com/safety/groups/parents/
- Set up your own profile so you understand how the site works and ask them to have you as a friend on their profile so you know what they are posting online
- Make sure your child understands the following basic e-safety rules that we have learnt about at school:
  - Always keep your profile as private as possible
  - If possible, don't put in your full name, e.g. *Bart S, instead of Bart Simpson*
  - Never accept friends you don't know in real life
  - Never post anything – writing or images – which could reveal your identity
  - Never post anything you wouldn't want your parents to see
  - Never agree to meet somebody you only know online without telling a trusted adult
  - Always tell someone if you feel threatened or someone upsets you

We also recommend that all parents visit the CEOP Think U Know website for more information on keeping your child safe online www.thinkuknow.co.uk

School support and action

Glossopdale School and Sixth Form takes e-safety very seriously, and we discus e-safety issues with students in Personal Development.

Because of our duty to all the children in our school, we will take action (which may involve the police) if a problem comes to our attention that involves the safety or wellbeing of any of our students or members of staff.