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Dear Parents/Carer

It has come to our attention that some children at Ewanrigg Junior School have Facebook profiles even though according to the sites terms and conditions, the permitted minimum age to use the site is 13.

Ewanrigg Junior School is committed to promoting the safe and responsible use of the Internet and as such we feel it is our responsibility to raise this particular issue as a concern.

There are special safeguards in place for those users who register as under-18s. However if a child registers on Facebook implying they are 18 or over, there are **no** automatic safeguards applied to their profile.

Other possible risks for children under 13 using the site may include:

- Facebook use "age targeted" advertising and therefore your child could be exposed to adverts of an inappropriate nature, depending on the age they stated they were when they registered
- Children can accept friend requests from people they don't know well which could increase the risk of inappropriate contact or behaviour
- Language, games, groups and content shared on Facebook is not moderated, and can therefore appear to be offensive, illegal or unsuitable
- Photographs shared by users are often neither moderated nor restricted and therefore children could see inappropriate images. They can even post their own.
- Underage users are less likely to manage their online privacy wall.
- Facebook could be exploited by bullies and for other inappropriate contact
- It is important to remember that if your child can lie about who they are online, so can anyone else.

There are many social networks designed for a younger audience. These can act as useful and safe environments for children to learn how social networks operate and to build up their online resilience and skills.

Should you choose to allow your child to have a Facebook profile, we strongly advise you:

- Help your child to make their profile safer by having appropriate privacy settings in place. Details of how to do this can be found at http://www.connectsafely.org/pdfs/fbparents.pdf
- Talk to your child about safe and appropriate online behaviour such as sharing personal information or posting offensive messages or photos

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- Think about installing the CEOP (Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre) application from www.facebook.com/clickceop on their profile. This places a CEOP "Report Abuse" button on their Facebook page and has been known to deter potential offenders .
- Get yourself up to speed with the latest guidance and advice. Try www.facebook.com/help/?safety=parents or Connect Safely/iKeepsafe "Facebook Guide for Parents" http://www.connectsafely.org/pdfs/fbparents.pdf
- If you need to play a more active role in your child's online life, you may want to set up your own profile to understand how Facebook works. You may even want to agree with your child to be "friends".
- Make sure your child understands the following guidance:
  - Keep your personal information under control; think, "Would I tell this to a stranger?"
  - Be careful what you share with online "friends" as you may not know all of them well
  - Use "friends lists" to help manage what information you share with whom
  - Be careful what you post; it says a lot about you.
  - 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 feel it is important to point out to parents the risks of underage use of such sites. Parents should make an informed decision as to whether to allow their child to have a profile or not.

There is a wealth of free online resources for parents with information on keeping your child safe online, including the following:

- www.childnet.com/kia/parents
- www.thinkuknow.co.uk
- parents.vodafone.com

Gaming

It's come to our attention that a number of children, some as young as 7 year old are playing online violent games, often for long periods of time. Many of these games such as 'Call of Duty', and Grand Theft Auto' are rated for adult use only due to the content that could not only be violent, but also racist, involve drugs abuse and sexual content. The effect can be seen in some children in terms of the language they are using as well being overly tired due to playing these games for extended periods of time.

There is a great debate over what affect playing these type of games have on a young person but it is generally believed that they can distort what normality is which can and does lead to increased levels of anti-social behaviour and computer addiction, evidence of which we see both in the playground and in the classroom.

Whilst we are not in a position to tell parents what games they should let their children play we do have a duty of care to other children and staff in school, not least if children themselves are arriving at school tired and not ready for the day ahead.

We would offer the following suggestions

- All games are rated using the PEGI ratings – look out for these symbols and to understand what the rating criteria is, do visit http://www.pegi.info/ You can also download the PGI app for your mobile phone from the iStore or Google Play for free

- To check out the content of games, Common Sense Media have reviewed every game for parental guidance at http://www.commonsensemedia.org/game-reviews

- In terms of time played, this is very much down to parents. Providers tend to recommend a break of 5 minutes every 45 minutes, however we might suggest that for younger children the amount of time they play is limited to 30 minutes. Recent research also suggests it is important to limit gaming and media time directly before bedtime (for younger children 60 minutes before)

Do visit the PEGI Good Gaming guide for more information at http://www.pegi.info/en/index/id/24

Not all online games have a detrimental effect on children, in fact some can be quite beneficial if played in moderation. Therefore before allowing your child to play online games we would urge you to look at the following advice:

1) If you are buying a gaming device, why not print the Shopper's Checklist<http://www.saferinternet.org.uk/advice-and-resources/parents-and-carers/parents-guide-to-technology/gaming-devices/shoppers-checklist/> and ask these questions in the shop?

2) Agree with your child some "rules" about their safe and responsible use of gaming. The following is a good starting point: http://www.digizen.org/digicentral/family-agreement.aspx remember most popular gaming devices like the Xbox, Wii and PSP connect to the Internet so the same online safety advice applies.

3) Find out what parental controls are available on your device and use them if you have to: http://www.saferinternet.org.uk/advice-and-resources/parents-and-carers/parents-guide-to-technology

Yours Sincerely

Mrs C Wilson
Computing

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