

29 June 2017



Handsworth Wood
Girls' Academy

Dear Parents/Carers

Safe Use of Social Media

I am writing to you about a growing problem that we are experiencing regarding the misuse of social media by some students. This problem is prevalent in all secondary schools and often leads to behaviour problems.

In the first instance, I would like to remind you that mobile phones and MP3 players are not allowed to be seen or heard on the academy site at all. If they are, then the device is confiscated and kept in the safe until a parent can collect it on a Friday at 3.20 p.m. If a student is caught a second time with such a device, it will be kept until the end of that half-term. This rule has been in operation for the last 7 years at the academy and has ensured that lessons are not interrupted by phones ringing and has kept instances of bullying by text during the academy day to almost zero.

In the last few years, the growth in the use of social media sites has been exponential: SnapChat, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger and You Tube being the most popular. Although these sites are very worthwhile if used appropriately, they can cause all sorts of problems when they are used for inappropriate comments, bullying and harassment. This then tends to lead onto arguments, aggressive behaviour and even physical assaults, which I will not tolerate in the academy. It is crucial that we work with you as parents and carers to ensure that all students are safe on-line and use these forms of communication in a civilised and acceptable way only.

Tips for Keeping Safe On-line and on Social Media Sites

As a parent or carer, I am sure you would be very concerned if your daughter was not keeping herself safe on-line. Therefore, the following advice will be useful to you in supporting her in this matter:

- Students must always have a strong password for their access to all social media and on-line sites: at least 8 characters using lower and upper case, numbers and special characters such as %, &, *, £, \$.
- Passwords **must never** be shared with anyone else.
- If a student does use social media sites, then she is responsible for anything that is put on them, even if she claims that someone else did.
- Students must be very careful about what personal information is being put on these sites. I would not advise that they share their address, date of birth, information about their family and telephone number, for example.
- All social media sites have filters and privacy settings, which must be looked at when an account is set up. These give you the opportunity to only provide certain people with information and to restrict access to your messages, photos and contacts.

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- Students must not give their location away. Each social media site does offer the facility to share a person's location. This must be switched off or put on "ghost" mode, as people can otherwise find out exactly where you are and where you live.
- You should regularly check with your daughter that she is only using social media sites to communicate with people she knows and not new "friends", as there is no guarantee that they would be genuine without an ulterior aim of causing harm.
- If your daughter receives any inappropriate message, please encourage her to talk to you about it and not to retaliate by sending the same type of message, as this would make the problem escalate. We can obviously provide support if the offender is a student here or in another local school.

We have provided some further information on the safe use of social media and the internet, including tips, resources and useful links, on Firefly, our VLE, for which you should now have your login details. We are also available to provide advice either on the telephone or at an arranged meeting in the academy.

Responsibility of the Academy and Parents/Carers

We all have a responsibility to keep our students safe when using these sites. We do inform students regularly through notices, lessons and assemblies of how to keep safe on-line but you do need to check that your daughter is doing that at home. We also have installed software that monitors all on-line activity in the academy, which will identify any unsafe/inappropriate use.

All the issues that we have had to deal with this year that started with inappropriate comments on social media and on-line, have been written outside of the academy day, either in the evening or at weekends. Whilst we will continue to deal with bullying and other behavioural issues that always ensue, we do need you as parents and carers to monitor your daughter's activities on social media and other on-line sites to ensure she is keeping herself safe. Sending rude and inappropriate messages to other students does not keep students safe, as this always escalates very quickly into problems. If you are aware of your daughter doing this, can you please speak to her about it and prevent her from doing that again. Equally, if your daughter is being threatened, mistreated or victimised by another student in the academy through social media, then please let us know immediately so that we can deal with it. Whilst we have contacted the police at times in regards to the misuse of social media, they will only deal with the most serious of incidents. Therefore we have to work together to reduce the risk of harm that can arise. We will always contact you, for example, if we are aware of any inappropriate use of social media by your daughter and invite you into the academy for a meeting to resolve it.

If you have any questions about this, then please do contact us. In the meantime, I would like to thank you for your co-operation and support in this matter so that we can ensure that all our students are safe when using social media sites and the internet.

Yours sincerely



Nicola Walters

Headteacher