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Michael McCulley
Principal

Registered in England
Company number 07515832

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Dear Parents/Carers

Safeguarding and Social Media

In line with guidance that is in place to protect and safeguard children, pupils in Year 7 should not have access to **any** form of Social Media. The **minimum age for all Social Media platforms is 13 years**, with the exception of *WhatsApp*, which has a higher minimum age requirement of **16 years**.

Pupils in Year 7 generally have not yet reached the level of maturity needed to be able to manage the pressures that can be attached to Social Media and we are concerned by the increasing number of issues that are arising out of school hours on Social Media platforms. We are seeing cases of bullying, discrimination, prejudice and unkindness; all of which are distracting pupils from their learning, causing upset and in some cases leading to serious behaviour consequences.

As parents/carers you will understand that our role in supporting children is to help them understand how to use the internet safely and to build the interpersonal skills that allow them to flourish as active and responsible global citizens. Houlton School expects excellence from all pupils and our core values (with which pupils are now very familiar) require our pupils to understand that kindness, integrity and acceptance are qualities not only our pupils should have, but that should be modelled in British society as a whole.

We have spoken to pupils extensively about the dangers and recommended age requirements around Social Media and have asked parents/carers already for support in ensuring our pupils are not engaging with Social Media platforms. **Our strong recommendation is that parents/carers remove all Social Media from their child and monitor closely their interactions online.**

Specifically, we are aware of **several emerging WhatsApp groups**, some of which contain highly inappropriate language, discriminatory language and inappropriate images. Instances of racism, homophobia or any other form of discrimination are considered 'serious incidents' under our behaviour policy and, as such, could lead to fixed term exclusions (suspension) or even permanent exclusion (expelled).

We will be holding an assembly next week delivered by our local police liaison officer who will be reiterating to pupils the importance of staying safe online, of what constitutes a hate crime and of what the legal parameters are around these types of behaviours. As a school, we will deal robustly with incidents of this nature and where appropriate will advise parents to report hate crimes to the police, especially where they are taking place outside of school hours.



We appreciate your support in ensuring we are safeguarding the children in our care and **urge you to revisit the Social Media platforms and online access that your child has.**

Yours faithfully



Chloe Buckenham
Vice Principal