

Otterham C P School

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Dear Parents

Following on from Friday's Online Safety Day I feel that it is important to share the following feedback from Richard. This is now Richard's feedback:

Thank you for welcoming me into your lovely school on Friday. I feel it is important to share some important insights regarding the online activities of your pupils. It's crucial that we all (school, educators & parent/carers) work together to ensure their online experiences are safe and positive.

Social Media Usage:

Both Ks2 groups mentioned connecting with others on WhatsApp (16+), with a significant number using TikTok (13+), SnapChat (13+), and some even on Instagram (13+) and Discord (17+). What is concerning is that many have public accounts, and some have quite a significant following. This presents obvious risk, as it opens them up to anyone making a direct connection. I urge you to encourage your parent community to have open discussions with their children about using social media and emphasize the importance of maintaining private social media accounts. This approach is not only safer but also contributes to a more positive online experience.

Online Gaming:

In terms of gaming, games like GTA (18+) and Call of Duty (18+), along with the usual suspects, such as Roblox, Minecraft, and Fortnite were all mentioned. Worryingly, most gamers admitted to regularly playing and chatting with people they don't know. It's highly advisable for parents to fully understand the risks of online grooming and engage in age-appropriate conversations with their children about it.

Warning Signs (Online Grooming):

We discussed 4 crucial warning signs today that children should be aware of to reduce the risk of online grooming.

Avoid sharing personal information: This includes their name, age, address, school, and phone number.

Decline gifts: Children should not accept gifts, as adults looking to exploit them might offer in-game currency or online gifts as a way to gain trust.

Reject private connections: Children should avoid connecting privately with unknown individuals. Adults sometimes try to move conversations to private platforms like WhatsApp or Snapchat.

Never meet up: Meeting in person with online friends is obviously highly risky.

The prevalence of these issues is not unique to your school; it's a growing concern in schools everywhere. Year by year, children are starting their digital journey earlier, and the number of users is increasing. This presents an opportunity for us to address these issues and concerns with parents.

Action Steps for Parents:

I urge all parents to take the time to fully understand what their children are doing online and the functions available on the apps and games they use:

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Can they chat with others?
Can they connect with people they don't know?
What kind of content can they be exposed to?
What are the age ratings of the games and apps they use?

By understanding these aspects, parents can make informed decisions and provide the necessary support for their children's online activities. Knowledge is the key to fostering meaningful conversations and sharing ideas on how to ensure online safety at home.

If we all (school / parents / carers) work together, we can create a safer online environment for our children.

If any of your community has questions or concerns, please feel free to encourage them to reach out to me. I'd be more than happy to offer guidance and support.

Given the above feedback I would suggest that it is vital that you up skill yourselves using the short 10-part course that we have invested in for you as parents, see email dated 1st December and 4th January.

If you have any specific concerns regarding your child's activity online, please do not hesitate in making contact so that we can offer the appropriate support. We will of course be following up the messages that Richard has shared with the children and revisiting this topic on a regular basis.

Kind regards

Helen Ward
Headteacher