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Dear Parent,

As you will be keenly aware, keeping children safe online is a shared task, between school, home and the child. I wrote to you last year to outline the importance of purchasing devices that are not 4G/5G enabled, so your child is protected by only being able to use their laptop or tablet through the school Wi-Fi, rather than the phone network. Likewise at home they would be forced to go through your home Wi-Fi, which you can put controls on, rather than use mobile networks that do not.

I am writing this term to remind you that we have a wealth of information on our website with links on how parents can keep their child safe online. You can click on the area of interest to you in our e-safety library and download the guidance, which includes how to set a family safety mode and restricted modes on the apps that you decide to allow your child to have on their phone.

To explore this further please go to the Ellesmere website, parent area, policies and click on safeguarding online. <https://www.ellesmere.com/the-schools/all/college-policy-documents/safeguarding-on-line-e-safety/>

I need to share with you the annual update on the statutory guidance, **Keeping Children Safe in Education 2023** which has a big focus on mobile phone use and other smart technology and seeks to improve how we can all help protect children and young people. In addition to the distress caused by inappropriate use of devices there is another area of risk where children may fall foul of the law in the area of harassment and assault.

Sexual harassment can be online and may include;

- Consensual and non-consensual sharing of nude and semi-nude images and/or videos.
- Taking and sharing nude photographs of U18s is a criminal offence. This applies to young people under 18 who are engaging in sharing images.
- Sharing of unwanted explicit content.
- Sexualised online bullying.
- Unwanted sexual comments and messages, including, on social media.
- Sexual exploitation; coercion and threats, and coercing others into sharing images of themselves or performing acts they're not comfortable with online.

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A particularly difficult topic is the taking and sharing of indecent images by children and sent to children.

The Law states; making, possessing and distributing any imagery of someone under 18 which is 'indecent' is illegal. 1.7(a) Indecent images of children. It is an offence to possess, distribute, show and make indecent images of children. The Sexual Offences Act 2003 (England and Wales) defines a child, for the purposes of indecent images, as anyone under the age of 18. This includes imagery of yourself if you are under 18. This means anyone under 18 having indecent images on their phone, tablet, or computer, even of themselves, is committing an offence.

This is an area where young people and parents often misunderstand, they assume that the law only applies to those over 18, that is not the case, the same legislation applies to those under 18.

The non-consensual sharing of private sexual images or videos with the intent to cause distress is a serious offence, regardless of age. In some cases, the exchange of indecent images has been consensual, nevertheless, even though the participants are under 18, they are subject to the same law with regard to having indecent images of children on their electronic devices. Parents can be shocked when we have to inform the police which is why I am sharing this information with you.

The risks associated with mobile phone use are high and that is why we do not allow them to be used during the school day. Schools cannot block the national phone network but we can, and do, control our school network, which has strong filtering and monitoring protocols to block access to unsafe sites. If you provide your child other devices, such as tablets and laptops, smart watches, please ensure they are NOT 4/5G enabled – without 4/5G the device is forced to use the school Wi-Fi, which has the protection on that the mobile networks do not provide.

When your child uses devices at home, please ensure that you have put controls on to protect your child. This is equally important for teenagers as it is for young children. Guidance for parents is available here on how to do this. <https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/articles/Parental-controls/>

We ensure these areas are covered in our assemblies and the programme for personal, health and social education (PHSE) on the consequences of sending and receiving indecent images, and it is important parents are aware.

The age of technology has brought a great deal of advantages, but it also brings the negative aspects we see with social media and misuse of cameras - hence the need for robust online safety both at home, in school, and on your child's mobile devices.

I also need to draw to your attention the statutory guidance on child-on-child abuse. Pupils engaging in what might be called 'rough play' may find themselves in breach of the law and schools are obliged

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to report such incident as it may meet the criteria of child-on-child sexual violence and sexual harassment.

Child on Child abuse as outlined below are harassment, assault and sexual violence and includes;

Challenging physical behaviour (potentially criminal in nature) such as grabbing bottoms, breasts, and genitalia, pulling down trousers, flicking bras and lifting skirts.

Sexual assault covers a very wide range of behaviour and young people need to understand that a single act of kissing someone without consent or touching someone's bottom/breasts/genitalia without consent is sexual assault.

Likewise, children engaging in sexual comments, such as: telling sexual stories, making lewd comments, making sexual remarks about clothes and appearance, and calling someone sexualised names, sexual "jokes" or taunting, displaying pictures, photos or drawings of a sexual nature are all examples in the statutory guidance of children committing sexual assault.

Physical behaviour, such as: deliberately brushing against someone, interfering with someone's clothes, taking pictures known as 'up skirting' are all sexual assault, with the latter now being a specific criminal offence.

Children may refer to these actions as 'banter' but we cannot treat them as such. The regulations demand that schools deal with them as sexual harassment/assault and it is likely that we will have to involve the police. I share this information with you so you are informed of how these matters are to be dealt with and can discuss it with your child. I know you will support us in seeking to ensure our children do not engage in such activity and put themselves at risk. If they are on the receiving end of such activity then I hope they will report it to a member of staff, or you can report it on their behalf. We will support them, and you as we move through the process that we are required to follow.

Kind regards,

S.V. Pitt-Roberts

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