Dear Parent/Carer

Re: Internet safety and the use of Social Media

Fountain Primary School and Nursery Unit 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. A growing concern throughout primary schools in Northern Ireland is the increase in inappropriate use of You Tube, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, Snapchat, HouseParty and other messaging sites.

We understand that it is increasingly difficult to keep up with the ways our that children are using new and ever changing technologies. Our children are immersed in a society that has become dependent on powerful computers, including smart phones, iPads, interactive online games and virtual communities. Therefore, parents need to closely monitor what their child is accessing online to ensure their safety.

Websites and Apps such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, TikTok and Snapchat, to name but a few, offer fantastic opportunities for communication and social connections, however they are created with their audience in mind. It is UK law that a person must be over the age of 13 to use these Social Media platforms and this is written into their Terms of Service, which you must agree to before signing up. Therefore, no Primary School child should be accessing these.

When monitoring your son/daughter's internet use, please remind yourself of the concerns of social media:

- Many sites use 'targeted' advertising and therefore your child could be exposed to adverts of a sexual or other inappropriate nature, depending on the age they stated when they registered.
- They may have lied about their age to get an account, making them appear older than they are, increasing this risk.
- Young people may accept friend requests from people they don't know in real life which could increase the risk of inappropriate contact or behaviour. The general rule is, if they aren't friends in real life, they shouldn't be 'friends'.
- Language, games, groups and content posted or shared on social media is **NOT** moderated, and therefore can be offensive, illegal or unsuitable for young people.
- Photographs shared by users are **NOT** moderated and therefore young people could be exposed to inappropriate images or even post their own.
- Underage users might be less likely to keep their identities private and lying about their age can expose them to further risks regarding privacy settings and options.
- Social media sites can be exploited by bullies and for inappropriate contact.
- Social media sites cannot and do not verify its members, therefore, it is important to remember that if your son/daughter can lie about who they are online, so can anyone else.

Primarily, these occurrences and reported incidents of misuse of social media sites happen at home, after school hours when children have access to web sites that are blocked in school. With this in mind, and in response to concerned parents who have asked for advice regarding internet safety, we feel it important to point out to parents the risks of unregulated use of such

sites, so you can make informed decisions as to whether to allow your child to have a profile or not and when and how to monitor their use, particularly at night time.
We strongly advise a device free bedroom policy after bedtime to allow for uninterrupted sleep and rest.

Although we cannot govern matters occurring out of school hours which is parental responsibility, we have **a duty of care** to take action if a problem comes to our attention that involves the safety or wellbeing of any of our pupils.

Should you decide to allow your child to have an online profile we strongly advise you:
- Check their profile is set to private and that only their friends can see information they post.
- Monitor your child's use and talk to them about safe and appropriate online behaviour such as not sharing personal information and not posting or messaging offensive/inappropriate messages or photo's.
- Monitor your child's use of language and how they communicate to other people, ensuring profanity is discouraged.
- Have a look at advice for parents on the social media sites.
- Set up your own profiles so you understand how the site works and ask them to have you as their friend on their profile so you know what they are posting online.

Make sure your son/daughter understands the following rules:

- ✓ Always keep your profile private.
- ✓ Never accept friends you do not know in real life.
- ✓ Never post anything which could reveal your identity including photographs wearing school uniform where possible.
- ✓ Never post anything you wouldn't want your parents or teachers to see.
- ✓ 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 recommend that all parents visit the CEOP Think U Know website (www.thinkuknow.co.uk) for more information on keeping your child safe online. Additional information can also be found at www.net-aware.org.uk and www.getsafeonline.org .

Through lessons provided at school, assemblies, guest speakers, and PDMU lessons, we do our best to provide our children with the awareness and knowledge they need in order to recognise and avoid dangerous, destructive, or unlawful behaviour and to respond appropriately.

However, it is only through a collaborative effort between parents and teachers that we will succeed in creating responsible and safe cyber citizens.

If you would like any further information, please do not hesitate to contact Mr Torney or Mrs Donnell.