Spurcroft Primary School
Spurcroft Road
Thatcham
Berkshire
RG19 3XX

Telephone: 01635 871541

Email: office@spurcroft.w-berks.sch.uk
Website: www.spurcroft.w-berks.sch.uk

Headteacher: Mrs K Flowerdew

Dear Parents and Carers,

Mobile Phones and Online Safety

We understand that phones can provide children with independence, and opportunities to stay connected, but we also want to make you aware of some challenges that arise when children in Years 5 and 6 are using phones, without appropriate supervision.

In recent years, we have noticed a significant increase in issues, across a wide number of children, following lots of them getting phones for Christmas. Some of these are extremely serious. I would like you to be as informed as possible, so I am listing here the issues that we have dealt with in the last two years.

· WhatsApp and other group chats leading to misunderstandings, arguments, children swearing, using threatening language, making fun of each other's physical appearance or neurodiversity, using racist and homophobic language that they wouldn't use in real conversations.

· Unkind messages or bullying between peers, including the deliberate exclusion of others from groups & ganging up on each other.

· Pupils not feeling able to walk away from these unkind conversations and it continuing for several hours.

· Friends of pupils from other schools becoming involved, many of these are not actually known to others in the groups, and some may be older.

· Inappropriate online searches and then sharing of inappropriate images or memes, including pornographic images, occult, racist, and homophobic content.

· Apps like TikTok exposing pupils to unsuitable content through the algorithm giving them posts/reels on topics they have shown some interest in, including self-harm and sexualised behaviour; and then some pupils sharing this content.

· Children having public profiles on YouTube and Social Media apps and being approached by people they don't know.



· Children being online or messaging well into the night.

· Children trying to deal with problems themselves, and getting into a muddle or having their actions misunderstood.

· Children not wanting to come to school because of unkindness and arguments the night before – either because they feel sad or scared, or because they now realise they have gone too far, and feel embarrassed.

· Children using language or jokes that they have seen online, and don't fully understand, which to an adult, sounds like the child is saying that they are being abused. This led to other parents reporting safeguarding concerns to us, and we have had to report the issue to Children's Services, in order for them to check that the child is safe at home.

As you can imagine, these issues can quickly affect children's wellbeing and often require substantial intervention from staff and parents. In our online safety work it would be inappropriate for us to discuss all of the above concerns with them, so I am hoping that warning you, and helping you to prepare as families, we can work together to prevent and

reduce the amount of problems. We focus on online communication with peers, limiting screen time and what to do if they have a concern.

Guidance for Parents

If your child has a phone, we recommend the following:

1. Parents understanding the age recommendations for different apps, and why they are set.

2. Set clear rules and expectations about phone use, including which apps they may access and how to behave online.

3. Encourage them to use devices in shared spaces such as the kitchen and lounge.

4. Encourage open conversations about what they see and share online.

5. Use parental controls to restrict inappropriate content, and set screen time limits to stop them being on their devices for long periods of time, or late at night.

6. Monitor usage daily by looking at their messages and the apps they are using.

7. Discuss the importance of kindness and privacy online, and that once something is shared, it cannot always be taken back.



8. Agree on boundaries, and enforce them, such as no phones during homework, at mealtimes, or after bedtime.

Helpful Resources

We recommend these websites for guidance on children and online safety: · NSPCC Online Safety Advice: https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/ · Childnet Parents' Guide: https://www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers/ · UK Safer Internet Centre – Advice for Parents: https://saferinternet.org.uk/guide-and-resource/parents-and-carers

We encourage all parents to have conversations with their children about responsible phone use, and to agree together on safe online habits. And then, please be vigilant in monitoring your child's phone use and help them to navigate using it. By working together, we can help children enjoy their devices, and learn how to use them to communicate safely.

Thank you for your continued support in keeping our children safe online.

Kind regards

Kate Flowerdew

