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Principal & Chief Executive: James Nunns

28th February 2019

Dear Parent/Carer

Re: Recent Viral Social Media Story

Following recent media stories regarding a viral story being shared on social media, we feel it is a good opportunity to raise awareness of the importance of online safety with our parents. We have sought advice and would like to share the following information with parents and carers.

We appreciate that this story has created some anxiety amongst adults (and children and young people who have seen the images) however it's important to recognise that most of the current concerns have been fuelled by the recent publicity. Credible reports about this issue are very rare, making it difficult for people to know precisely what is going on. Due to recent publicity it is likely that content is now being created and shared on popular social media apps to generate fear and panic.

Viral stories such as this often contain graphic or distressing imagery; we strongly recommend this is not shared with children. It is also important to recognise that by mentioning specific challenges by name, we may encourage children to explore something that they were previously unaware of, either out of curiosity, or because they want to feel involved in what everyone is talking about.

Online safety is an important part of keeping children safe at West Heath School and is taught to all pupils within ICT, PSHE and is embedded in the curriculum. Our curriculum empowers children to become critical thinkers and to understand how they can stay safe and behave appropriately online, but we can only be successful in keeping children safe online if we work with you.

Talk to your child

- We would not recommend naming concerning challenges or sharing potentially frightening images specifically with children as this can cause them significant upset and distress.
- It's important that parents find out and learn about what children are doing online; find out what your child is looking at, and judge for yourself if it's appropriate.
 - Learning together with your child can often open opportunities to discuss safe behaviour online. By having regular and open conversations with your child, you'll provide them with an opportunity to share any concerns they may have.
 - www.childnet.com and www.thinkuknow.co.uk has some useful tips and ideas for parents about starting conversations about online safety

Do your research

- If you are made aware of a concern being shared on social media, it's a good idea to check such stories out with a known reliable and trustworthy source. Many headlines and stories



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use sensationalist language with vague details; if this is the case then it's possible that it's not entirely accurate.

- Useful websites that can help determine if an online story is true include:
 - www.thatnonsense.com
 - www.snopes.com
 - www.truthorfiction.com

Take concerns raised by children seriously

- If your child has been exposed to such content and is scared, then it's important not to dismiss their worries. It doesn't matter if the fear is real or proportionate, if it's scaring them, it's worth listening to them to help them feel reassured and safe.
- Help provide a balanced view to such stories and talk with them about how they can deal with concerns, such as blocking and reporting on websites or apps they use and always talking to a trusted adult if they see something upsetting online.

Understand technology

- Discuss together as a family how the internet will be used in your house and set clear boundaries regarding time-limits, supervision and what they can access.
- Visit sites like www.internetmatters.org and www.saferinternet.org.uk/advice-and-resources/a-parents-guide for advice about parental controls on consoles and devices.
- Make sure you read any parental guidance and safety recommendations (including age requirements – most popular social networking sites and apps are only for users aged 13+, 16+ or 18+); visit www.net-aware.org.uk to find out information about some of the most popular apps.

Report any serious risk of harm

- The School Designated Safeguarding Lead Julie Goodyear, Vice Principal of Care and Safeguarding and our Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead Photini Bohacek, Strategic Head of Key Stages 2 and 3 with responsibility for Online Safety and I are available to discuss any help you may need or concerns that you may have.
- If you are worried that a criminal offence has been committed, then you can report your concerns to the Police. You can contact Kent Police via 101 or 999 if there is immediate risk or you can report online abuse to CEOP by visiting www.ceop.police.uk and using the "Click CEOP" report button.

For more information access:

- www.thinkuknow.co.uk – Visit the "Parent/Carer" Section and use the "Click CEOP" button to seek advice and report online abuse
- www.childnet.com – Visit the "Parent and Carer" section helpful tools and advice
- www.internetmatters.org – A range of advice and support on issues for parents
- www.nspcc.org.uk/onlinesafety – NSPCC provides information for parents about popular social media sites, apps and games.
- www.saferinternet.org.uk – Parents guides to safety tools on popular devices and signposts report mechanisms for some websites.
- www.kent.police.uk/internetsafety - Guidance from Kent Police

It is important that we all remember that the internet is an essential part of young people's lives and provides them with tremendous opportunities. The vast majority use it without coming to any harm so it is essential to be realistic: banning the internet or web sites often will not work and it can make a child feel less able to report a problem or concern, so education around safe use is essential.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J Nunns', written in a cursive style.

Mr J Nunns
Principal