St Mary Redcliffe and Temple School

Welcome to this fortnight's SMRT Safeguarding Update...

WAKE UP WEDNESDAY

Under 16s Social Media Ban

At SMRT we train all staff regularly about online safety, have VIP lessons in place for every year group about how to stay safe online and have a range of assemblies, events and tutorials in place to help students understand and avoid risks online. For parents and carers, setting clear boundaries, and monitoring online activity is essential. This includes discussing the dangers of sharing personal information, cyberbullying, and online grooming, as well as teaching young people how to identify and report inappropriate content.

From next spring there will be new rules for young people under the age of 16 that will 'ban' young people of secondary school age from accessing most forms of social media. This will not affect Whats app, gaming sites that include messaging services such as Roblox and other lesser used and riskier services such as discord (see information below).

The government ran a national consultation from March to May 2026, one of the largest engagement exercises undertaken by this government.

The results showed overwhelming public demand for action, with 9 in 10 parents backing a social media ban for under-16s, and two-thirds of young people agreeing under-16s should not be allowed to use at least some social media platforms.

These changes reset the rules so that children are protected from the platforms and online features that create the most harm.

The government have said:

We plan to use the same model for a social media ban as Australia. Their model included platforms like Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, Snapchat, Facebook and X.

We do not intend for messaging services like WhatsApp and Signal to be included in the social media ban.

High-risk features including livestreaming and strangers being able to contact children will also be restricted for under-16s on other online services like gaming.

This will be backed up by stronger requirements for age checks on platforms.

The first set of Regulations will be laid before the end of the year, and the changes should be implemented in Spring 2027

Until that point, we thought it would be good to give an important reminder for all parents and carers: Apps and on-line Safety:

While our safeguarding updates cover a range of online safety concerns and government guidance, please could I draw your attention to these sites in particular: Discord, Omegle, OwnTV, Thundr, Reality and monkey. All of these sites have an on-line gaming focus and use live streamers. These are specifically for over 18 users and are known to be places where older males have groomed and abused young people in the past.

In order to place further controls on your child's phone or device, please follow the attached instructions for Android and iphone users.

We would encourage you to check what platforms and sites your young people have been using and report any concerns to CEOP (Child Exploitation and Online Protection Command).

https://www.ceop.police.uk/ceop-reporting/

Top Tips include:

1. Open Communication and Education:

- **Talk to your children about online safety:** Regularly discuss the potential risks of the internet, including cyberbullying, inappropriate content, and online predators.
- **Encourage open communication:** Make sure your children feel comfortable talking to you about anything that worries or upsets them online.
- **Teach them about online reputation:** Explain how online actions can impact their reputation and future.
- **Explain the importance of strong passwords and privacy settings:** Emphasize that passwords are like digital keys and should be kept private.

2. Setting Boundaries and Monitoring:

- **Establish clear rules:**

Agree on age-appropriate boundaries for online activities, including time limits and websites/apps that are allowed.

- **Supervise online activity:**

Keep computers and devices in a common area of the house, and monitor their use, especially for younger children.

- **Utilise parental controls:**

Explore and implement parental control features on devices, browsers, and streaming services.

In particular, see the ways you can limit access to unsafe apps and have controls over these on their phones (see attached guides).

- **Be aware of your child's online friends:**

Know who they are interacting with online, and if they plan to meet someone in person, always meet in a public place with other adults present.

3. Staying Informed and Taking Action:

- **Familiarize yourself with online safety tools and resources:**

Explore websites like Internet Matters, Childnet, and NSPCC, which offer guidance and support.

- **Report any concerns:**

If you encounter inappropriate content or suspect online grooming, report it to the appropriate authorities, such as the police or the National Crime Agency (NCA)-CEOP.

- **Stay informed about new trends and apps:**

Keep up-to-date on the latest online platforms and potential dangers they may pose.

4. Promoting Digital Wellbeing:

- **Encourage a healthy balance of online and offline activities:** Help your children understand the importance of spending time on other activities and hobbies.
- **Teach digital kindness and respect:** Encourage empathy and positive online interactions.
- **Promote responsible online behaviour:** Make sure your children understand that what they do online can have real-world consequences.

By taking these steps, we can work together to help create a safer online environment for children and empower them to navigate the digital world with confidence and responsibility.

Update from the National Crime Agency

Please be aware that the NCA has issued a direct warning to education sector about the growing threat from Com networks, online communities of predominantly teenage boys that begin around ordinary interests such as gaming or music before migrating to private channels on Discord, Telegram, or Instagram. What starts as a community becomes a hierarchy in which status is gained through the commission or facilitation of harm.

As always, if you have any immediate concerns about safeguarding issues, students, or the school site, please get in touch via:

safeguarding@smrt.bristol.sch.uk