Dear Parents and Carers,

Our school is strongly committed to the safety and well being of our students. The advent of social networking sites such as MSN, Instagram, Snap Chat, YouTube and Facebook add a dimension to our lives that was not around when we were children. There may be many advantages to such sites but there are also some potential dangers that need to be considered.

Our school has many students who use social networking sites. Many sites have age restrictions. As parents you may not be aware that your child has signed up to these sites and falsified their age to do so. Further, some children may have had accounts set up by others children who “know the system”. Technically no child of primary age is 13 and thus should not have access to age restricted sites.

It is not the school’s role to interfere in decisions being made by families around their children’s use of the internet. As a school we are however concerned that children may be putting themselves at risk, by not understanding the dangers associated with the improper use of social networking sites. Some key points for your consideration have been outlined below. Please discuss the topic, as appropriate, with your child.

**Is your child legally old enough to sign up and do you know what he or she is doing on the internet?**
Facebook, Youtube, and Instagram set a minimum age limit of 13 for users to register and Myspace sets the limit at 14.

**Keep the Log On Details and personal information Private** The use of your profile depends on who knows the password. Things written on a site remain archived and while the writer may delete the details there is a record of those conversations. Some people trust websites too much and forget that millions of people can look at the private information they post; this includes criminals looking for their next victim. Social networking sites are the new browsing grounds for identity thieves. There is a saying – Once on the internet, forever on the internet.

**Beware of Child Predators** Child predators have taken over teen chat rooms and social networking sites like Facebook. These adults will search sites for unsuspecting youngsters, and pose as children/teenagers themselves. They will get to know the teen, and then eventually try to meet him or her offline.

**Strangers are Still Strangers** When you meet someone for the first time offline, you may have a difficult time knowing if the person really is who he or she claims to be. The online world is no different. The online world is ideal for people who enjoy over exaggerating their life, or making up a completely different one from their own. This is a frightening thing for parents to hear, but parents can cut down on the risk by monitoring your children.

**Downloading Computer Viruses from Facebook** A high percentage of people who use social networking sites download files from other people’s profiles. Some of them contain viruses that either corrupt your computer, or attempt to collect personal information that can be used against you.

**Increases Internet Addiction** Social networking sites are fun and addictive. Meeting new people, catching up with old friends, and visiting interesting profiles can take up hours each day. You may spend more time on Facebook than studying or going to class, which contributes to lower grades.

**Cyber bullying and inappropriate interactions.** Children who are at Primary school may not fully understand the implications for their posts and videos and the effects it can have on others. Things in writing can often be very hurtful. Please talk to your child in regards to this.

I have also enclosed information from Facebook Safety Centre, Instagram and a page from Parenting Ideas. We hope that this information may assist families making decisions about social networking sites. Never easy being a parent – many would think it is getting more difficult all the time!

Regards
Aloma Stewart
Basic Terms of Instagram – from the site. (abridged)

1. You must be at least 13 years old to use the Service.
2. You may not post violent, nude, partially nude, discriminatory, unlawful, infringing, hateful, or suggestive photos or other content via the Service.
3. You are responsible for any activity that occurs through your account and you agree you will not sell, transfer, license or assign your account, followers, username, or any account rights.
4. You are responsible for keeping your password secret and secure.
5. You must not defame, stalk, bully, abuse, harass, threaten, impersonate or intimidate people or entities and you must not post private or confidential information.
7. Violation of these Terms of Use may result in termination of your Instagram account. You understand and agree that and you use the Service at your own risk. If you violate the letter or spirit of these Terms of Use, we can stop providing all or part of the Service to you.

From Facebook Safety Center (abridged)

Playing It Safe How you present yourself on Facebook says a lot about who you are—just like what you say and do at school or with your friends. In all public places, online and off, it’s important to represent yourself as the kind of person you want to be.

The Importance of Being You Facebook is a community where people use their real names and identities, so we’re all accountable for our actions. It’s against the Facebook Terms to lie about your name or age. Help us keep the community safe by reporting fake profiles to Facebook if you ever see them.

Think Before You Post It’s easy to get caught up in the moment and write or do something that may seem hilarious at the time. But remember, what you say can really hurt someone, or come back to haunt you. Think before you post. It only takes a second or two. Ask yourself if you really want to say it. Make sure you don’t mind if your friends, classmates, or teachers hear about it later.

Also remember that any information you post—whether in a comment, a note, or a video chat—might be copied, pasted, and distributed in ways that you didn’t intend. Before you post, ask yourself - would I be OK if this content was shared widely at school or with my future employer? At the same time, we all make mistakes. If you find yourself wishing you hadn’t said or done something, it’s never too late to apologize.

Don't Talk to Me Anymore If you ever receive hurtful or abusive messages or posts on your profile page you have options. Depending on how serious the situation is, you can ignore it, ask the person to stop, unfriend or block the person, or tell your parents, a teacher, a counselor, or another adult you trust. Everyone deserves to be treated with respect.

Report Abusive Content Be sure to always report abusive content—whether it’s on your profile page, or someone else’s. You can also report inappropriate Pages, Groups, Events and fake or impostor profiles. (Remember that reporting is confidential, so no one will know who made the report.)

Be authentic. The real you is better than anything you might pretend to be.