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Dear Families,

Online safety is an important part of keeping children safe at Bromstone School. Online Safety is taught to all pupils and our curriculum empowers children to understand and be aware 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.

Your help is needed to talk to your children about how they can keep themselves safe and behave appropriately online. It's important that we are all vigilant when children are using the internet and act to ensure they are protected from people who may pose a risk to them. Children can accidentally or deliberately be exposed to illegal, unwanted or unpleasant content, comments or activity online and there are steps you can take at home to minimise this risk.

We know that new apps and sites appear daily online and it would be unrealistic to ask parents and carers to understand all of them. Currently, many children are using **TikTok and Roblox**. The sites and services that your child likes to use may change regularly, but the messages they need to keep themselves safe will remain the same – think before you post, be kind online and ask for help if something makes you feel worried, upset or uncomfortable.

If your child wishes to download a new app then we'd recommend considering some of the following points:

Listen

- Take an active interest in your child's online life and talk with them about how they use technology.
 - Ask your child why they want to use the app? How did they hear about it?
- Discuss with them how they will keep themselves safe and make sure they know:
 - How to block and report other users and content
 - To speak to a trusted adult if they see anything or something happens online that makes them feel worried, upset or uncomfortable.
 - About websites such as ChildLine and CEOP, www.childline.org.uk and www.thinkuknow.co.uk

Functionality

- Make sure that you understand how the app works so you can decide if you are happy for your child to use it. You may even wish to set up an account yourself first.
- Consider:
 - Does it allow video chat or the sharing of images?
 - Does it allow user to communicate with 'random' strangers?
 - Does it allow anonymous chat?
 - Does it allow in-app purchases?
 - Can you restrict access to the content that your child shares?
 - How will your child's personal data be used by the app?



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Age Restrictions

- You can usually find age restrictions within the apps terms and conditions. This is not the same as the app/google store rating.
- The age limit for many popular social networking sites is thirteen. This is due to the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act of 1998 (COPPA). The age limit is not based on suitability of content and instead applies to any website, app or online service which collects, stores or uses children's personal information. Some apps will have age limits of 18+ as they are exclusively designed for use by adults.
- If children use apps that are aimed at an older age group then this may leave them vulnerable to being exposed to unsuitable content (including advertising), as well as being contacted by strangers.

Safety

- Many popular apps will have 'help' and 'safety' sections, either within the app itself or via its website. Some apps will even have content specifically designed for parents and carers.
- Does the app have any **privacy settings**? If so then help your child to apply them appropriately – for example is it possible to set the app so that only trusted friends can see information they post?
- Explore the block and report features. Can your child **block or report concerning users or inappropriate behaviour**?
- If the app doesn't have safety or help sections or doesn't provide the ability to report and block then you may wish to consider if it is safe for your child to use.
- Talk to your child about safe and appropriate online behaviour.
- Consider setting up a family agreement regarding how their internet use will be supervised and how long they can spend online.
- Apply appropriate parental controls to all devices
- Discuss your expectations about the types of content and information they should share online, rules relating to adding friends and meeting people in real life.
- Do they understand:
 - That content posted online should never be considered to be private and may be copied and shared?
 - That they should behave online the same as they would in "the real world" and be kind?
 - How to be secure online such as by using safe and strong passwords? You can visit www.getsafeonline.org.uk for more advice

If you are worried that your child is at risk of harm or criminal offence has been committed then you can report your concerns to the Police or Children's Social Care. Please do not notify suspicious profiles of your actions, as this could enable them to delete material which might be required for any Police investigations. You can contact Kent Police via 101 or via 999 if there is an immediate risk to a child's safety (additional advice can be found at www.kent.police.uk/internetsafety). You can also contact Kent Children's Social Services on 03000 41 11 11. You can also report online sexual abuse to CEOP by visiting www.ceop.police.uk and using the "Click CEOP" reporting button.

We and the School Designated Safeguarding Lead Mandie Hadden are available to discuss any help you may need or concerns regarding online safety that you may have.

Yours sincerely,

Alison Monroe and Toni Moon – Heads of School



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