



Digital Bulletin – Online Supervision

As children begin to explore the world of social media and electronic/online communication, there are several considerations to ensure that this is both positive and respectful. As with all new things, mistakes are likely to be made and there is the question of how we can support students. In this Digital Bulletin, I would like to look at the measures in place within school, along with possible suggestions on how to manage the challenges of online communication at home.

In School

There is a provision of teaching about Online Safety at school to ensure that students are aware of the potential hazards, as well as the expected behaviour online. The first session for First Form students addresses cyberbullying and looks at positive online communication. Various school policies are discussed with the school emphasis on kindness and respect explained in detail. This is reinforced as students move through the school and the message is clear that the school will not tolerate behaviour that has a detrimental impact on the school experience of another student.

Home

The subject of how to supervise children's online activity is a difficult one. There are a number of factors to consider, largely relating to family rules and agreements. Here are some factors or advice that you may wish to bear in mind:

When to introduce social media

From conversations with students, it is evident that there is a large discrepancy between when students are allowed to open their first social media account. The legal age for most platforms is 13, with WhatsApp being 16. Some parents agree to allowing their children to open an account earlier than this, with others following the legal age, or later. From my conversations within school, students appear to accept family decisions, providing there has been a conversation and an agreement in advance.

Monitoring online activity

With the privacy settings for social media accounts, it is difficult to use any third-party application to monitor usage. You may wish to agree 'terms' of usage when allowing your child to start accessing social media. For example, you may state that this is conditional on a parent being a friend or follower on that social media account, or on the understanding that you as a parent will be allowed to view activity upon request. This is a contentious and controversial view and questions the balance between privacy and parental supervision. However, most online safety sources would be of the view that the parent, as the bill payer of the phone should be allowed access to the device.

Screen time

You may wish to limit the amount of time that your child spends on social media. This could be through limiting access to a phone or device, maybe during homework times, or bedtime. When are the 'leisure' times when your child has access to the internet? You may also wish to use the phone's screen time function to monitor how long your child is spending on social media (see previous Digital Bulletin on Screen Time). Does this allow adequate time for your child to keep up to date with homework? Is the amount of time spent online restricting 'real life' experiences, such as co-curricular involvement, or meeting up with friends?

Although in this guide, the focus has been on agreeing 'terms of use' before beginning to use social media, it is important to point out that this may change over time. You may wish to adapt this as your child gets older, or enters a period of public examinations etc.

If you have any further questions regarding this, or any other aspect of online safety, please feel free to email me directly.