Dear Year 3 – 6 Parents,

RE: SOCIAL MEDIA

We are all well aware of the growing phenomenon of social networking and the attraction that it has for children and young people. Social networking is here to stay and is very important to young people. We are hearing daily in the media about sites such as Facebook, YouTube and messaging apps for iphones, ipods and android devices such as Kik, Instagram and Snapchat.

Young people, including many of our own students, have Instagram, Kik or Facebook accounts and use them regularly. This phenomenon is not going to go away and it is up to us as parents, teachers, mentors and leaders of the next generation, to make sure that children learn to use the technology safely and responsibly.

In light of this, and should you be willing for your child to have an Instagram, Kik or Facebook account, I am providing some information, advice and strategies to parents that, I believe, will help keep our children safe and allow them to become responsible users of technology.

Information about Social Media Apps

- It is against the Instagram, Facebook and Kik rules for children under the age of 13 to use these programs. Are you aware that your children may be falsifying their date of birth in order to create their accounts?

- Some children may not understand the issues around privacy and have inadequate privacy settings allowing anyone, anywhere to search the sites for photos or participate in conversations with them potentially exposing themselves to approaches by online predators.

- Children sometimes use inappropriate language in their messages. Children have always experimented with swear words but in the past it has been in the privacy of a conversation with only a few listeners, not a permanent record for hundreds to see.

- Some children are using Instagram and messaging apps to bully or tease others with inappropriate comments or ‘put-downs’. Other children are able to like these inappropriate comments. These children then become part of the problem by supporting the initial harassment. (Under Australian law, inappropriate use of communication technologies can be a ‘criminal offence’ if they are used to “cause offence, bully, harass or embarrass” someone. Any person 10 years of age or older can be charged and convicted.)

- Sometimes children post photos of other children at school or elsewhere that they do not have permission to post. ‘Tagging’ of friends in photos is another area fraught with risk. Once again, depending on the privacy settings, these photos can be accessed by anyone.

- All internet users will have a digital or online reputation. This is the opinion that others hold about the user and as with reputations in the real world, they are easily formed and not so easily changed. Digital reputations are informed by content that is posted online and how people communicate online. People can be judged on how they behaved as a child well into the future. Close monitoring and guiding children’s online behaviour will assist them to maintain a positive reputation.
Advice for parents

- Visit the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) internet safety site ‘Cybersmart’, http://www.cybersmart.gov.au. This is a great resource for parents and students to better understand how to be cyber smart. It also includes resources for parents on how to discuss cyber safety issues with you child.

- Log in to our Digital Excellence site with your child and work through the silver and gold cyber safety badges together. http://www.deaausonline.com It will take approximately 30 minutes and will provide you with common knowledge as well as a great opportunity to discuss something of immense importance to children’s on-line safety.

- As a parent, you should take a rigorous interest in your child’s online activities including Instagram, Kik and Facebook.

- As a parent you should be listed as a ‘friend’ or ‘follower’ so that you have access to your child’s page.

- Check at least weekly, to see what your child is posting or talking about (or to) ‘on-line’. This needs to be done carefully and thoroughly as there can be ‘conversations’ that are posted in reference to photos and may not be obvious on your child’s ‘wall’.

- Monitor their Instagram, Kik and Facebook friends list as well as who they are having conversations with on messaging apps. Who are they accepting as a friend, and do they know the people they are talking to?

Bullying on-line

If you find that your child is being harassed on-line please report it and print out a hard-copy or take a ‘screen shot’ of the offending comments. Delete or block the offending ‘friend’ and never ever respond. Report the abuse to the administrator of the site or to the school if you know which school they attend.

When we get a report of cyber-bullying we seek to verify this by getting a copy of the offending comments. We treat incidents of on-line harassment very seriously and follow up with the parents of the children posting the inappropriate comments and report matters to the Police if necessary.

The Digital Users Agreement that Bimbadeen Heights asks every child to sign at the start of each year makes it clear that children will not use the Internet for teasing or bullying. Point 4 of this agreement states that they agree “Not to cyber bully other students at school or at home using the Internet, email or mobile phones.” It is also against the school rules for children to use Instagram, Kik, Facebook or any other social media sites at school and such sites are blocked on the computers that the children have access to here at school.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) also has very clear guidelines on acceptable use of the ICT resources. This policy is available at: http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/deptpolicies/acceptableuse.htm

The Internet is an important part of our day to day communication with others. It provides us with enormous opportunities. It is important that we ensure our children use the Internet responsibly and safely at home and at school.

Should you want further information on this topic or need advice or assistance please contact Mr Matt Laws or myself at the school on 9726 9989 or email via the contact tab on our school website.

Yours sincerely,

Mr Leigh Johansen
Principal