

Dear Parents,

In the last few days, we have been contacted by several parents regarding a WhatsApp group set up with Year 6 pupils from Bedford Prep School and Bedford Girls School. Students are, of course, (subject to parental permission) free to chat to their friends on various online platforms and we as a school wouldn't want to curtail their friendships in any way. However, there have been a couple of reports of bad language being used and comments being made about teachers (from both BGS and BPS), as well as messages being received late in the evening and early in the morning.

Whilst we realise that how children use phones outside the school is something for parents to discuss with their children, it is our role to deal with anything that comes into school. Therefore we will, as a school, get involved if there is any unkindness or if other boys or teachers are mentioned in a disparaging way. It is also our role to educate the boys in this area; therefore I wanted to take the opportunity to pass on what we have discussed in both PD lessons and assemblies this year, for you to discuss with your children if you feel it appropriate.

Children today have access to technology that would not have been available to children in previous generations; conversations exist not just 1-2-1, via phone calls or face to face, but also in large groups and through various social media channels. This raises several issues:

- Children have permanent access to one another. Whilst in the past, the bedroom may have been seen as a 'safe space', if students are connected via social media, they are always contactable.
- Comments in text messages can be easily misconstrued.
- Information that has been put on a group can be saved (screenshotted) – there is always a record of it. This means it can be passed along to external parties almost instantly.
- Exclusion, and therefore hurt, can be achieved at the push of a button.

We have encouraged students to think before they send; 'is this comment likely to cause offence?', 'would I say this to someone's face?', 'would I be happy for my parents to read this?' Similarly, we encourage students to keep their bedroom free of screens, it has been proven to damage both sleep patterns and overall happiness. The advice that we, as a school, are given is that parents should be aware of what their children do on their devices. It is important to make sure that parents check search histories and communications, thus ensuring children are not breaking their trust in giving them access to the vast array of information available through technology.

This is not a fool proof science, and children will make mistakes and need guidance, both from parents and school. I hope you find this email helpful; whilst we as a school are not directly responsible for children's interactions outside of school or on social media, we are of course deeply invested in their wellbeing. We always want our students to feel safe and happy and will, if requested, support parents in any way we can.

Kind regards,

Ed Loader

Head of Year 6