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Dear Parents and Carers,

Subject: Please Read – Urgent Online Safety Concerns

At Lovington C of E Primary School, the safety and wellbeing of our pupils, both in school and online, is our highest priority. I am writing to you today with a serious concern that affects all children growing up in the digital age: the increasing risks associated with social media platforms, particularly TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat and others.

While these platforms may appear harmless or entertaining, they are **not designed for children** and pose significant risks, including:

- **Exposure to highly inappropriate content:** Despite some age restrictions, children can easily access videos and messages that are violent, sexual, or otherwise unsuitable.
- **Online predators and grooming:** Social media is used by adults to contact children directly, often under false identities.
- **Mental health impacts:** Research shows links between excessive social media use and anxiety, depression, poor sleep, and low self-esteem in children.
- **Cyberbullying and peer pressure:** Children may be exposed to harmful comments, exclusion, or pressure to participate in risky and sometimes life-ending trends or challenges.
- **Data privacy concerns:** These platforms collect personal data, often without users fully understanding the implications.

A Disturbing Example: The Lip-Balm Challenge

One particularly alarming trend circulating on TikTok is the so-called *lip-balm challenge*. This challenge encourages children to apply lip balm each time they feel sad, with the implication that when the balm runs out, they should harm themselves. We are aware that children in primary schools have seen this content and discussed it, which highlights how easily such harmful material can reach young users - even in a primary setting.

Challenges like this are often disguised as harmless or humorous, making them even harder to detect. They can have a serious impact on children's mental health and wellbeing, especially when shared widely among peers.

The Reality – What the Data Tells Us

To help you understand the scale of the issue, here are some recent UK statistics:

- **44% of young people** say social media negatively affects their mental health, often leading to anxiety, low self-esteem, and sleep disruption (*YoungMinds, 2024*).
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- **1 in 6 children aged 5–16** are likely to have a mental health problem — a 50% increase in just three years (*NHS Digital, 2023*).
- In 2023/24, UK police recorded **7,062 offences** of *Sexual Communication with a Child*, an **89% increase** since 2017 (*NSPCC, 2024*).
- **70% of children aged 9–13** have been exposed to harmful content online, including violence, hate speech, and dangerous challenges (*Ofcom, 2024*).
- **TikTok** is the platform where children are **most likely to encounter real-life violent content**, with **44% of users** reporting exposure (*Ofcom, 2024*).

Social media and their Age Requirements

Instagram	13 years+	TikTok	13 years+
Facebook	13 years+	Snapchat	13 years+
YouTube	13 years+	WhatsApp	13 years+

What You Can Do

We urge all parents to:

- **Check your child’s devices regularly** and know which apps they are using.
- **Set clear boundaries** around screen time and online behaviour.
- **Talk openly** with your child about the risks and encourage them to speak up if something online makes them uncomfortable.
- **Use parental controls** and privacy settings to limit exposure.
- **Stop access** to apps and social media sites that are not appropriate for school-aged children.

We understand that technology is part of modern life, but it must be used safely and responsibly. We are committed to educating our pupils about online safety in school, and we ask for your partnership in reinforcing these messages at home.

If you would like support or guidance on managing your child’s online activity, you can access the following links –

Child Net - <https://www.childnet.com/help-and-advice/social-media/>

Safer Internet - <https://saferinternet.org.uk/guide-and-resource/parents-and-carers>

Alternatively, please don’t hesitate to contact us and we will support and help you in any way that we can. Together, we can help keep our children safe.

With warm regards,

Emma Marshall

Mrs Emma Marshall

Headteacher
