Keeping your children safe online

There has been an understandable increase in children's use of online activities over the past few months and I fully appreciate the challenges parents and carers face trying to ensure their children are safe online. Since the return to school, we are increasingly being made aware of inappropriate use of the internet, whether it is whilst playing games, accessing inappropriate web content or using social media in a negative way. I thought it would be useful to provide you with some information which will help you to keep children safe online.

We are being made aware of children accessing apps, sites and games which are not age appropriate. I was astonished when I did a bit of research to find out what is and is not age appropriate for primary age children which I want to share with you.
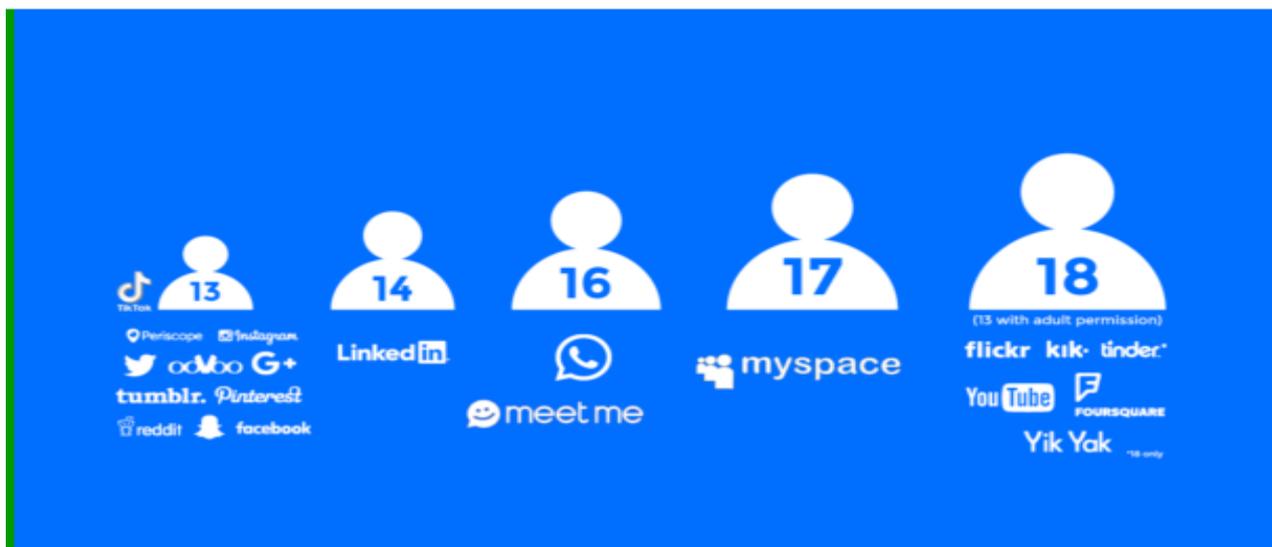
No children in our school should be using any of the above apps. As a parent it's important you know that all social networking platforms (or social networking apps, if on a smartphone) have age limits. Some social networks use technologies that mightn't be right for some ages, or engage with communities that are made up of people much older than your child.

An increasing number of incidents of children being bullied on social networks outside school are being drawn to our attention. We are doing a lot of work in school to educate children about this, but it is only parents and carers in the home who can really do anything about it.

Another aspect of online usage is gaming. Children are having fall-outs at home in the evenings on games they are playing and then coming into school the next day and continuing the disagreement. These disputes which have nothing to do with what is happening in school, are taking up valuable learning time and are causing an unnecessary distraction.

It is really distressing to observe that children are accessing games which have content that is not suitable for their age group. I know that Fortnite is really popular, but it is not intended to be played by primary age children. Again, internetmatters.org has information about what activities and games are age appropriate. I know that children will often use the argument that all their friends are playing something, but it is seldom the reality of the situation.

It can be difficult to make sure that the right filters are on devices so that children cannot access inappropriate images and content. Internetmatters.org has a series of videos and advice pages which can help with this.

We want our children to grow up as confident users of technology and I am sure that you will all support us with that wish. However, we really do want them to stay safe and use technology in an appropriate way so that they are not frightened or distressed by what they are seeing or hearing. I hope that these links will help you to keep your children safe in the virtual world.

We have a duty of care for our children and there are occasions when it is appropriate for us to contact other agencies in relation to information about inappropriate use of technology outside school to ensure that children are safe.

These websites are very useful and will give you all of the information you need to be able to talk to your children about keeping them safe. Please contact school if you need more help or advice.