



29.11.12

Dear Parents

It has come to our attention that a number of children at Bedlington Station Primary School have Facebook profiles, even though the permitted minimum age to use the site is 13, according to the sites terms and conditions.

Bedlington Station Primary School is committed to promoting the safe and responsible use of the Internet and as part of our e-safety policy it is our responsibility to raise this concern. Websites such as Facebook offer amazing communication and social connections, however they are created with their audience in mind and this is specifically over 13 years old. Risks for children using the site may include:

- Facebook uses 'age targeted' advertising and therefore your child could be exposed to adverts of a sexual or other inappropriate nature, depending on the false date of birth they stated when they registered.
- Children may accept friend requests from people they don't know in real life which could increase the risk of inappropriate contact or behaviour.
- Language, games, groups and content posted or shared on Facebook is not moderated, and therefore can be offensive, illegal or unsuitable for children.
- Photographs shared by users are not moderated and therefore children could be exposed to inappropriate images or even post their own.
- Underage users might be less likely to keep their identities private and lying about their age can expose them to further risks regarding privacy settings and options.
- Facebook can be exploited by bullies and for other inappropriate contact.
- Facebook cannot and does not verify its members therefore it is important to remember that if your child can lie about who they are online, so can anyone else!

We feel it important to point out to parents the risks of underage use of such sites. You should also be aware that is the school and Northumberland County Council's policy to report the use of Facebook by children under the age of 13. We will also take action (which may involve the police) if a problem comes to our attention that involves the safety or wellbeing of any of our children.

If you have children over the age of 13 and you decide to allow them to have a Facebook profile we strongly advise you to:

- Check their profile is set to private and that only friends can see information that is posted.
- Monitor your child's use and talk to them about safe and appropriate online behaviour such as not sharing personal information and not posting offensive messages or photos
- Install the CEOP (Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre) application from www.facebook.com/clickceop on their profile. This places a bookmark on their profile to CEOP and the Report Abuse button which has been known to deter offenders.
- Have a look at the advice for parents/carers from Facebook www.facebook.com/help/?safety=parents

- Set up your own profile so you understand how the site works and ask them to have you as a friend on their profile so you know what they are posting online.
- Make sure your child understands the following rules:
 - ★Always keep your profile private.
 - ★Never accept friends you don't know in real life.
 - ★Never post anything which could reveal your identity.
 - ★Never post anything you wouldn't want your parents to see.
 - ★Never agree to meet somebody you only know online without telling a trusted adult.
 - ★Always tell someone if you feel threatened or someone upsets you.

We would all like to think that we are monitoring what our children are doing online, and some of you do it very successfully. However, we all need to remember that children are very vulnerable online, no matter how safe they think they are. This could not be made clearer than by the case of 17 year old Ashleigh Hall, who in 2010, was kidnapped, raped and murdered in Teeside by a 35 year old convicted sex offender who posed as a teenage boy on Facebook. He used fake photos to befriend Ashleigh before persuading her to meet him.

We recommend that all parents visit the CEOP 'Think U Know' website for more information on keeping your child safe online www.thinkuknow.co.uk

Yours sincerely

Mrs P. Mulholland
Head Teacher