

# **Ark BDA Wellbeing Check: Helping your child stay safe online**

## **Safeguarding your children in school**

At Ark Burlington Danes Academy, we care a lot about the safety of your children. In school we have taken significant measures to ensure that children are safe in school throughout the COVID19 pandemic, alongside our usual safeguarding procedures. In the local community, we have members of staff on duty before and after school, encouraging your children to cross the road safely, adhere to social distancing guidelines, and make their way directly to and from school to ensure that their safety is not at risk on their transitions to and from school.



As well as preserving the physical safety of your children, it is an important priority for our school to safeguard their emotional and mental health and wellbeing both in and out of school. In school, we have a comprehensive non-examined curriculum, delivered to your children across two tutor times each day, which teaches them to understand how to keep themselves safe, how to manage their wellbeing and the wellbeing of their peers, and how to understand the world around them. We are also lucky enough to have inclusion links on each year group corridor who can support your child if they are struggling with their emotional mental health and wellbeing, and two onsite counselling services that provide additional therapeutic support for those children that need it.

## **Safeguarding your children online**

However, one area that it is more difficult for schools to manage safeguarding effectively, is keeping children safe online.

Although we do take a lot of time to educate students about appropriate use of technology and how to stay safe online, and ban the use of mobile phones on the school site to prevent students from engaging in unsafe content and online bullying while they are in school, the majority of students' internet and technology usage occurs outside the school gates, while they are at home and in the local community. For this reason we must encourage parents and carers to take a leading role in ensuring that you know exactly what your children are doing while on the internet and using popular social media apps, so that you can keep your children safe while they are at home.



Although we will sanction the inappropriate use of technology in school when incidents of inappropriate technology use and cyberbullying come to light, it is essential that parents and carers take a close interest in their children's use of technology to prevent these incidents from occurring in the first place.

## **Understanding children's use of social media**

With an ever-changing array of social media apps, it can be confusing and overwhelming as a parent to understand what your child is doing online.

The main apps that have been involved in the most recent incidents of inappropriate internet usage include:

**Snapchat:** On Snapchat, children can post public 'stories' including videos, images and text, share 'stories' with a select group of friends, and have private or group messages.

- Snapchat is a particularly concerning platform when it comes to inappropriate technology usage as 'stories' and messages disappear after they are viewed, leaving no evidence behind.
- Children can also share their location either publicly or with their friends using 'SnapMaps.' This places children at risk as it lets strangers know where they are.
- We **do not recommend** that KS3 children are allowed to use Snapchat. The minimum age for this app is 13.
- If you do choose to allow your child to use this app, we recommend regular spot-checks of their stories and messages.
- If your child reports being bullied on Snapchat, it is essential that they screenshot evidence of this as soon as possible before it disappears from the platform.

**Whatsapp:** Children use Whatsapp to text other children, either one to one or in groups. Children can also send voice notes and have video calls with other children on Whatsapp.

- Whatsapp has featured in several of the cyberbullying incidents we have managed recently, where groups of children have posted images of and unkind comments about other children, who may or may not be part of the group chat.
- We **do not recommend** that KS3 children are allowed to use Whatsapp. The minimum age for this app is 13.
- If you do choose to allow your child to use this app, we recommend that you regularly check your child's phone to see the content of the discussions in their Whatsapp messages. Again, screenshot any evidence of bullying as soon as you can before the perpetrator chooses to delete it.

**Instagram:** Instagram is an image-sharing platform, but it also allows children to message each other, either in group chats or one to one.

- Children sometimes create fake profiles on Instagram and use these to post unkind content about other children in their class or year group. Children sometimes also create fake profiles on Instagram pretending to be someone else.
- Children can also post unkind comments underneath other children's pictures.
- The direct message feature on Instagram can also be used similarly to Whatsapp.
- We **do not recommend** that KS3 children are allowed to use Instagram. The minimum age for this app is 13.
- If you do choose to allow your child to use this app, we recommend that you check the content that your child is posting on Instagram very regularly to ensure that they are not posting inappropriate content on the app.

**Houseparty:** Houseparty is an app that allows children to video call each other in groups called 'rooms'. They can choose to make these rooms public or private. If their rooms are public, anyone can be added to their rooms, including people they don't know.

- Children can have video calls or text messaging groups with Houseparty.
- If children's privacy settings are not secure, then people they don't know can video call them and use this feature to bully by issuing insults or threats.
- The direct message feature on Houseparty can also be used similarly to Whatsapp.
- We **do not recommend** that KS3 children are allowed to use Houseparty. The minimum age for this app is 13.
- If you do choose to allow your child to use this app, we recommend that you only allow your child to use video calling when you are in the room, and that you check your child's direct messages frequently to ensure that they are not posting inappropriate content on the app.

For additional advice on how to keep your child safe online, visit [www.internetmatters.org](http://www.internetmatters.org).

If you are concerned that your child has been a victim of cyberbullying, please let us know by emailing [safeguarding@burlingtondanes.org](mailto:safeguarding@burlingtondanes.org). Alternatively, you can also speak to your child's tutor or Head of Year, who will pass on your concerns to the safeguarding team.