

Friday 15 July 2022

Dear Everyone

The end of an exceptional year comes to a close, save the last weekend for the choristers.

For those unable to attend Speech Day, my valedictory for leaving staff, and the address from our intended guest speaker will be available to parents on the parent portal in due course.

Sadly, Neeta Patel CBE, our guest speaker, has COVID and was unable to attend. We wish her a speedy recovery.

Before we sign off fully for the year, there is a grave matter I urge all parents to pay serious and particular attention to.

We know that social media can be difficult for children to navigate, and it is difficult for children and young people to manage their own emotions within what can appear to them to be safe spaces in which to say what they like without consequence.

WhatsApp and texting in particular are used extensively by children, but these are not the only platforms.

There are some important things to note about this.

The age for use of WhatsApp is 16. The age of criminal responsibility is 10 years old.

We know from recent incidents that groups of children at this school can and do lose sight of their boundaries in these environments. In their own words, behaviour becomes normalised, and subsequently the language and imagery can escalate to become dangerous and harmful. We know that this is not unique to groups of older children. The language of offence and slight is known to happen among much younger children, in one group, for example, in Year 4 which has also come to our attention this week.

There are always consequences, whether sanctions from school, or the hurt and upset caused, often unseen by parents, but felt heavily by children. There is a fine line, also, where matters can become actionable in law. Children make mistakes, that is normal, but if that behaviour persists the consequences can be life changing.

As one parent appealed to me this week, we are all culpable. From the provocateurs who egg each other on, to the bystanders too afraid to call people out, and to the adults that let children's activity online go unchecked.

I urge you, this summer, to take a much closer and persistent interest in what your child is exposed to through social media, and how and when they have access to it. For some, the horrible texts might be on their wrist, right now.

We have to help them to navigate safely. No one is advocating a complete divorce from technology per se, but at times we also have to make decisions on their behalf. Some parents this week have simply taken their children off of WhatsApp, notwithstanding that they should never have been there in the first place. I commend them for taking a stand—tough as it can be.

Among the gifts, for which thank you, a book of poems lands. The last stanza of page 19 reads:

*Nothing's the same as anything else. Away and see
for yourself. Walk. Fly. Take a boat till land reappears,
altered forever, ringing its bells, alive. Go on. G'on. Gon.
Away and see.*

Enjoy the summer's ease.

Some music:

This will get you to the airport.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nAN-LvFOGus>

This might help your sanity if you get stuck there.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vNwYtIlyt3Q&t=2s>

With kindness

Simon