



The Dixie Grammar
Senior School

Dear Parents,

There has been a great deal in the news recently regarding the potential dangers of social media and as a school, some of the dangers associated with its use have been put into sharper focus from both internal and external sources. The purpose of this newsletter is to:

1. Highlight our current concerns with some student use, from 3 to 18;
2. Offer advice to help you manage your child's social media use at home;
3. Deal with potential areas of misunderstanding;
4. Explain the rationale behind the school's involvement, and
5. Explain the Dixie Digital Strategy going forwards.

Throughout this newsletter I will make reference to social media—its benefits, some of the dangers and I will highlight some 'top tips' to help us as parents navigate through the myriad of advice. The engagement of children with social media cannot be ignored by parents or schools: any school which claims not to have a problem with social media is ignorant of the reality of young people's lives. I should say at the outset, that use of social media also offers huge benefits for young people and education: they are now able, with tremendous ease, to learn new skills of collaboration in a way that simply was not possible even 5 years ago. In the knowledge that these skills will be absolutely fundamental to their lives, we are committed to guiding all in our community, particularly our students, to safe online behaviour.

Young people themselves consistently paint an altogether different picture of a digital world filled with positive social and emotional benefits. Four out of five 16-24 year olds report that technology plays a positive role in their relationships, and half find online interactions more straightforward than face-to-face ones. Among young people aged 11-16, the situation is similar, where a high value is attributed to feeling part of an online social media community.

As we interact with each other in the physical world, we receive many cues which help instruct us as and when mistakes are made. These cues are absent in the online, digital arena, making it much easier for children to make mistakes and to go on making them; in addition, children fail to appreciate the public nature of online forums and the potential implications. We advise students to follow a simple rule in their online behaviour: not to write anything that would offend their grandparents! I manage the Dixie Twitter feed and in checking the accounts of all who follow the school's feed I am often reminded of students' naivety: in just a few clicks on Twitter, it is obvious to me that some of our students do not act on this simple advice. As an employer, one of my first actions on receipt of an application is to do an online search. There are many candidates who fail to impress me by the behaviour and language they choose to make public.

These public forums are not limited to Twitter or Facebook. We know that gaming platforms such as Roblox, Moshi monsters and Club Penguin and others such as Skype, used by students as young as 6 years old at the Dixie, come with the facility of 'chat'. Where children go, so do abusers, and where children chat to each other there is the potential for unkindness. Often, children do not have the skills to cope with such online interactions. Children don't differentiate between their physical and digital lives in the way which we do—if anything, children are more sensitive to events in their digital lives.

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From the
Headmaster



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- 1 Ensure your children obey the legal age limits for games and apps.
- 2 It is important that your son/daughter understands the security of profile settings
- 3 It is important that your son/daughter recognises that 'friends' made online might not be as they appear.

We know that social media will form an important part of the lives of our students and at the Dixie we are committed to equipping them for this life. Young people use social media communities as an important distraction from the pressures of studying for exams, a solace from the strain of challenging family lives, and to gain instant access to communities of like-minded peers who share their interests, passions and desires. They also use them in times of distress and to find information, advice or guidance. A blanket policy of banning access to devices is counter-productive—instead we need to engage with young people—guiding their online behaviour and lives.

Just this week, I have received news from a concerned teacher that some of our students might be using the app 'Yellow' out of school—a phone app nicknamed 'Tinder for kids'. This app allows youngsters to make friends by swiping right or left—if both people agree to 'liking' each other then they have 'made a friend' and can communicate on other chat apps such as Snapchat, Kik, Musical.ly and Houseparty. Several primary schools have been alerted to the use of this app by the police, who are concerned that children are able to make potentially intimate connections with people totally unknown to them.

Recent events in school have highlighted several issues:

- Students have greater technical knowledge than some parents and some teachers
- Some students have access online at home of which parents are not always aware
- The way younger students use social media is changing rapidly: its use is increasing

We know through talking to students, that the vast majority use some form of social media overnight—including children as young as those in Year 4. Whether it is Periscope, HouseParty, Yellow, Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, AskFM, Whisper, Tinder, Snapchat, Fling, OoVoo, Kik, YikYak, Flinch, Musical.ly, Lively, Poof, Rate my Teacher, Twitter, Layar, Chat Ave, Kisschat.co.uk, Gigatube, Chat Roulette, Omegle or Instagram, it is clear that our children are vulnerable and as adults we must be vigilant.

4. Limit your son's/daughter's access to social media

There is a great deal of research that suggests young people spending large amounts of time online are more likely to experience social, academic and or mental health issues. Consider whether you want them to be able to text, send or receive pictures, chat with their friends or colleagues at any time of day or night. If not - remove their phone, iPad etc. from them at a specific time in the evening. Despite what your son/daughter tells you, many parents have just this kind of embargo – no phones etc. in bedrooms or after 9pm etc. For younger children removing devices from bedrooms during the night to avoid sleep disruption is particularly recommended as evidence suggests that the anticipation of texts, activity on social media etc. can prevent quality sleep. The potential for a negative effect on children's learning and academic progress is clear.

It is of course vital that children are prepared for the world in which they are going to live and at the Dixie we are committed to confronting issues as they arise. Students have access to the internet in school through specialist filters and monitoring devices, but restrictions



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are at best always one step behind—for all these reasons we endeavour to teach responsibility rather than ban access. We have taken advice on best practice and consequently our rules in school are:

- Students should avoid bringing devices in to school
- If students have to bring devices in to school: in the Junior School they should be handed in to the office at the start of the school day; in the Senior School they should be switched off at all times during the school day (this rule is relaxed for the Sixth Form in the Sixth Form House only)
- If the use of a phone/device is discovered during the day, the phone will be confiscated, for collection at the end of the day.

Some parents have questioned our involvement in issues originating outside school. Often problems related to the use of social media arise out of school hours and of course there is a limit to how much we can monitor such activity. I am very clear in this regard: where student unkindness online causes problems in school and where it is in the best interests of the children that we get involved, we will do so. It would be counter-productive for me to pretend that problems online do not sometimes affect children in school. There are no clear boundaries between where school ends and home starts—our guiding principle is that we should act in the best interests of our students to the very best of our ability.

5. Put off social media for as long as you can and as much as you can.

If you are concerned by any of the material your son/daughter is exposed to we advise the following action:

- a. DO NOT DELETE offensive comments etc. without first taking a 'screen-shot' of it. Your sons and daughters should know how to do this but if you need help to do it please contact the school.
- b. Remind your child that they are responsible for their own actions on the internet and they should NEVER retaliate to comments etc. This inevitably makes the situation worse.

I would like to take this opportunity to remind parents that if you have any concerns regarding any aspect of school life or if you have heard a rumour that troubles you I would welcome you making contact with the school. I am continually made aware of some of the rumours which circulate amongst parents on WhatsApp, many of which have no relation to reality. Several parents have brought issues into school this term which has allowed us to solve problems before situations have escalated and I would urge you all to make contact in case of concern, no matter how small.

As part of our Digital Strategy in school, which has been formed in consultation with the student council, the following will be features of our provision going forward:

1. Year 10 and 11 students will talk to Years 6 and 7 regarding their use of social media. We know that children often pay far more attention to older students than adults.
2. Years 6 and 7 students will go to the Junior School to talk to Years 3, 4 and 5 students.
3. I will be available at all Parents' evenings in the Senior School, and Mrs Billington at the Junior School—an opportunity for you to share any concerns regarding social media.

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Further information and advice is available from the following sources:

- If you would like more information regarding the content of this briefing, then please use the link below which will automatically download a document containing a wealth of advice: [download here](#).
- <https://ceop.police.uk/safety-centre/>
- <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/>

If you ever need support with these matters, the three people in school with a designated responsibility for this are: Mrs H J Banton (Head of Sixth Form), Ms C M Young (Deputy Head – Pastoral) and Mrs S Baker (Deputy Head).

Key Messages:

1. Check privacy settings on all home devices
2. Make conscious decisions regarding your children's access to online activity.
3. Children should not assume they know who they are 'talking' to online.
4. Children should never physically meet someone they have 'met' online without a parent
5. Actively engage with your children's online behaviour: check messages, understand the apps they are using and have open dialogue with your children.
6. Contact school if you are concerned.

Whilst I understand that some of the content of this briefing may cause some concern, I hope it also reassures: particularly in our resolve to work hard to keep students at the Dixie happy, safe, and well-prepared for the challenges ahead.

With my best wishes,

Headmaster

Acknowledgement:

I am very grateful to Mark Ashfield for his invaluable input with this social media briefing.

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