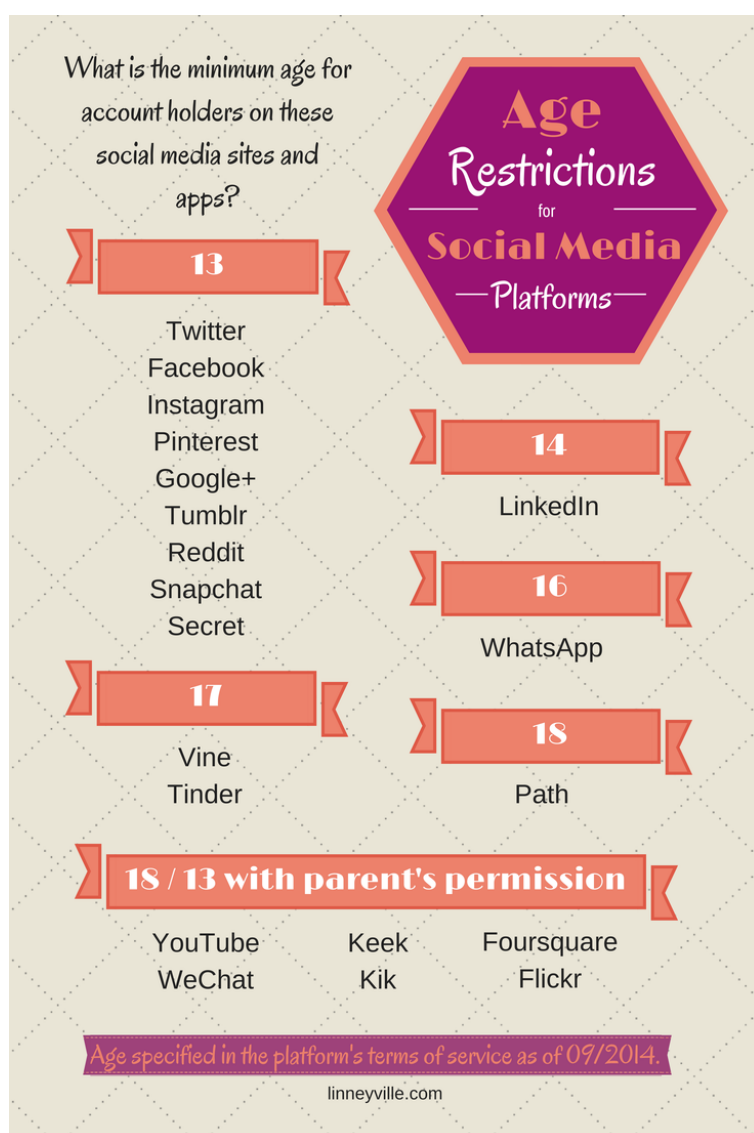




Wednesday, 14 December 2016

Social Media – Support for parents: do you know the minimum age expectations?

The world is fast evolving and children are undoubtedly living in the most stimulating and information saturated time in history. This should be, and is, embraced by schools; however, it does come with its challenges. As we approach Christmas, I am sure that many children will be given new opportunities to access the internet and social media through a wide range of devices and using platforms that many parents will not themselves be familiar with. With this in mind, it is worth sharing the guidance outlined by social media providers and how it can impact on children in school.



As with all schools, there are occasions where staff are required to help children with friendship difficulties. As children grow and mature, they often need support with changing relationships and how to respond to disagreements. In each and every case, we work hard to solve problems through mediation and our Good Conduct and Behaviour Policy / Counter Bullying Policy (available to download on the school website). Our actions reduce the frequency and likelihood of future problems.

Although such incidents remain in a minority, one common feature appears to be a cause, or at least a significant fuel, that of social media, most notably *Facebook*, *WhatsApp*, *Twitter* and *SnapChat*. It is now very rare to investigate long running friendship issues without being informed that it started, is powered by, or made more complex by social media.

When schools manage pupil behaviour well, as we do, and opportunities to bully or upset others are greatly reduced, children can often seek to find other means by which they can target pupils; social media is an easy platform for this.

Commonly, a 'minor incident' or 'fall out' that could be managed and easily solved through support actions in school are escalated into a bigger problem once shared on social media. It is not uncommon for friends, who

were not involved, or even there, to fuel (intentionally or otherwise) unfounded ill feeling, share unkind posts or escalate matters.

One sad feature of internet posts is that whether what is written is true, false or pure speculation, children will deem it as irrefutable fact. Additionally, it is noticed that if an incident is started by or escalated through social media, pupils are less likely to report the initial problem to an adult, including the school.

Most social media sites have a strict protocol that states those under a given age should not have an account. **This is for a very good reason. If your child has an account, you are in breach of the user agreement and responsible for all posts, incidents and responses – leaving you vulnerable to action and your child open to the dangers the platform presents.**

Age limits are included in this letter. It is noteworthy that **none of the providers listed support primary aged pupils accessing the platforms.**

Although we will do all we can to support pupil who are objects of social media postings, we are not responsible for them and have no power to have them removed. It is for the parent to report misuse to the provider, who is likely to inform you that you are in breach of the agreement you have made and therefore will be void of responsibility. They will state, as will I, that the immediate response should be to remove the access you have given your child to the site, as you are personally in breach of the agreement and responsible.

Our duty of care extends to all children and incidents; however it is increasingly difficult to resolve issues if the hard work undertaken by the school is undone by parents allowing access to social media that is not age appropriate. **I therefore highlight that parents should think carefully about underage access and understand their own responsibilities, before, during and after, if their child is subject to misuse.**

We often present children at Ashgate Primary School with guidance and support for the use of the internet, including the dangers of 'cyber bullying'. Guidance is available on the school website for parents and carers, as is the presentation we use.

If you would like further guidance or support, please visit the school website links, or speak to the school directly, who will be happy to signpost you to support groups.

Mr Seargent

Headteacher