

NMc/HM

30/11/21

To: All Parents/Carers

Dear Parent/Carer

Inappropriate use of online media by pupils in East Lothian schools

I am writing to let you know about a recent situation whereby some schools' staff have been targeted by online abuse from anonymous social media accounts, which are often set up using the school's name. This is something that we know other local authority areas are experiencing. I am writing to let you know what we are doing about it here in East Lothian, and how you may be able to help.

What is the issue? Offensive messages have been posted, which have caused distress to individuals. Offences of harassment and malicious communications may have been committed.

What action have we taken? In addition to removing offending accounts, social media companies are able to provide relevant internet addresses and other identifiers to the police, who can work with internet service providers (ISPs) to identify the networks and devices involved. Schools are raising awareness with students that abusive activity will always breach their ISP terms and conditions, and so can lead to unexpected disconnection of mobile and/or home broadband services.

The following information has been taken from a research project, Parenting for a Digital Future, run by the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) Department of Media and Comms. They have an active blog related to growing up in a digital world at <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/parenting4digitalfuture>

What can you do to help?

- First, please just **have a conversation**, if you haven't already, with your child or young person about what they're doing or sharing online. We know that digital safety is possibly on your agenda of concerns but, nonetheless, creating opportunities for

dialogue around online safety can prove beneficial.¹ This can seem challenging if you're not confident about technology, but NSPCC provides excellent help for parents and carers. Their guide, 'Starting a conversation about online safety'², is here: <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/talking-child-online-safety/>.

- **Get involved:** By playing online games together or watching your child's favourite TV show, YouTube channel or TikTok, you can review the content and can discuss issues that arise.³ By using ICT together parents and carers can support their children in gaining better skills, taking advantage of a wider range of online opportunities, and learning how to use technologies safely.
- **Show interest but respect your child's privacy:** Being overprotective can sometimes prevent children from developing the skills necessary to develop into responsible individuals. Building a trusting relationship through regular dialogue will encourage open conversations, even when difficult situations arise. Inspecting your child's phone or computer can break this trusting relationship so for this reason it is not advised.

This is a complex area and we hope that the advice in this communication is useful to you. If you need any further advice please contact your school Head Teacher in the first instance.

Yours Sincerely



Nicola McDowell
Head of Education

¹ "Parents' role in supporting, brokering or impeding their children's" 2 Jun. 2021, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/parenting4digitalfuture/2021/06/02/parents-supporting-or-impeding/>. Accessed 22 Nov. 2021.

² "Talking to your child about online safety - NSPCC." <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/talking-child-online-safety/>. Accessed 22 Nov. 2021.

³ "Families, technology use, and daily life: parents' role in building" 19 May. 2021, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/parenting4digitalfuture/2021/05/19/families-and-technology/>. Accessed 22 Nov. 2021.