Mobile Phone Use and Online Kindness

Following Mr Critchley's Year 5-8 assembly for Anti-Bullying Week, this year's theme, **"Break the Silence"**, provides an important opportunity to reflect on how members of the school community support one another both in school and online.

One of the key messages from this week's assembly was that remaining silent when someone is doing something wrong can unintentionally send the message that their behaviour is acceptable. Being a **silent bystander** may lead others to believe they agree with what is being said or done. While speaking up can sometimes feel difficult, particularly online, there are always ways to help. If pupils do not feel safe challenging behaviour themselves, they can still protect others by sharing their concerns with a trusted adult.

The school has recently seen an increase in reports of unkind and inappropriate online messages, particularly within group chats. Anti-Bullying Week provides an important reminder that the standards of kindness, respect and responsibility the school expects face-to-face also apply online. The fact that words are typed rather than spoken does not lessen their impact. Pupils' digital footprints and reputations matter, and they remain responsible for everything they post, share or send.

The School's Expectations for Online Conduct

When using mobile phones, social media, messaging apps and online gaming platforms, the school expects all pupils to:

- Be kind, respectful and considerate in all communications.
- Think carefully before sending messages, photographs or comments.
- Never use group chats to exclude, ridicule or target others.
- Avoid sharing rumours, screenshots or private conversations.
- Report any concerns about bullying, upsetting messages or harmful content.
- Remember that if they would not say something to someone's face, they should not type it online.

Group Chat Safety

Whilst group chats can be a useful way of communicating, they are often where friendship issues and misunderstandings arise. The school actively discourages pupils from creating large group chats or feeling pressured to join them.

Pupils who participate in group chats should:

- Do not add someone to a group without their permission.
- Remember that adding someone to a chat often means sharing their personal phone number with others.
- Respect others' privacy and their choice not to join.
- Leave conversations that become unkind, negative or inappropriate.
- Never assume that messages, photos or screenshots will remain private.

What Parents Can Do

Parents play a vital role in helping young people navigate the online world safely. The school encourages families to:

- Have regular conversations about online behaviour and digital responsibility.
- Know which apps and platforms their child is using.
- Discuss the importance of kindness, empathy and respect online.
- Encourage children to speak up if they witness or experience anything that worries them.
- Remind them that seeking help is a sign of strength, not weakness.

Support Is Always Available

Pupils who feel uncomfortable, upset or worried about something online should not keep it to themselves. They should speak to a parent, tutor, Head of Year, teacher or another trusted adult.

Pupils can also use the school's online reporting system MyVoice to raise concerns confidentially or ask for support. MyVoice can be found in Seesaw (Years 3 and 4) or Teams (Years 5-8). Whether pupils are affected directly or are worried about someone else, the school would much rather hear about a concern early so that staff can help.

This Anti-Bullying Week, the whole school community is encouraged to commit to **breaking the silence**. Speaking up, seeking help and showing kindness online can make a significant difference to the wellbeing and safety of everyone in the school community.

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