

28th February 2019

Dear Parents

I am sure many of you are aware of the new app called the Momo Challenge which has been attaching an advertisement to innocent online platforms and games such as Peppa Pig.

The advertisement shows a doll which encourages children to add a contact on WhatsApp at which point they are inundated with violent images and dares.

The Momo Challenge allegedly encourages the user to self-harm and the ultimate post tells them to take their own lives. Over the past couple of days, I have had a number of parents come to me to express concerns that their child has been exposed to this app and thankfully to date children appear to have only seen the advertisement with the doll's face. This is terrifying enough for young children and has led to some sleepless nights and a lot of distress at home. In actual fact the Momo Challenge is an online hoax that has been spreading throughout the internet for several months. It has grown in the UK over the past few weeks due to people sharing posts about it on social media, sending out challenges independently and creating a lot of hysteria and fear. Having said that we should take anything that potentially relates to self-harm or suicide extremely seriously. I have posted a link to a video on the school's website which offers some sound advice for parents about the Momo Challenge.

Here is the link. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DdsWHtYQdKQ>

Since the issue has been raised I feel it is important to take the opportunity to correspond with parents about online safety and some of the issues we have been facing as a school.

I cannot stress strongly enough the need for parents to be extremely vigilant and have robust parental filters on their internet devices at home. Children should **NEVER** be left unattended while on the internet and parents should regularly check as to what apps and websites are being viewed on their children's devices. Every parent should also make sure they have an open discussion with their child at home so any suspicious content can be identified immediately.

If adults are concerned or have any questions on how to approach the subject with their children, they can contact the NSPCC Helpline on 0808 800 5000 or visit the NSPCC website. Children who are worried about their activity on apps or online games can contact Childline 24 hours a day, online and over the phone on 0800 1111.

On Thursday 14th March from 2.00-3.00pm I have arranged for the NSPCC to come to school to do an internet safety awareness session for parents. Prior to this meeting at 1.30pm we are going to have a short presentation by the school choir when they will be singing some of their songs from last Sunday's Peace Proms. In light of recent concerns relating to the Momo Challenge and other online forums, I strongly recommend that a parent or close relative of each parent attends this meeting.

This Momo problem is the culmination of several issues which we have been facing recently with social media platforms, unfiltered internet access and online games. I am aware of some of our children creating class WhatsApp groups which, in some cases, have led to comments being posted which have caused great upset to other pupils. Even within adult social media forums, we have been made aware of some unhelpful comments about our school that have been posted by parents on Facebook and WhatsApp. Thankfully, to the best of our knowledge, the Facebook comments have been removed, however, damage was obviously done and unnecessary distress caused. If a parent has a concern about something that has happened in school, they should contact us immediately and we will investigate the matter thoroughly. We also have a comprehensive Complaints Procedure which allows issues and concerns to be dealt with in a discreet and professional manner.

Other local Principals and I have also been recently dealing with cases whereby pupils are showing real signs of addiction to Xbox games such as Fortnite. This in turn has had a very negative impact on their behaviour at home as well as their attitude to homework and school.

All primary schools are now noticing that many younger children are starting school with significant delay in their language, attention span and social development. In an increasing number of cases this is not a medical condition but due to exposure to excessive 'screen time' as a baby and toddler. As a school we try to implement recovery programmes to assist with these issues, however, the children are still at a massive disadvantage during these formative years of their education.

We hope you can work with us and keep a very close eye on both the amount of time your child spends online and playing virtual games along with monitoring all the content your child is exposed to. If we can be of any further help please feel free to get in touch.

Your sincerely,

Colin Elliott

Principal