

26<sup>th</sup> February 2026

Dear Parents and Carers,

## **Re: Guidance for Online Safety**

At Heath Lane Academy, we are committed to ensuring that all pupils are safe, supported, and able to thrive — both in school and online. As secondary school pupils increasingly use social media and digital platforms to communicate and socialise, we would like to share important guidance about online safety, age restrictions, and what support is available if concerns arise.

### **Why online safety is especially important for secondary-aged pupils**

Young people aged 11–16 are often developing independence online, using social media to build friendships and explore their identity. While this can be positive, it can also expose them to risks such as online bullying, harmful content, peer pressure, sharing images, scams, or contact from strangers. Open conversations and clear boundaries are key to helping them navigate these challenges safely.

### **Age restrictions for popular platforms**

Most social media platforms require users to be at least 13 years old:

- Instagram — minimum age 13
- TikTok — minimum age 13 (with additional protections for under 18s)
- Snapchat — minimum age 13
- WhatsApp — minimum age 13 in the UK
- YouTube — minimum age 13 for personal accounts (younger children should use supervised accounts)

Please be aware that these age limits are set by the platforms to help protect young users, and we encourage parents to monitor use and discuss appropriate behaviour online.

### **How you can support your child**

- Talk regularly about their online experiences — ask what apps they use and who they interact with
- Discuss respectful behaviour, digital footprints, and the risks of sharing personal information or images

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**Principal:** Mr M Trimmingham

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Heath Lane Academy  
Heath Lane  
Earl Shilton  
LE9 7PD  
t: 01455845061

e: [enquiries@heathlaneacademy.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@heathlaneacademy.org.uk)  
w: [www.heathlaneacademy.org.uk](http://www.heathlaneacademy.org.uk)



- Encourage your child to speak up if something makes them feel uncomfortable or unsafe
- Agree clear expectations around screen time, device use, and privacy settings
- Remind them that once something is shared online, it can be difficult to remove
- Be alert to changes in mood or behaviour linked to online activity.

### **Signs a young person may be experiencing online bullying or abuse**

- Sudden withdrawal from friends or activities
- Anxiety, low mood, or reluctance to attend school
- Being secretive or distressed after using their phone or computer
- Changes in sleep patterns or confidence
- Avoiding conversations about online activity

### **What to do if you are concerned your child is being subjected to online abuse**

1. Stay calm and listen carefully — reassure your child they are not to blame
2. Save evidence — screenshots or messages can be helpful
3. Block and report — use the reporting tools within the platform
4. Contact the school — we can provide support and investigate where appropriate
5. Seek further help — if there is immediate risk, contact the police or appropriate services.

You may also contact your child's Head of Year or the Pastoral team for support. The school work closely with external agencies where needed to ensure pupils are safe and supported.

### **National support for young people and families**

If you or your child would like advice or confidential support, the following services are available:

- NSPCC Helpline — 0808 800 5000 or [www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk) (support for parents and carers worried about a child)
- Childline — 0800 1111 or [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk) (free, confidential support for young people up to age 19)
- CEOP (Child Exploitation and Online Protection) — [www.ceop.police.uk](http://www.ceop.police.uk) (report online grooming or sexual exploitation)

Encourage your child to seek help if they are worried about anything they experience online — these services are free, confidential, and there to listen.

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## Working together

We value the partnership between school and families in helping young people develop safe and positive online habits. By staying informed and maintaining open communication, we can support pupils to make responsible choices and seek help when they need it.

If you would like advice or wish to discuss any concerns, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Yours sincerely,

Philippa Curtis  
Assistant Principal and Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)

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