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Dear Parents,

Are you aware of what your child sees when they are online?
Are you aware of the dangers of the internet, including online gaming?
Have you got effective parental controls on all devices used by children in the home?

The Internet has opened up a world of information for anyone with a computer and a connection. Digital technologies have become integral to the lives of all of us, including children. These technologies can be used as powerful learning tools, which open up opportunities for us all. At school, we will learn about computers and the internet. However, just as you wouldn't send a child near a busy road without some safety rules, you shouldn't send them onto the information super highway without some sort of rules to protect them from the dangers that the internet, including online gaming, poses. There are now many examples, locally and nationally, of issues around the e-safety of children and adults which can cause distress, upset, depression and a range of other issues. The e-safety of our children is of paramount importance to the school and something that we monitor and revisit regularly. Our children have an entitlement to safe internet access at all times both at home and at school. At school, this is achieved through stringent filtering, continual reference to e-safety and a comprehensive approach to the safeguarding of children online.

At Heathwood, we teach and remind children of e-safety whenever we use a computer and the internet. We explain that sometimes bad things may appear on the internet and the children are taught to report anything that they see or hear that they are not happy with. They are informed of the dangers that the internet can pose. We discuss that sometimes people are unkind to each other online and that they should inform a grown up or a friend if this happens to them. They are taught about the ratings of games and we explain that just like they shouldn't watch a film with a teen rating, they also should not be playing xbox or play station games with such a rating. We talk about never using their real name or photo on a gaming profile, instead they should use an avatar and nickname. We also insist that they should never arrange to meet anyone they don't know in the real world, that they have played an online game with, just in case they are not who they say they are. We explain that they should never give away any personal information online to anyone. We discuss that although social media is developing quickly, it is not appropriate, and in some cases against the terms of these sites, for children under a certain age to have social media accounts. We talk about that this is generally set at 13 (i.e. for Facebook, Youtube, Instagram and Snapchat) and that if children have their own accounts under this age, they are violating the terms of these platforms.

Kent Police have recently conducted a survey on online safety, regarding the Roblox app, which I know lots of children in our school use. Their findings are quite shocking. This survey found that children had 'received many messages from strangers' using this app, and that they 'hadn't told their parents'. These were children as young as those in year 1 and 2. Through further discussion, they found that as the children play these games, naked characters appear and that the characters appear to do inappropriate things. Through their investigation, they found that children were talking to strangers online, using their headsets. This meant that obviously the parents did not know what was being said. As I'm sure you will



agree, we, as a school, found this disturbing and shocking. Following their research, they have urged that parents check their online accounts, as some of the children in this survey revealed they have over 200 online 'stranger' friends. As we talk about stranger danger in the real world, this is obviously a cause for concern.

Every year there is a National e-safety day. This year, National e-safety day is on Tuesday 6th February and we plan on holding a special day full of activities to encourage e-safety and to promote the safety of your children online, both at home and at school. This day will consist of an assembly first thing in the morning, in the hall with me to introduce the day. The children will then be participating in a range of activities in their classrooms around e-safety, which we will ensure are age appropriate activities. This will include some activities promoted by the NSPCC. To end the day, we will gather in the hall again and I will be asking the children to explain what they have learnt and how they can keep themselves safe online. Hopefully, after this day, your children will come home with lots of advice and ideas about how to stay safe online. You may want to spend some time talking to your children about what they have completed, so that you are aware of the types of things we have discussed. This may also support you, as parents, with how you can ensure that your children's online safety is just as important as their physical safety.

In conjunction with this, we have contacted the NSPCC for some advice on how to further support children, but also you as parents in the e-safety of your children. I know, through talking to lots of parents, that often the idea of e-safety and internet safety is confusing and lots of you have asked for support and advice in the past. As technology is moving on fast, it is often confusing and difficult to keep track of. We also understand peer pressure and the effect that this can have on a family, with regard to technology.

We have therefore arranged to have two visits from the NSPCC to support us. This will include all aspects of staying safe, which will include e-safety. The first visit will be for the children and will take place on Wednesday 14^h March and will involve the children in the form of two assemblies. One for Key Stage 1 and a second assembly for Key Stage 2. The children will be completing the NSPCC's 'Speak out, Stay safe' programme in these assemblies. We also have a provisional date booked in for a Parent Workshop with the NSPCC, which is currently on the afternoon of Tuesday 22nd May 2018. There will be additional information about this workshop nearer the date, but at this stage I would strongly encourage you to attend if you can, as I feel this will be a very informative session.

There are lots of websites that you can visit to obtain further guidance and support with e-safety. Common Sense Media (www.commonsensemedia.org), the NSPCC website (www.nspcc.org.uk), Net Aware (www.net-aware.org.uk), www.internetmatters.org/advice/ and www.safetynetkids.org.uk are all useful sites to visit for guidance and support with a range of different e-safety issues.

In the meantime, if there is anything I can help you with, with regard to the e-safety of your children at school and at home, please do not hesitate to contact me at school. I am happy to offer any advice I can on this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Mr Paul Dicker
Assistant Head teacher/ICT Subject Leader

Mrs Susanne Dove
Head teacher

