

## Westways Primary School

### Online Safety Student Consultation

The Children's Commissioner for England published "Life in Likes" a report into Social Media use by young people aged 8-12, in January 2018. The full report can be downloaded [here](#).

For information and risks about the apps and games mentioned in this report please visit the [NSPCC's Net Aware APP or Site](#).

The purpose of this consultation was to find out how closely the online lives of children at Westways Primary School reflected those of the children in the report. The consultation was with a small group of children from each year group from Y2 to Y6.

Life in Likes states that Snapchat, Instagram, Musical.ly and WhatsApp are the Social Networks most commonly used by 8-12 year olds and this was certainly confirmed by the consultation in Sheffield. The Westways children reported some bullying comments in social media, strangers, and fake celebrity profiles e.g. Liam Payne, but they also reported a great deal of discussion with parents about how to keep safe, which is very positive.

The report talks about the children enjoying the fun side of the internet and that they use it to make them feel happy. It referred to the traditional Online Safety messages about predators and strangers being well drilled but that children are not good at recognising the effect of the internet on their mood, emotions and sleep. Westways children talked about the fun side, slime videos, the floss dance etc. They knew the traditional online safety narrative but as in the study they seemed surprised that this should also cover their wider health and well-being, particularly their sleep.

#### Westways Primary School Y2 – Y6

The majority of the children reported that it would make them unhappy if they lost access to the internet. There were notable exceptions to this in every year group for example children who liked being online but talked about having other interests e.g. sport. playing out, music and reading. The vast majority of the children had access to a device that they called their own and many had multiple devices. The majority of Y4 and above children, and a number of younger children, had their own mobile phone.

A number of the children reported a very gentle use of the internet e.g. for homework, talking to family, Pinterest, and age-appropriate games and puzzles on sites such as CBeebies. One child reported her favourite thing online was watching Mary Poppins on Netflix! Y2 love watching TV and films and they really love eating popcorn in the real world! Lots of the children reported that they felt their parents had an overview about what they do online. Some expressed surprise at what they had seen on parents and older sibling's phones and apps. Some children talked about their parents' excessive use of apps e.g. Facebook and Twitter and used the word addicted. Some children said that some underage use of media/apps occurred when staying with or during babysitting by older siblings or other young relatives.

YouTube, although not strictly a Social Media app is a massively popular online space with the majority of children sitting a long list of Vloggers, the most popular being Jake Paul, Ali-A, Ninja, TSM Myth, Dan TDM, Granny Run, Cookie Swirl etc. The comments and



communication aspect of YouTube was mentioned as being problematic but most children had ways to deal with that, for example blocking etc. Some children follow news vloggers. The children generally aspire to being vloggers and a number had their own channel, but on closer inspection they had few followers and were mostly being followed by their friends. Lots of children watch TV on YouTube and some reported randomly accessing scary or rude editing of mainstream child appropriate films. Many used YouTube for information about coding, crafting, art and music.

Gaming is hugely popular with Fortnite: Battle Royale being the overall favourite at the moment. A balanced report about its use by the NSPCC can be found [here](#). Other similar games are PUBG (Battleground) and Survi.vo. Roblox and Minecraft are still popular and both have the risks of online chat and communication from strangers. The PEGI rating on the Fortnite game is 12 although PEGI does not take into account chat risk. The children at Westways seemed genuinely perplexed about the adult opposition to this game particularly in the press. Stories of addiction seem to be overplayed, however we should put this into the context of this being the latest craze. Adults are in danger of missing the real risk to children which is present in many Social Media apps and games ie random chat with strangers. Older children talked about using the app Discord which is a free voice and text chat app for gamers. The children reported a level of racial abuse and enquiries about where they live etc in gaming chat generally. A couple of children also reported the use of a Live streaming APP called Twitch which is mainly used around gaming but also has a chat function.

Under-age gaming, i.e. children playing 18 games such as COD WWII, Assassins Creed and GTA5 etc. was an issue particularly in Y4, 5 and 6 with widespread use. Many children said that they would not be allowed to watch 18 films but that their family did not see a problem with age inappropriate gaming. A number reported playing with their parents. Children used various methods for controlling online chat and approaches from strangers, but said that they disliked the level of swearing and aggression from other online users. Hacking or “Modding” in games was a source of worry for the children and also abuse, particularly racial abuse, “trash talking” and strangers encountered in “Squads” or “Lobbys”. A number of children reported that leaving people out of online “Parties” “Squads” and “Lobbys” was a form of bullying. These are groups that form online to play a particular part of a game.

Many children talked about frightening stuff being the most worrying online content. Fright Night at Freddie’s and YouTube films that have startling events in them were mentioned. Some very young children talked about being frightened by seeing age inappropriate films e.g. It. On closer questioning in a number of cases this was because they had open access to Netflix in their rooms or on their tablets. They gave the impression that this was a loophole in the family’s security settings rather than an active choice by their parents.

Lots of children used Spotify and other Music streaming apps and were aware of illegal download sites. Some articulated that these were not good because of the risk of downloading viruses and knew that such sites were not strictly legal e.g. Putlocker.

Children talked about the news being a concern – particularly scary events close to home terrorism, violent crimes etc. but also a number reported being upset by seeing news reports about war or disasters in their family’s country of origin. A number of children reported real fear about the so called “Punish a Muslim” day widely reported on Social Media earlier in the



year. N.B. This is considered to be fake news. They then talked about how heartened they had been by the Social Media response “Love a Muslim.” It was humbling to witness the very positive response to this from all the children in that particular session. The children mentioned fear about the reporting of a third World War and the unreliability of Donald Trump and Kim Jong- un. Some talked about not trusting facts they heard on the TV or online and also about not being sure where to look for information.

Many of the children spoke about inappropriate content in adverts, particularly gambling apps. Some spoke of seeing “rude” stuff. Many, but not all, said they would tell an adult but worried about getting into trouble or losing their access to the device or the internet. Many seemed totally unaware that the inappropriate advertising they received was linked to telling a social network or app the wrong age. The children reported that they would give information about themselves of a commercial nature to access free games and stuff online but that they would not do this at the school gate.

Lack of sleep is one of the few proven areas where technology is directly linked to poor mental health. The RSPH document [#StatusofMind](#) documents this on page 9 and 10.

Many of the children knew the importance of turning off their devices before bed and many reported that they did not have devices in their room. In discussion with the children I asked them what would be a reasonable time to “turn off the internet”: this ranged from 7pm in Y2 to a grudging acceptance of 9.30pm in Y6. A number of the children talked about playing online or watching online TV e.g. Netflix or iPlayer very late into the night particularly during the holidays and at weekends and some routinely in the week until 11pm or later. A number talked about accessing their devices secretly when parents thought they had been put away for the night.

It was particularly worrying when Y6 children talked of looking at more risky content on a sleep over when they were “bored”. This is a vulnerable time for online sexual exploitation to begin often originating from the sharing of naked “dare” pictures which can end up in the hands of offenders. Some children talked about the dating App “Plenty of Fish” and about having explored this.

“Sharenting” is a term used by children to describe when parents share pictures or other media of their children online. As this came up in Life in Likes I asked each year group about it. Although the youngest children were not very concerned the Y5 and Y6 children showed a severe dislike. Many articulated that their parents did this from pride and with positive loving intentions but the children felt that they should be consulted particularly because they felt that their parents might not be fully conversant with privacy settings. Facebook was the most disliked medium but the children felt better about family “WhatsApp” groups, where access was only with close family and friends.

S Finnigan

May 2018

