A letter to our school community

Re: The social discourse created by social media

In 2018 Mount Compass Area School implemented a policy banning the use of mobile phones by students during school hours from Year 7 to Year 9 due to the observed negative and distractive influences of this device; (Reception to Year 6 students should not have phones at school.) This ban now includes Year 10 students as a result of negative and inconsiderate use of mobile phones. I believe implementing blanket bans on aspects of our lives that are complicated achieves very little however, the ongoing negative interactions in out-of-school hours we are being required to manage reinforces the decision made.

At the time of the ban the school communicated this decision to our school community citing specific reasons for this decision, including well-founded international research on the impacts that social media saturation has on young people which include;

- General health impacts of late night phone use – a recent survey found that a quarter of children aged 7-8 are now using mobile phones between 10:00pm and 6:00am. Apart from sleep loss, the research highlighted that night-time phone use was associated with a fourfold increase in the odds of receiving hurtful messages and almost a threefold increase in the odds of being cyber-bullied
- Neurological impacts affecting attention spans, weakening our memories, making us less creative and productive and having a significant social impact on personal relationships and a lowering of our self-esteem.
- Physical discomfort caused by the 'slouching' posture instigating neck, shoulder, upper back, wrist and hand pain

The dominant social convention of today's personal interactions is via social media whereby any misunderstanding, negative impact or intended confrontation is diffused by distance with no immediate controls or consequences.

As a result of ongoing incidents involving social media we are implementing the following practices:

- Any negative interaction involving social media between student's out-of-school hours should be managed without influence from the school. However, if the incident is brought to our attention we will, in the first instance, provide comprehensive counselling and advise a way forward. Should our advice be ignored we will actively disengage from any further involvement
- Should students bring the remnants of outside incidents into the school we will respond to that and that only within the guidelines of our student behaviour management policy

The research evidence around our complacency of monitoring internet activity of students is compelling and from my observations parents/caregivers are exceedingly culpable with regard to this. This culpability exists because our students have;

- Access to adult-age gaming at very young ages
- Unsupervised internet access
- Highly graphical and anti-social conversations
- Undertaken intimidation and harassment of other students.

Mount Compass Area School will provide a Cyber-safety workshop for our Community on Thursday 17th October and I would encourage families that are currently challenged by the consequences of the Smartphone phenomena to join us.

Kevin Mooney
Principal
13th September

Government of South Australia
Department for Education

Parental fail on web danger

REBECCA BAKER

MOST Australian parents are unaware of the online dangers their children face and are failing to supervise their internet habits, a new survey has found.

The national survey of 1000 parents found almost three-quarters felt out of their depth when it came to educating their children on internet safety.

And seven in 10 parents admitted to letting their children browse the internet completely unaccompanied.

A leading national cyber safety educator told the *Sunday Mail* the results were concerning, given the covert and frightening tricks online predators were using to lure kids.

"Some of the threats we are currently seeing (involve) online predators pretending to be social media agents," clinical psychologist and ySafe director Jordan Foster said.

"(They're) promising young children they can become famous if they send a series of vid-.eos and photos that are terrifyingly inappropriate in nature.

"So much activity that is hurting our kids is covert and therefore our kids don't always know how to stop it."

Ms Foster said the survey by internet parental control app FamilyEye mirrored a similar study by her organisation of middle-school students and their parents.

It found one in three kids admitted they had spoken to a stranger online, seen inappropriate content such as pornography and had created a social media account before they were old enough to do so.

A total of 33 per cent of kids said they had hidden their online activity from their parents.

Ms Foster says cyber-bullying remains an "ever-present threat", with evidence of children creating fake accounts under the names of their victims, while kids are also being anonymously taunted online to hurt themselves.

"Many Australian kids are being exposed to dangers online and parents may be unaware of it ... (it's a great worry) how little some parents are involved in their child's digital lives," Ms Foster said.

"To be fair, many kids push back from parents as they want more privacy and time online (which) can make it difficult for parents to supervise, but it's still essential for parents to do it anyway."

Just six per cent of parents polled believed their child viewing pornography was of greatest concern.

Sydney-based child psychologist Kimberley O'Brien said honest and open lines of communication between a parent and child is pivotal.

"A close relationship encourages free-flowing dialogue and the opportunity for children to express their worries and concerns, especially when it comes to cyber safety," Dr O'Brien said.

Experts suggest using a parental control app to help track, monitor and protect your child's safety online.