



Adventure School

Social Media Advisory

9 August 2021

Dear Parents and Caregivers,

I have pondered whether the following notice should be sent to our parent community as it could be misinterpreted as an attempt to step beyond the school gate and into the world of parenting. This isn't my intention. This notice serves to alert you to a few issues we have been encountering with regard to social media communications amongst students and particularly girls. This will hopefully start a conversation that will lead to more positive outcomes for all.

There is no doubt that social media platforms such as Snapchat, Instagram and Tiktok have become an integral part of how many students communicate outside the school gate. I am sure many of these communications are positive, if not a little inane. Some are inevitably miscommunicated or misconstrued. Others are purposely and pointedly negative.

Intermediate-aged students are still learning how to form and sustain positive relationships with their peers. Some of their attempts to do so will inevitably occur online. Students are also going through a period of cognitive development and will at times struggle to think rationally, behave appropriately, put things into perspective and not catastrophize. This is one of the reasons why most of these platforms are restricted to people who are at least 13 years of age.

We have recently been dealing with an increased number of incidents where online communication has been miscommunicated, misconstrued or been purposely and pointedly negative to others online. Whilst these exchanges happen outside school hours, we are often left to deal with the effects and repercussions of these communications at school. In these instances we support, advise and counsel those students involved. We contact or meet with parents when deemed appropriate. We also talk more widely with students about appropriate behaviours and remaining safe when online. It does however remain an issue.

I'm not advocating for an outright ban on social media as this would likely just drive behaviours underground. What I ask parents to consider doing is the following:

- Start a conversation with your child about how much time they are spending online. Ask how online interactions with their friends make them feel.
- Help them to understand that online messaging can often be misconstrued or amplified and it is usually easier to communicate with friends face to face.
- Let them know that certain messages are not ok and they don't have to deal with them by themselves.
- Agree to a set time when screens are put down and everyone can unwind from their online worlds and interactions.

These points will continue to be mirrored in discussions we have with students at school. More advice for parents can be found at www.netsafe.org.nz/social-media-parents/

Whilst I am sure a typical adolescent does not want their parent or teacher looking over their shoulder whilst they are online. I believe they will recognise we need to take a healthy interest in and offer support with what they are encountering.

Thanks and regards on behalf of the Totara Syndicate.

Mark Hughes