IMPORTANT SAFEGUARDING UPDATE

I am writing to make you aware of a concerning online safeguarding issue that has recently been highlighted to schools across Gloucestershire.

There are reports that groups operating through online platforms are targeting young people in the Gloucester area. Both boys and girls may be at risk. While there is no cause for alarm, I believe it is important that parents and carers are aware of this emerging threat and remain vigilant to help keep children safe online.

These groups are associated with what is known as sadistic online exploitation. Individuals involved seek status and recognition within online communities by encouraging or sharing harmful, abusive and sometimes violent content. Young people can be drawn into these groups through online friendships, gaming communities or social media interactions.

Children who are vulnerable due to social isolation, mental health difficulties, neurodiversity, low self-esteem or a desire to belong may be particularly at risk. However, it is important to stress that any young person can be targeted.

Some of the warning signs parents may wish to be aware of include:
- Increased secrecy about online activities.
- Sudden new online friendships that your child is reluctant to discuss.
- Excessive time spent on online platforms, particularly late at night.
- Significant changes in behaviour, mood or wellbeing.
- Exposure to extreme, violent or disturbing online content.
- Unexplained self-harm or references to symbols, numbers or online groups.
- Involvement in online activities that may include hacking, cybercrime or other concerning behaviours.

The most effective protection is often regular, open conversation. We encourage parents and carers to:
- Take an active interest in their child's online life.
- Ask who they are communicating with online and what platforms they are using.
- Discuss online safety regularly and encourage children to report anything that makes them feel uncomfortable or worried.
- Monitor devices and online activity in a way that is appropriate to your child's age and needs.
- Contact the school if you have any concerns about your child's wellbeing or online interactions.

Please be assured that safeguarding remains our highest priority. Staff continue to receive training to help identify emerging risks, and we work closely with safeguarding partners and other agencies to protect children from harm.

If you are concerned that your child may have been approached by an unfamiliar online group, or if you notice any of the warning signs described above, please contact the school's safeguarding team without delay.

By working together and maintaining open communication, we can help ensure that all of our young people remain safe both online and offline.

Thank you for your continued support.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Mrs Penney
Head Teacher