

4 November 2024

Dear Parent/Carer,

Y9 Upcoming RHPD lessons

As part of our broader Personal Development curriculum, Year 9 will be exploring the wider topics of child-on-child abuse. Child-on-child abuse occurs when a young person is exploited, bullied and/or harmed by children who are the same or similar age. In our next lesson we will explore how this happens through sexting.

Online exploitation of children and young people is becoming more prevalent due to the significant rise in the use of social media, availability of smartphones and the use of online platforms by young people to communicate with their child's and others. In autumn last year, the NSPCC announced a 29% increase in children seeking help from Childline due to child-on-child sexual abuse. The issue has, understandably, been scrutinised in the media recently.

The increasing numbers of young people accessing online platforms such as Instagram and Snapchat leaves our young people vulnerable to online exploitation, grooming and sharing indecent images. This technology allows pictures and videos to be created, copied and shared at great speed and what may start as an innocent sharing of a photo with a close friend or a few close friends can result in images being shared outside a young person's network to the entire school community and, more concerning, way beyond the school environment.

Around the country this situation has led to perpetrators including young people utilising social media platforms to manipulate and intimidate other young people into situations in which they are not comfortable.

As a consequence, young people can end up in situations which are out of their control, resulting in social anxieties, bullying, blackmail and illegal acts taking place. Children and young people may also not be aware that the sharing and receiving of these images can also mean they are committing a criminal offence and it is important they understand this in order to prevent incidences of this type in the future. If a young person under the age of 18 engages in sexting by creating an explicit photo or video of themselves then they have potentially created an image of child abuse. By sending this content on to another person, they have distributed an image of child abuse. By receiving content of this kind from another young person, they are then in possession of an image of child abuse.

As parents/carers you are in a unique position to share these concerns with your child and to highlight the impact and consequences of their decisions on their future, including the potential implications for future education and/or employment opportunities.

As with all relationship, sex and health education lessons at The Weald, the lesson on sexting will be taught within a safe learning environment by trained teachers who will aim to be as

sensitive as possible to faith issues whilst responding appropriately to the concerns and issues faced by young people in today's society. This part of our relationship and sex, health education programme will:

- Explore the consequences
- Provide information about the law
- Explore and critique the attitudes
- Develop young people's skills to keep themselves and their friends safe

We are confident you would rather be secure in the knowledge that our young people have learned about relationships and sex and health education in a safe environment, rather than learning through hearsay, gossip and be exposed to learning through harmful online influences such as pornography and inappropriate websites. Any parent/carer wishing to excuse their child/children should put their request in writing to their child's Head of House and me.

Please note that this parental and carer right to exclude is limited up to and until three terms before the child turns 16 (typically Year 11). After that point, if the child wishes to receive sex education rather than be withdrawn, the school will make arrangements to provide the child with sex education during one of those terms.

There are huge personal and social benefits of a young person receiving sex education; any withdrawal may have detrimental effects on the child. This could include any social and emotional effects of being excluded, as well as the likelihood of the child hearing their child's version of what was said in the classes, rather than what was directly said by the teacher.

To read our relationship, sex and health education policy please go to:
<https://www.theweald.org.uk/attachments/download.asp?file=2518&type=pdf>

The concerning issues of exploitation are also covered in this pack www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents. We encourage you to discuss such issues with your child and this is a useful resource to assist this.

Yours faithfully,



Mr N Everest
Head of Character and Culture