

## Brampton Area Schools Consortium (BASC)



15.01.19

### Safeguarding Alert.

Dear Parents,

During our half termly meeting for headteachers of the Brampton Consortium, awareness was raised about the content of a popular website/music app called TikTok. This app appears to be very popular amongst Year 5 and 6 pupils in our area.

On first glance this app looks quite innocent, children can lip sync to their favourite song and post videos of themselves dancing and singing.

However, as you can see from the parent information sheet enclosed it is also a platform where inappropriate material can be accessed and viewed.

As a collective, we urge all parents who allow their primary school aged children to use this app to take a very careful look at what your child has posted and more importantly see for yourselves just how easy it would be for your child to view inappropriate content or to be approached by persons unknown to you.

TikTok is not intended for primary school children. It has adult content and members should be 13 years old to open an account. As with all these apps anyone can join by simply lying about their date of birth.

We appreciate how hard it is for parents to keep track of which apps are being used and hope you find this information useful.

Yours sincerely,

*The Cluster Heads*

**Bewcastle, Brampton, Castle Carrock, Crosby-on-Eden, Fir Ends, Gilsland, Great Corby, Hallbankgate, Hayton, Irthington, Lanercost, Lees Hill, Shankhill, Warwick Bridge**

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## EXAMPLES OF THE DANGERS SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENTS TO PRIMARY-AGED CHILDREN

**SNAPCHAT – not as short-lived as you’d imagine:** We are aware that there is an active circle of users employing fake Snapchat profiles to gain access to the social address lists of ever younger children by working downwards from older teens. With these profiles, they are able to groom children of various ages, tricking them into sharing images of themselves, or those they have been sent by their ‘real’ friends by taking a screenshot before it deletes itself. Any image harvested and shared in this way will include the sender’s username, which will allow them to be contacted by anyone who subsequently sees it.

These are then distributed widely, within the circle itself and beyond it. The impact of this is most keenly felt within our local secondary schools, but the grooming frequently starts long before this. Some of our schools have already been contacted by local police when they have been able to identify one of our pupils from an image found within a collection uncovered as part of investigations into sharing of adult content; frequently they are innocuously included amongst other, more extreme, sexualised images.

**‘AGE-APPROPRIATE’ ADVERTISING:** Once an account is created, all platforms assume that the date of birth given is accurate and will direct advertising at the user accordingly. Similarly, within the terms and conditions there is usually a clause that allows them to sell that user as a piece of data to other parties.

This means that an eight year old signed up as a 13-year old will receive advertising aimed at an individual five years older throughout the lifetime of that account. At eight, they may receive relatively safe invitations to pay-as-you play gaming; by 11 they may be receiving adverts for e-cigs, contraception and driving lessons, as well as less savoury content; at 13 their false date of birth will identify them as an adult, and they may receive invitations to dating agencies and adverts for alcohol. The danger is that this becomes normalised – children begin to believe that others their age are accessing these things, and follow suit.

**BODY IMAGE / FAKE REALITY:** Many social sites like Instagram and Facebook increasingly normalise a lifestyle that most adults recognise as a ‘fantasy reality’ – one in which the sun always shines, every day is a holiday, and having an all-over tan is the only way to be. They show celebrities confidently showing the world how they look – albeit with the veneer of make-up, a 7-day fitness regime and a nutritionist-led diet. Facebook feeds contain ‘news’ that delivers truth and lies in equal measure. Children simply don’t have the relevant world experience to see through the smoke and mirrors.

**CYBERBULLYING :** Once the preserve of the secondary school, as younger pupils have joined the smartphone user-base they have become exposed to cyberbullying. Some have been victims, others have become the instigators. Since many users now access various different platforms, bullies frequently have access to a significant amount of personal information. Instagram photographs may give them an insight into the victim’s home and hobbies. Written posts reveal vulnerabilities. A child’s likeness from a seemingly innocent selfie can be cut and pasted onto other images. Worst of all, friend lists give bullies access to everyone the victim knows and trusts. For young children and teens the results can be devastating.

**Primary-aged children are not emotionally, developmentally or socially ready for any of the challenges presented by social media. The age restrictions are there for their protection. Please ensure they are followed.**

