North Primary School and Nursery
John Harper Street
Colchester, Essex CO1 1RP

Headteacher: Alan Garnett
Telephone: 01206 574225
Fax: 01206 369583
www.northschool.org.uk
admin@north.essex.sch.uk

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Keeping Children Safe: Cyber-Safety

"Trying to embrace technology whilst finding the balance with safety clearly isn't easy. I found the event left me feeling as if it created more questions rather than giving answers, but this is a good starting place to find out more and how we'll tackle it as a family." [parent]

"Social media is a good thing but when primary age children are using it a responsible adult should monitor their activity." [Year 6 pupil]

On Thursday 7th December 2017 North hosted an event for Colchester parents organised by local MP Will Quince on the subject of Cyber-Safety. There were two speakers one from an organisation called Parentzone, the other from Essex Police.

Parents from North were invited to provide written feedback answering the following questions:

What did you find most useful?
What did you hope to find out but was not covered?
What questions would you like on the website that is not there now?

Overall, parents found the meeting useful, pointing out that what makes for good parenting applies in all aspects of a child's life. This means parents taking an interest, preparing the child for situations well before they are ready to be independent – just like teaching your child to cross the road. It means helping your child to make good choices, which includes them telling you if they are worried about something.

The school takes its responsibilties very seriously to educate children and familes on keeping e-safe. The parents section of the school website is full of useful links which can help crimes and concerns to be reported and also provide practical tips on how to parent effectively. At the start of every term children are taught about e-safety at an appropriate level.

Parents feel our website is very good for E-Safety but some say it is a little hard to find that part of our site. Here is how to find it:

www.northschool.org.uk/parents/links-for-parenting

I would like to add that research suggests children and young people do not tell parents if something bad happens because they worry their parent's response will be to confiscate their device even when they have done nothing wrong. Children will be most safe if they have a relationship of trust with their parents where they can talk about their concerns without such a fear. This is critically important if children are going to develop sound judgement of risk and practice safe behaviour.

Returning to the comparison with road safety, at some point a parent will decide when the child is responsible enough to cross the road independently. But the parent has started teaching the child road sense many years before that time – modelling, rehearsing all the things to consider before crossing the road safely, getting the child to practice those decsions with the parent. The same principles apply to cyber-safety. On tablets, mobiles or gaming devices, children must be taught how to use them, discuss the risks, shown what to do to minimise them and know what to do if something is not right. Last year, most of our older pupils told us that they have reported concerns. Whilst this fact is worrying on one level, on another level it is also reassuring; these children had a concern and acted on it, keeping themselves safe.

There are plenty of websites which can give parents practical tips. This is the parentzone website - https://parentzone.org.uk. They publish a free magazine which the school has ordered and will give to Year 5 and 6 parents. It can be read online too.

Another Year 6 pupil wrote this: *"Social Media is one of the twenty first century marvels and a spectacular way of communicating. When a message is sent, billions of small particles zoom through the air, and then piece back together when they reach their destination, all in a millisecond."*

I am sure many children got devices for the first time over Christmas and no doubt love them already. Do you know what they can do on them? Are you confident that they will make good choices? The two quotes from Year 6 pupils were taken from essays they wrote about primary age children using social media. Those essays showed great maturity and awareness of the benefits and risks.

Our responsibility as parents and as teachers is to give children the skills and judgement to use the "marvel" of technology with confidence. We will be successful in our roles if children gain an understanding of benefit and risk and what they must and must not do to remain safe.

I hope you have found this letter helpful and for those of you that did not attend the meeting I hope you find it to be, as the parent said of that meeting, *"a good starting place to find out more and how we'll tackle it as a family,"*

With thanks to all the parents who responded to my survey.

Yours sincerely

Alan Garnett