

STARTING A CONVERSATION ABOUT CHILDHOOD

These chapters were sent to parents via parentmail from 13th -17th April 2026

Childhood Chapter 1

This month it's 25 years since I became headteacher of North School. In that time I have seen many changes in the lives of children, some good, some bad. I am writing to you today to seek your support in tackling one of the biggest threats I have seen to the health, wellbeing, safety and future of our children - unregulated online gaming and access to social media.

Governors are very concerned about this issue. Together we've been discussing what we can do as a school community to protect our children and encourage good habits for the future.

I will be starting this same conversation with the school council. I will share their views in due course. Their views may surprise you: remember, it was the school council that voted overwhelmingly to ban children's phones from school discos.

In a later chapter you will find real-world examples of the negative consequences of the online world - accessed through smartphones and tablets - from our own school community. I've also included some links to further information. I'm sure that like me, and the school's governors, you'll find them interesting.

Childhood Chapter 2

We want your help and ideas as well please. You were your children's first teachers and will remain their most important ones. Maybe you can help each other to navigate the minefield of the online world. This approach is happening in some communities already where class WhatsApp groups come to an agreement on shared rules about phones and gaming.

Parents and carers, I want this to be the start of a conversation between you all. Share what you do - no judging, no virtue signalling - just open, supportive and constructive advice on what you do with your kids, and what rules work for you regarding online devices. The class WhatsApp groups could be a great forum for this conversation. (I know, there is an irony here in using social media as a forum, but social media can be a force for good when used responsibly.)

Can we put the genie back in the bottle? Is it too late? Not if children haven't got any devices. Can you parents agree amongst yourselves at what age your children get a device and what they can do on it? And if your children are older and have a device already, how about you agreeing certain rules like curfews and no phones in bedrooms at night?

Childhood Chapter 3

I hope these parentmails do not come across as preachy. That is absolutely not my intention. I remember, as a parent, there were times when I needed to get on with chores and meals and needed something to occupy the kids. TV and DVDs were a life saver. We just need to give thought to what it is we plonk our children in front of and how we get them to engage with the real world. Can we come together with some ideas for good, cheap alternatives to resorting to mobile phones and gaming? It strikes me that with more daylight and warmer weather this is the perfect time to re-discover the joys of fresh air, exercise, nature on our doorsteps, without having to spend money.

I look forward to hearing your ideas.

Childhood Chapter 4

Here are some real examples of North Pupils' online activity...

Two Y6 girls (who never got told off in class and were model pupils) were interviewed by the police because of a message they posted on social media.

Parents were shocked when police knocked on their door following a report of their child's worrying social media messages. The parents thought their child was asleep.

A boy was falling asleep in class. It turned out he was gaming with players in another time zone and so set his alarm at 4.00am to play.

Children waking up, turning their phones on to discover their mates had been texting through the night.

A Y6 boy who knew all about Andrew Tate and was sympathetic to Tate's toxic views.

One of our Y5s played a game on Roblox recently called *Knife Arena*. (Did you know there is a *National Centre for Gaming Disorders*? At the moment only children over the age of 13 can access this. I expect this age to come down as evidence grows of younger children becoming withdrawn and addicted to their devices.)

Childhood Chapter 5

Further reading

The Anxious Generation by Jonathan Haight.

It not only talks about the impact of device use on the young, it talks about the changing experiences of young people in the real world.

Put simply, we parents have become overprotective of our children in the real world and 'underprotective' of them in the virtual world. You may not agree with everything he says but he makes a very powerful case.

Parents should monitor children on Roblox 24/7 says developer. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cd6107wwvlpo>

[Screen time for under-fives should be limited to one hour a day, parents told - BBC News](#)

Louis Theroux: Inside the Manosphere, Netflix

Chapters 6, 7, 8 etc

These are not yet written. These chapters will capture the responses from parents and children- your views, suggestions and what impact this mini-campaign may have.