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Principal: Richard Wilson

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Dear families,

Keeping students safe online is a priority at Dixons Kings Academy and our students learn how to keep themselves safe online in ICT and through the PSHE curriculum. As we approach the end of term and your child will be spending the next fortnight at home, I would like to take this opportunity to offer you some online safety advice.

Many of our students tell us that they enjoy online gaming, which can be a fun way to spend time with friends, however it is important that parents understand the risks related to online gaming.

Gaming is different to social networks, as players often play against people they don't know, and this may include adults. This means that your child may be communicating with adults they do not know as many games have an in-game chat facility. While many of these are monitored, and players look after each other, chat is in the moment and cannot be controlled. Mean comments or insults can hurt, and competitive criticism might feel like bullying for some children.

Some online gamers may ask others to enter into private chats and if your child does this, they could be exposed to greater risks such as sharing personal information or feeling pressured to do something that they don't want to do. If the chat is happening on a different chat or messaging app, then it will no longer be monitored by the game.

Many games allow users to make purchases. You can buy tools that can be used in the game to give you an advantage such as weapons, coins or cheats. Many children do not have access to money to make purchases in games, so it can be tempting to accept 'in game currency' to help them progress. Some people may offer to trade – or give – your child in-game items or currencies to earn their trust and persuade them to have a separate conversation outside of the game.

It is important you are aware of the various ways to safeguard your child against these risks whilst they are gaming. Please ensure that:

- you have ongoing conversations with your child about who they are talking to online. Discuss who they are, whether they know them offline and what they share with them.

- you take time to explore games with your children. Ask them to show you what they like about the game and take an interest.

- you speak with your child about making their profile private if possible and talk with them about information that is safe to share, for example nicknames as opposed to full names.

- are aware of the chat platforms your child is using. Ask your child about what they would do if someone within a game asked to talk to them in private whether that is on another platform or within the game. Help your child to identify this warning sign and explain what they can do can help them to keep safe.

What else can I do to protect my children when they are playing games?

1. Explore parental controls on games consoles. Most games consoles enable parents to apply settings that can help to manage a child's online activities. For more information on enabling parental controls visit https://www.internetmatters.org/resources/tech-guide/gaming-consoles-for-children/
2. Learn how to use the blocking and reporting functions on the games your child plays, and ensure they know how to use these. It's helpful to sit with your child and go through this together.
3. Visit www.askaboutgames.com for advice about safe play including using family controls to limit who children talk to, how much they spend in game and time spent online

If you are worried that a child is being groomed in a game, or on any other online platform you should seek support. You can contact your local police or report to CEOP at www.ceop.police.uk. If you believe your child is in immediate danger call the police on 999.

Online safety is an important issue which as an Academy we are committed to teaching our students about. If you have any concerns or questions about keeping your child safe online, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Miss E. Hickey
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Vice Principal