Dear Parent/Carer

‘Sexting’ and Youth-Produced Sexual Imagery

I am writing to you about several reports of incidents relating to ‘sexting’ and youth-produced sexual imagery that have been brought to my attention recently. Although students receive regular guidance and advice through PSHE, assemblies and tutor-time on the need to protect themselves online, I would be grateful if you would reiterate the following messages, provided by the UK Council for Child Internet Safety:

- The law: it is a criminal offence to make, possess or distribute indecent imagery of children. This law exists to protect young people. Creating and sharing sexual photos and videos of under-18s is illegal.

- Where young people share images of themselves, they expose themselves to the risk of embarrassment, bullying, blackmail and increased vulnerability to sexual exploitation.

- All incidents of youth-produced sexual imagery are dealt with by the school as safeguarding concerns in the first instance, but police may become involved.

- Young people should not be deceived into thinking that uploading photos into apps such as Snapchat is a safe way of sharing risqué images; if someone has sight of a compromising image, they can screenshot it, and are then in control of your image.

- Similarly, direct messaging or texting a close friend a compromising image is unsafe behaviour – you are no longer in control of that image.

For their own protection, at all times it is important that your child does not create and share inappropriate images of themselves; furthermore, they should not link with, or accept requests from, ‘virtual’ friends whom they do not know in real life. It is important that students remain healthily suspicious of any requests for contact from accounts they do not know and that they do not assume that an account holder is ‘safe’ just because another friend is linked with them.

The pressures on young people to use social media platforms, potentially in an inappropriate way, should not be underestimated; however, with responsible use, following the guidance above, social media can be made much safer.
If parents, or students, have any further concerns, they should contact a member of our safeguarding team either by telephoning the school or via email admin@ashlyns.herts.sch.uk with FAO Safeguarding Team in the title.

Further resources that can help inform parents are detailed at the end of this letter.

Thank you, in advance, for your continued vigilance in helping to keep our community safe.

Yours sincerely

James Shapland
Headteacher

Advice and information for parents

1. The NSPCC has information and advice about sexting available on its website: https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/sexting/
2. NCA-CEOP has produced a film resource for parents and carers to help them prevent their children coming to harm through sharing sexual imagery: https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/articles/Nude-selfies-a-parents-guide/
3. Childnet have information and advice about sexting available on its website: http://www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers/hot-topics/sexting
4. Parent Info (http://parentinfo.org/) provides information and advice to parents from expert organisations on topics ranging from sex and relationships, mental health and online safety. This includes content on sexting. The content of Parent Info can be hosted for free on a school's website via a newsfeed service.
5. The UK Safer Internet Centre have produced checklists for parents on using social networks safely: https://www.saferinternet.org.uk/advice-centre/social-media-help

Resources parents could highlight to their children

1. ChildLine have created Zip-It, an app that provides witty comebacks in order to help young person say no to requests for naked images: https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/bullying-abuse-safety/online-mobile-safety/sexting/
2. The Safer Internet Centre has produced resources called ‘So You Got Naked Online’ which help young people to handle incidents of sexting: http://childnetsic.s3.amazonaws.com/ufiles/Files%202015/SYGNO%20Booklet%20-%20version%202%20May%202015.pdf