

January 2019

1. Preston headteacher warns parents of legal consequences if WhatsApp chat used 'inappropriately'

James Maloney, who took charge of New Longton All Saints CofE last year, has written to families of pupils urging them to bring issues involving staff or pupils to him in person, rather than air them online. The Post believes the letter was prompted by comments made in a WhatsApp group for parents. "Posting messages with half-truths or rumours can be defamatory and potentially libellous," writes Mr Maloney. And he goes on: "Anything you commit to writing can be forwarded to others and may result in school contacting the legal team for advice on how to proceed." Mr Maloney's letter does not say what or who the derogatory remarks involved. And he also says: "As with many things in life, there are those unfortunate times when social media may be used inappropriately." The head initially declined to comment when approached by the Post, other than to say: "We send letters to parents all the time." But later he issued a statement through Lancashire County Council in which he said: "I support the convenience of parents' social media groups to share information relating to school activities. "However, I feel that it is inappropriate to post potentially untrue and defamatory comments about teachers within these groups. I sent the letter to remind parents of this. "I'm concerned about posts being inaccurate and the possible harmful impact of this on the individuals concerned and on the whole of the school community." Mr Maloney isn't the first headteacher to confront parents about discussions on social media. In 2017 the head of a school in Chirk, Wales, warned he would take "appropriate legal action" if negative and malicious comments continued to be posted on Facebook and other public platforms about the school and individual members of staff.

And the Association of School and College Leaders claims schools are being forced to trawl social media "to protect their reputations due to parents posting complaints online." As a result some heads are now asking mums and dads to agree how they will use social media as part of a relationship agreement when their child starts school. Parents at the 200-pupil New Longton All Saints School are already required to sign a Home School Agreement. And in his letter Mr Maloney points out that by doing so they have agreed to "support the school and its ethos" and "ensure early contact with the school to discuss matters which affect their child's happiness, progress and behaviour." He says: "In order for us to set the best possible example to our pupils, we must request that you align with these expectations, rather than canvas opinion via message groups.

Read more at: <https://www.lep.co.uk/news/education/preston-headteacher-warns-parents-of-legal-consequences-if-whatsapp-chat-used-inappropriately-1-9564434>

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2. Social media firms could face ban if they fail to remove harmful online content, warns Matt Hancock

"We are a nation state, parliament is sovereign – as we are discovering in the Brexit process – and we can legislate if we need to. It would be far better to do this in concert with the social media companies but if we think they need to do things they are refusing to do, then we can and we must legislate," he said.

Pressed by the BBC on whether this could mean imposing extra taxes on social media giants or even banning them, Hancock replied: "Ultimately parliament does have that sanction. It's not where I'd like to end up."

His comments follow the death of 14-year old Molly Russell, who took her own life in 2017 after viewing content about suicide on social media. Her father has said Instagram, which is owned by Facebook, "helped kill my daughter".

Facebook has said it is "deeply sorry" about Russell's death.

Yesterday Hancock wrote a letter to social media firms in which he called on them to "purge" harmful online material about suicide following Russell's death.

He said: "I welcome that you have already taken important steps, and developed some capabilities to remove harmful content. But I know you will agree that more action is urgently needed.

"It is appalling how easy it still is to access this content online and I am in no doubt about the harm this material can cause, especially for young people.

"It is time for internet and social media providers to step up and purge this content once and for all."

An Instagram spokesperson said: "Our thoughts go out to Molly's family and anyone dealing with the issues raised in this report. Nothing is more important to us than the safety of the people in our community, and we work with experts every day to best understand the ways to keep them safe.

"We are undertaking a full review of our enforcement policies and technologies around self-harm, suicide and eating disorders. As part of this, we are consulting further with mental health bodies and academics to understand what more we can do to protect and support our community, especially young people. inappropriate and potentially dangerous content on their favourite sites."

Link: <http://www.cityam.com/272265/social-media-firms-face-ban-if-they-fail-remove-harmful>

For more information about e safety :

- go to <http://www.blackpoolaspireacademy.co.uk>
- come into school and talk to a member of Student Services