

Note for Colfe's parents regarding recently created internet websites

The following guidance note should be of interest to all senior school parents at Colfe's. Most of the text is borrowed, with permission, from another independent school. I am grateful to the Headmaster of Latymer Upper School, Mr Peter Winter, who has approved our use of their documentation.

Q. What do these names mean - YouTube, Bebo and My Space?

A. These are the names of three well known and popular websites which reside on the Internet.

Q. What's on these web pages which you think concerns me as a parent?

A. Lots of things. Some of it is harmless; other content can be cruel and cutting. The sites are not rigorously censored in terms of content. For example, on YouTube, a video site, the BBC is putting video trailers for its forthcoming TV programmes. Others, however, are putting films showing the whole of the execution of Saddam Hussein and other video material. The other two sites allow "members" to write about themselves, and other people of course. Not all of it is nice.

Q. Can we view these sites / comments?

A. Yes ...you can view video content straightaway, although for some of it you will have to register your details on the site. My Space asks you to sign up immediately ...and Bebo lets you see some material but, again, expects you to join.

Q. As a parent of a child at Colfe's should these websites concern me?

A. Yes. They should concern you. Access to them is very easy. Your son or daughter may already be a member of them; and a contributor, not just a reader of material. That means they have access to material which you and the school may well consider offensive. The users of these sites have the ability to create their own material, i.e. films, pictures or text. Because it is accessed solely by user identification and a password, it is their choice who views it and whom they choose to pass it to.

Q. Can this material be considered to be inappropriate, then?

A. Certainly not all of it. But some of it is. And it could be hurtful or defamatory to or about others who attend Colfe's, or any other school. Worse, if it mentions Colfe's, or it can be seen to have originated here at Colfe's, then those identified will be considered to have brought the school into disrepute. They would then face the school's disciplinary sanctions.

Q. What has the school done about access to these sites?

A. Access to them from our internet service was blocked many months ago. They can neither read nor write to them from the school's PCs.

Q. Does that not solve the problem, then?

A. No. Far from it. They could be accessing the sites from your home PC or a friend's or directly from their mobile phone.

Q. Do you have any advice on this matter?

A. Yes. You know your children best. First, visit the site and see for yourself what's being said and the potential of what could be said or shown. Then ask your son or daughter if they use the sites at all; if they do, then ask to see the files, pictures or films they have uploaded. You could, for peace of mind's sake, look for software programmes that will monitor and, if necessary, ban access to these [and other] sites. Suitable "content watch" software can easily be found with an internet search.

The site addresses are:

<http://www.myspace.com/>

<http://www.youtube.com/>

<http://www.bebo.com/>