

Dear Parent/Carer

**IMPORTANT COMMUNICATION FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
REGARDING ONLINE SAFETY INFORMATION – CATFISHING AWARENESS AND  
SAFER SCHOOLS NI APP**

The Department of Education has written to all school in Northern Ireland to highlight a serious online safety concern and to provide you with resources to help protect your child. You may be aware of a recent news story about an individual in Northern Ireland who was involved in a large-scale catfishing case with devastating consequences. This has highlighted the potential dangers of Catfishing, and we want to ensure that you have the information and tools to keep your child safer online.

**What is Catfishing?**

Catfishing is when someone creates a fake online profile to trick people into forming relationships with them. This can be done for various reasons, including exploitation, scamming, or simply to cause emotional harm.

**How can Safer Schools NI help?**

Safer Schools NI is a free app, funded by the Department of Education, that provides valuable resources and advice on various online safety issues, including Catfishing. The app includes a new resource, "Catching a Catfisher", which provides information on:

- **Identifying Catfishing:** Learn to recognise the signs of a fake profile and deceptive online behaviour.
- **Avoiding Online Scams:** Gain practical tips and strategies to protect yourself from Catfishing and other online scams.
- **Verifying Online Identities:** Discover techniques to confirm the authenticity of online profiles.
- **Staying safe on social media and dating apps:** Access valuable advice on navigating online platforms safely.

**What can you do?**

- **Download the Safer Schools NI app:** Available for free on [Google Play](#) and the [Apple App Store](#).
- **Talk to your child about online safety:** Have open and honest conversations about the risks of online interactions and the importance of being cautious.
- **Familiarise yourself with the "Catching a Catfisher" resource:** Use this resource to learn more about Catfishing, the risks and how to engage your child in a constructive conversation.

**Remember**

- Encourage your child to be wary of online relationships with people they have never met in person.
- Remind them never to share personal information, such as their address or phone number, online.
- If your child experiences any concerning online behaviour, report it to the relevant platform and seek support from Safer Schools NI or other trusted sources.



## BANBRIDGE ACADEMY

ESTABLISHED 1786

**Paul Givan MLA, Education Minister:** "As parents, we want the best for our children, including ensuring their safety in the digital world. I encourage all parents to take advantage of the Safer Schools NI app and have open, supportive conversations with their children about online safety."

**Colin Stitt, Head of Safer Schools:** "Every child deserves to feel safe online. This tragic case reminds us that we must remain vigilant and empower young people with the knowledge to protect themselves. Safer Schools NI app is a vital tool for parents and carers in this effort."

We are committed to working with you to ensure our children and young people are safer online. Please do not hesitate to contact the school with any questions or concerns. For your convenience I have copied below a message that was sent to you earlier in the term.

*This is a reminder about the Safer Schools NI app, developed by INEQE, which is available to the whole Banbridge Academy community. The app is an excellent source of contemporary and pupil-centred information in relation to Online Safety topics. The "Online Safety Guidance" and "Online Safety News" sections are particularly useful. Some of the facilities that the app offers includes: - Current online trends, threats, and risks to young people. This information is sent directly to your device! - Information you need to know on social media and gaming platforms, helping you understand the latest buzzwords and learn how to set privacy and parental settings on platforms like Call of Duty, Snapchat, Instagram and TikTok. - Expert guidance to help you navigate important issues such as bullying, managing mental health, image sharing and harmful content. You will be given practical tips on how to approach these conversations with your child. An introductory video is shown in the link below: [Safer Schools NI App Overview | <https://vimeo.com/648966447>] Please download the app from the Android or Apple app store. The code for all parents of Banbridge Academy is 3824. A copy of a guide for parents on TikTok is attached. This is an example of the excellent guidance and help available to parents on the app.*

Yours sincerely

*R S McLoughlin*

R S McLoughlin OBE  
Principal