WC: 26/06/2023

Dear Parent/Carer,

This week at NUSA:

Year 10 have been brilliant with completing mock exams this week. For two weeks, they have shown dedication and grit to ensure that the mock exams are completed to the best of their ability. We can't wait to see their results.

On Monday, the students from our focused provision unit visited Harry Potter World. We were all super jealous but were really glad that they had such a fantastic time.

Every morning we offer all students the opportunity to have a free bagel before school. If you know that your child is a little reluctant to eat breakfast in the morning, please encourage them to pick up a free bagel so they can start their day with full tummies.

Industrial action update:

We have been notified of the intentions for further industrial action days on the 5th and 7th July.
Wednesday 5th July – closed to all pupils except Y10 and Y12.
Friday 7th July – Sports day – open to all pupils as normal. Year 10 who are completing work experience in school will work from home on this day, as will Y12.
If your child would receive free school meals and would like to take a packed lunch home on Tuesday 4th July, they will need to head in to the canteen at the end of the school day on Tuesday to collect it.

We need your voice!:

We are running our next round of parental surveys. The closure date for the survey is 21st July 2023.
This time there is opportunity for 5 people to win an Amazon or Tesco voucher worth £25. All you need to do is complete the survey and enter your email address at the end to be included in our draw!
www.edurio.com/poll/Ns9kge

Coming up at NUSA:

SEND drop ins – Please contact reception to make an appointment for Monday 10th July if you need to discuss your child's SEND needs
Year 11 Prom is on Friday 30th June
Year 10 Work experience – week commencing Monday 3rd July
Closed for Industrial action – Wednesday 5th July
Sports day – Friday 7th July

Safeguarding corner:

This weeks safeguarding corner comes from National Online Safety, see the attached leaflet.

Have a lovely weekend,

Emma Howard
Headteacher

What Parents & Carers Need to Know about
AI VIRTUAL FRIENDS

Artificial intelligence – particularly in terms of how it generates natural language – has seen significant development over the last six months, with companies releasing new AI-based software or adding an AI element to existing apps (such as Snapchat, for example). One form of AI to become especially popular has been the 'AI friend' or chatbot, as children eagerly experiment with these new-found computer-generated companions. There are now numerous apps available with this 'virtual friend' functionality, with the likelihood of it being added to other successful platforms soon.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

CONTENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

AI chatbots may not always be able to recognise when content is age inappropriate or harmful and should be filtered out. So there's a possibility that children could be exposed to offensive language or explicit material while conversing with their virtual friend. The companies producing such AI solutions are also unlikely to take responsibility for any content that their algorithms generate.

REDUCED SOCIAL CONTACT

An excessive reliance on chatbots for social interaction could potentially cause a child to begin reducing the amount of face-to-face communication they have, leading to social isolation. If young people become dependent on chatbots to provide companionship, it could very likely hinder the development of their real-life social skills.

LACK OF SENSITIVITY

Chatbot software isn't always sophisticated enough to pick up on subtle emotional cues or recognise signs of distress in children, as most humans would. It might therefore fail to respond appropriately. AI misinterpreting what it's being told or replying insensitively to a young user who's already struggling could potentially impact a child's emotional wellbeing or exacerbate any existing emotional issues.

UNINTENTIONAL BIAS

AI companions are only as reliable as the information they've been programmed with. The algorithms they use, therefore, may unintentionally promote bias, stereotypes or discriminatory behaviour (as many originate from the USA or the UK, for instance, they can display a distinctly western-centric worldview). This could lead to children developing skewed attitudes and behaviours.

COGNITIVE LIMITATIONS

Although many are now undeniably advanced, AI-powered chatbots still have limitations in terms of understanding complex concepts, context and nuance. Depending heavily on chatbots to help with learning or solving problems may stunt the development of a child's own powers of critical thinking, creativity and ability to engage in open-ended discussions with other people.

PRIVACY CONCERNS

Chatbots typically collect data about users, including personal information and conversations. This is ostensibly to improve their performance as they gradually learn about our behaviour – but many experts are warning that there may be significant risks associated with how this information is stored and used (the possibility of potential breaches or misuse by third parties, for instance).

Advice for Parents & Carers

CHAT ABOUT CHATBOTS

If your child is already expressing an interest in AI apps, a relaxed, natural chat should help you to discover which ones they're aware of and how they're using them (or are planning to). Discuss these options with your child and perhaps do your own research to ensure you think they're suitable. Once you're totally happy, you could sit with your young one and begin exploring AI chatbots together.

CREATE A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

If your child is keen to engage with AI chatbots, encourage them to do so in a safe environment: ideally in a shared space at home, so you can easily keep an eye and ear on their progress. Set up appropriate content filtering measures in advance – and gently remind them that you'll be close by and ready to help with any questions or concerns that may arise.

FIND A BALANCE

Work alongside your child to establish the right balance in terms of how they might use AI-powered chatbots – and when it's appropriate. It's important to make sure that children are still getting plenty of opportunities to learn to solve problems for themselves, as well as building their interpersonal skills through face-to-face conversations with friends, family members and teachers.

TAKE CONTROL

As with any form of app or game, when it comes to AI chatbots we'd strongly recommend that you consider employing parental controls (either on the device being used or within the software itself) to manage which apps your child can download and use. This is particularly important for younger children, who may be more at risk of being upset or frightened by inappropriate content.

RECOGNISE THE RISKS

It's unlikely that most children will have even considered the potential risks attached to having a virtual companion. So it's probably wise to explain some of the possible hazards and challenges of AI chatbots to your child. In particular, emphasise that AI isn't a real person (however much it might sound like one) and may occasionally tell them something that isn't entirely impartial or accurate.

Meet Our Expert

National Online Safety ®
NOS
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