



4 February 2022

Dear Parents,

Over the years, many parents have commented that they feel their children are safe at CAEA. This reflects the quietness of Brettenham, the intimacy of the school itself, the low-arousal site—and various other reasons. Knowing that the first duty of any school is to ensure the safety of all its children, we have been pleased by this general perception.

Nevertheless, we, like you, are aware that ensuring a child's safety is an ongoing process, one that transcends a particular time and place. Against this backdrop, we are writing today to express our increasing concern over the impact of social media on children generally—and especially on teenage girls. Increasingly, social media dictates the perception of many girls about beauty; it therefore becomes the arbiter of what looks good, how one should dress, what is fashionable and what is not.

A growing number of studies have stated that social media has led to increasing amounts of adults who are dissatisfied with their appearance. Many women see “thin” as the ideal while men opt for the muscular body. Both groups are increasingly resorting to chemicals, plastic surgery and, most significantly, a revision of their eating habits. Teenagers, however, are limited by law to pursuing some of these “remedies”—but not all. The most common tactic to attaining an “ideal” body shape is by regulating their food intake and, most worrying, limiting severely that intake. As you may be aware, this can lead to various eating disorders, including bulimia and anorexia.

A recent study asserts that “social media influences these habits by influencing competition among teenage girls. The popularity index of most girls relies not on their abilities but their looks and the number of likes they get for their pictures on different social sites. The urge for these teenagers to compare themselves with famous models and popular girls influences their eating habits.” In essence, the goal is to create a better body shape. To achieve this, “many of the girls suffering from anorexia have convinced themselves that it is a crime to eat.”

As you will understand—and should expect—CAEA monitors the eating habits of our students and increasingly of our teenagers. We have noticed that a few appear to be paying an inordinate amount of attention not only to what they eat but how much. We also discuss eating and related issues in our social skills classes, and we keep abreast of related trends and problems through our interaction with the appropriate health authorities. Moreover, we are currently in discussion with ‘One Life Suffolk,’ whose focus is on assisting people to live healthier lives. We have been advised that they will supply access to resources, and we believe that these resources will benefit our students.

We believe that our parent community is increasingly aware of the eating-related challenges that our students, and especially our teenage girls, are facing. But we also believe that social media—despite its profestations to the contrary—is playing an increasingly negative role in influencing these children. Given that social media's grasp is not limited to any one place or time, we agree with a growing number of medical and other professionals that vigilance must be the watchword at both school and home.

Handwritten signature of Mrs Kim Salthouse in black ink.

Mrs Kim Salthouse
Head of School

Handwritten signature of Dr Duncan Rollo in black ink.

Dr Duncan Rollo
Principal & CEO Centre Academy Schools