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Dear Parents/Carers and Students,

'COUNTY LINES' EXPLOITATION

It is likely you have heard the term 'County Lines' used in the news recently. This is a growing form of criminal activity that exists nationally, regionally across the West Midlands and here in Birmingham.

County Lines is a term used to describe how gangs and organised criminal networks export illegal drugs into other (mainly rural) areas by exploiting children and vulnerable adults, often without them realising it. Gang members may use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons to do this. We are clear that this is child exploitation.

WARNING SIGNS

We want to support parents and carers to keep children safe; listed below are some warning signs of 'County Lines' exploitation for you to look out for. Often, these are behavioural changes such as:

- Returning home late, staying out all night or going missing
- Being found in areas away from home
- Increasing drug use, or being found to have large amounts of drugs on them
- Being secretive about who they are talking to and where they are going
- Unexplained absences from school, college, training or work
- Unexplained money, phone(s), clothes or jewellery
- Increasingly disruptive or aggressive behaviour
- Using sexual, drug-related or violent language you wouldn't expect them to know
- Coming home with injuries or looking particularly dishevelled
- Having hotel cards or keys to unknown places.

Birmingham schools are working together with West Midlands Police and partners, including The Children's Society, to prevent and spot signs of exploitation at the earliest opportunity. We're keen that parents are also aware of 'County Lines', know where to ask for more support if they are worried and know that you will be listened to and supported.

If you have any concerns about your child, speak to them calmly and explain the risks and consequences. You may wish to contact a member of the Pastoral Team at school if you feel you need support or believe your child is at risk. We can talk through your concerns and plan a way forward together.



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If you or your child are aware that other young people in school or the community are at risk of 'County Lines' or any criminal exploitation, you should contact the police directly via 101. Alternatively you can contact Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111 or via www.crimestoppers-uk.org. If a crime is taking place or a life is in danger, call 999 immediately.

There are some links that you may find useful for more information.

<https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/what-is-county-lines> (on The Children's Society's website there are also guides for parents available in 14 different languages).

<https://www.fearless.org/professionals/resources/gangs>

<https://www.youandco.org.uk/crime-info/violent-crime-facts/gangs-and-street-violence>

<https://www.spurgeons.org/>

Yours sincerely

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