

"since friends' children or nieces and nephews started having babies," she admits. "I felt like, 'It'll be my

awkward.

"Friends of mine whose daughters are expecting have found it hard to

down to a generational struggle to balance career progression, getting on the property ladder and finding

The school teaching girls how just one viral tweet can ruin your life

Cara McGoogan visits the school inviting internet casualties to talk about their online experiences

In the age of social media, dangers that would once have lurked outside the school gates have seeped inside. The average pupil aged between eight and 18 now spends a third of their life on new media; smartphones, tablets and so on. Little wonder that new PHSE classes, rolled out in many secondary schools recently, are focusing on helping teenagers cope in the digital world.

While parents may fret about the threats posed by malicious adults, the actions of children themselves can be harmful – from thoughtless comments to joining in with cyber-bullying and sending sexualised images of themselves (for which they can, in theory, be charged with making an indecent image of a child).

Heathfield, a £35,000-a-year boarding school in Ascot, Berks, is using stories of internet casualties to demonstrate this to its 200 girls, aged 11 to 18. Earlier this month, it flew former Disney and Nickelodeon actress Nicole Crowther to the UK, from Florida, to tell her story.

"We wanted to show the repercussions of social media; what a careless, non-thinking act can do," says Marina Gardiner Legge, Heathfield's headmistress. "It's so easy to say, 'you shouldn't do this, you shouldn't do that' – but the greatest lesson of all is experience."

Crowther's career was destroyed by an ill-advised tweet in 2011. The budding actress, now 28, was studying at a Los Angeles film school and working as a TV extra when she landed a one-off role in *Glee*. Her part was small – "All you see is the back of my head" – but she was thrilled.

Six months later, Crowther met some extras who had filmed the climactic episode and revealed the big secret of who would be crowned prom king and queen. She "had no way to verify what they said", but later tweeted a cryptic message: "K is PQ and Ka is PK".

She awoke to



Life lessons: Heathfield is inviting internet casualties, such as former *Glee* extra Nicole Crowther, below, who had her career ruined with one tweet, to share cautionary tales

thousands of emails, including "massive amounts of hate" and threats of violence. Buried in her notifications, she discovered the reason: Brad Falchuk, *Glee* co-creator and now Gwyneth Paltrow's fiancé, had sent an outraged reply. "Who are you to spoil something talented people have spent months to create?" he said. "Hope you're qualified to do something besides work in entertainment."

Crowther's life crumbled. Her name was splashed across the world, with false claims that she had been fired for leaking the plot. "It was a nightmare," she recalls. "It was hard to understand what had transpired in a few hours."

Crowther's casting agency dropped her and, as a slight 4ft 11in young woman, she was forced to hire a bodyguard. Fear turned into anxiety and depression, which led to suicidal thoughts. She started medication and therapy for her mental health, but ended up dropping out of film school and moving back in with her parents,

in 2014. "My career ended in almost an instant," she says.

"I was like a hermit, I was terrified to leave my house."

Seven years later, Heathfield invited her to Ascot to tell her tale.

While Crowther believes she was one of the first major internet casualties, she is not the last. Countless celebrities and civilians have found their lives tarnished by their online behaviour. Only this week, footballer Phil



Neville deleted his Twitter account and apologised after controversial posts he wrote in 2012 about women emerged in the wake of his appointment as the new England Women's manager.

In another notable case, in 2014, Justine Sacco touched down in Cape Town only to discover that she had lost her job while in the air.

Shortly before leaving Heathrow she tweeted, ironically: "Going to Africa. Hope I don't get Aids. Just kidding. I'm white!" Despite having just 170 followers, her message went viral during the flight, prompting thousands of replies and a P45 from her employer.

In Heathfield's closed environment, which sits on a gated 36-acre estate, it would appear pupils are safely in a bubble. But, the school says, you can never be too careful. Head girl Daisy, 16, says that Crowther's story has cautioned her to be more thoughtful. "Anything can happen on the internet. You can be misinterpreted and the backlash it can have can properly affect your life," she says.

Daisy has seen this herself, on a small scale. She recalls a time when a friend posted something on Facebook that came across as an insult and was met with more than 100 angry comments. "You have to be so careful. Things spiral out of control quite quickly and it can be dangerous."

Following Crowther's visit, Heathfield's students have drawn up a social media charter that sixth-form students will be in charge of policing.

"If we see something that's inappropriate or is getting a backlash, we'll approach them and offer advice," says Daisy. "We can't stop them from doing anything. And if they make a mistake, they will learn from it – in not the easiest way."