

21st March 2018.

Dear Parents and Carers,

Monitoring Social Media

Along with other schools, we have recently been dealing with an increasing number of issues arising from children using social media platforms. As ever, technology develops at a rapid rate, so monitoring your child's usage is essential. It is a real challenge as a parent to keep abreast of these changes, and often children are one step ahead of us.

As a school, we are expected to ensure that online safety has a high profile both within the curriculum, and by sharing information with parents. The critical question is: "Do you know exactly what your child is doing online or on their phone" and the challenge is: "How best to monitor this".

We have had feedback from parents that their child is claiming that "everyone else has a phone or access to Apps", but in fact this does not appear to be the case, so please do not give in to your child.

WhatsApp age limit

WhatsApp requires everyone to be at least 13 years old before they create and use a WhatsApp account. If your child is younger than 13 and has created an account, it is recommended that you delete the App. If you continue to allow your child access to WhatsApp please monitor the messages sent. Children are responsible for the words and actions used within the chat, and these are recorded for all to see.

If WhatsApp learns that identifiable information of a child under 13 has been collected on the WhatsApp Site or WhatsApp Service, then WhatsApp may deactivate the account.

How do I report a user to WhatsApp?

There is no direct way to report a user, or specific abuse, other than to block them from sending you further messages. To do this, tap:

Settings ► Account ► Privacy ► Blocked Contacts

WhatsApp messages sent by a blocked contact will not show up on your child's phone and will never be delivered to them. The "last seen" status information and profile picture will no longer be visible to blocked contacts. To permanently delete a contact in WhatsApp, you will need to delete the person from the phone's list of contacts.

Group Chat

Group conversations usually take place between friends. However, users can sometimes be added to a group where they do not know everyone else. Even if fellow users in the group are not contacts, they will still be able to see messages

your child posts in the group, and your child will be able to see theirs. Likewise, if they are added to a group with someone they have blocked, the blocked person will be able to contact them there. It is therefore possible that they could see or be contacted by someone they do not know, and could be vulnerable to content posted by that person.

Although a user cannot control who adds them to a group chat, they can always control their own participation within it – they can leave whenever they want to. It is a good idea to advise your child that, if they are in a group chat with someone they don't know and are uncomfortable with, they should exit the group and speak to you or a trusted adult, about it.

What is the impact on the children?

As children are not allowed to use their phones in school, we are dealing with the behaviour of the children on devices and Apps they use at home. However, issues arise at school, which take staff a large amount of time to resolve, and this inevitably impacts on learning time.

As part of online safety guidance, we have discussed with the older KS2 children the fact that, over the past few years there have been a number of “celebrities” and important figures who have lost jobs/roles due to unkind words posted when they were younger. Teaching your child only to write something they would happily say in front of you or to the person themselves, is a good stepping stone.

If you do allow your child access to social media Apps such as WhatsApp, I would advise you to closely monitor what they have written and received. As adults, it is important that we guide and control what the children are exposed to. We cannot do this alone, as a school; we need you, parents and carers, to be active partners to ensure that the children are safe online.

In addition to the social media Apps, in recent weeks we have been informed about the potential dangers of using an online gaming App called Roblox. The game is aimed at younger children, and there is some evidence on review sites that children may be able to talk to strangers and receive inappropriate messages through this App. We would advise parents to check their child's message inbox to prevent any undesirable material being shared.

Whilst there are some good games available, such as Minecraft, confusion arises as, for example, Minecraft Survivor is not, and is in fact quite violent.

In summary, it is very important that you monitor closely your child's use of technology. For further information, please press “control” & click on this link:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/444865/Advice_for_parents_on_cyberbullying.pdf

Yours sincerely,

Ms. Helen Swain
Headteacher