

27 March 2017

Dear Parents and Carers

It has become obvious that children, particularly in Key Stage 2, are using social networks outside school to communicate with their friends. You may be unaware that these have age restrictions, all of which exceed 11 years old (see attached information).

The main sources of communication appear to be iMessage (for Apple devices) and WhatsApp. WhatsApp allows children to chat to up to 100 people in one conversation. Group conversations usually take place between friends but sometimes, users can be added to a group where they don't know everyone else. Even if fellow users in the group aren't 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're added to a group with someone they've blocked, the blocked person will then be able to contact them within the group. Additionally, it's possible they could see or be contacted by someone they don't know and could be vulnerable to content posted by this person.

Although a user cannot control who adds them to a group chat, they can always control their own participation within it as they can leave whenever they want to. *It's 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 speak to you about it.*

Moreover, by using WhatsApp, a user agrees to provide certain personal information such as their mobile phone number, billing and mobile device information which can be passed on to third parties.

As with all social media, caution is advised over your child's digital footprint (the information about a particular person that exists on the internet as a result of their online activity), particularly the content (photos, videos and messages) they choose to share via WhatsApp. Once shared, it can be copied, re-shared and posted anywhere online.

WhatsApp's default privacy setting allows any other WhatsApp user to view your profile photo, status and when you were last using the app. However, you can specify that your child's WhatsApp account (when they were last online, profile photo, status) can be seen by, **everyone** (all WhatsApp users), **my contacts** (the contacts from their address book only. This is the recommended option for most users) and **nobody**.

Please be aware that these problems are not just limited to WhatsApp and should be considered when allowing children to join other social networks.

Yours sincerely

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Headteacher