

Online Safety Reminder: WhatsApp

We would like to remind parents and carers about the use of WhatsApp and other messaging apps by children. We are aware that some pupils are using WhatsApp, which has a minimum age requirement of 13 years old. We have also seen occasions where messages and disagreements on WhatsApp have caused upset outside school and have affected friendships and relationships in school. We would like to encourage all families to be aware of the apps their children are using, to check age requirements, and to help them develop safe and positive online behaviours.

I have set some information, which I hope you will find helpful, in the style of FAQs.

What is the minimum age for WhatsApp?

WhatsApp's minimum age requirement is 13 years old. Parents and carers should consider whether their child meets this requirement before using the app.

Why is the school sharing this information?

We have experienced situations where unkind or hurtful messages sent through WhatsApp have upset children and sometimes led to friendship issues within school. While these incidents often occur outside school hours, they have a significant impact on children's wellbeing and relationships during the school day. It also has a negative effect on the children's learning.

What can parents do if their child is allowed to use WhatsApp?

We recommend regularly talking with your child and checking:

- The groups they belong to.
- Who they communicate with online.
- How to respond if they receive messages that make them feel worried, uncomfortable, or upset.
- The importance of being kind and respectful online.
- The messages your child has sent and received.

Are there parental controls available on WhatsApp?

Yes. WhatsApp offers Parent-Managed Controls, which allow parents and carers to link their account to their child's account. These controls can help manage:

- Who can contact the account.
- Which groups the child can join.
- Certain privacy settings.

A parent PIN is required to change these settings, helping to ensure that only the parent or carer can make adjustments.

Can parents read their child's WhatsApp messages through these controls?

No. WhatsApp uses end-to-end encryption, meaning that Parent-Managed Controls do not allow parents or carers to view the contents of chats.

How can I stop my child being added to group chats without permission?

You can change the group privacy settings in WhatsApp by following these steps:

Settings → Account → Privacy → Groups → My Contacts Except

Then select all contacts. This means your child cannot be automatically added to a group chat by someone else without their permission.

Where can I find more information?

Internet Matters provides useful guidance for parents and carers about WhatsApp and its safety features:

Internet Matters - WhatsApp Guidance

<https://www.internetmatters.org/advice/apps-and-platforms/social-media/whatsapp/>

What messages do we teach children about staying safe online?

At school, we teach children that the same expectations for kindness, respect and good behaviour apply online as they do face-to-face. This includes:

- Thinking carefully before sending messages.
- Treating others with respect.
- Not joining in with unkind or hurtful conversations.
- Respecting other people's privacy.
- Knowing how to seek help if something online causes concern.

We appreciate your support in helping children develop safe, positive and responsible online habits.