



22 January 2019

Dear Parents / Carers,

It has been brought to our attention that many of our children are using the cross-platform mobile messaging app known as Whatsapp. This is a free app which allows users to send messages, images and videos free of charge. As you may know, Whatsapp allows users to set up group chats including up to one hundred people. Children can be added to these groups without their consent and some have been exposed to offensive language and what you as parents may deem inappropriate content.

Whilst only your contacts can be added by you, other people may add who they wish, **including people you may have blocked**, who can then see all your content. Some group chats have involved much older children who are not known to many. Some of our children have been made very uncomfortable by the discussions and yet they feel unable to leave these groups because they feel that if they do they will be spoken about in their absence. Some of this language and content has started to be discussed in school, having an impact on learning and we are dealing with individual incidents as appropriate.

For Whatsapp, the minimum age for sign up was raised in the UK last year from 13 to 16 years of age. More details about Whatsapp are available by following the link below.

<https://parentinfo.org/article/whatsapp-a-guide-for-parents-and-carers>

Further information about how you can help your children stay safe and happy online is available in the Parent section of our school website. In school, we shall continue to discuss safe and responsible use of the Internet and social networking and I would ask that you support us by talking to your children about their own use of social media.

The use of social media, as the school has pointed out in previous communications and through workshops in the past, is happening outside of school and therefore we have a limited ability to intervene in these cases.

The school's Positive Behaviour Policy does make it clear that "where incidents outside school are reported to the school, the head teacher will use their discretion...and if a sanction is deemed necessary, it will be applied in line with the policy." This could include behaviour at any time which "could have repercussions for the orderly running of the school" or "poses a threat to another pupil or member of the public."

Any specific incidents of cyberbullying, racist or homophobic comments brought to our attention by children or parents will be dealt with in line with the policy quoted above. If you would like to discuss further any of these issues, please feel free to make an appointment through the school office and we will be happy to meet with you. **We are also hosting an Online Safety Workshop for parents on 6 February here at school. This will take place at 6pm** and we would encourage you to come and join the discussion about how we can safeguard our children in the digital age.

Yours sincerely,

Richard Austin (Head of School)