



6 January 2021

Dear Parents / Carers,

It has been brought to our attention that many of our children in Year 6 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 it would appear that some have been exposed to offensive language and what you as parents may deem inappropriate content in one such group.

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. In the past, 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.

For Whatsapp, the minimum age for sign up was raised in the UK in 2018 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. We continue to promote and 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. These are difficult times in the midst of a pandemic and more time is being spent by children communicating with friends online. This online communication with their friends is vital for their continued relationships and mental health and we encourage it as long as it is properly monitored.

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 do email the school and I will be happy to contact you.

Yours sincerely,

Richard Austin  
Co-Head of School

