



28th February 2020

IMPORTANT – KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE – ‘Children’s use of What’s App’

Discussions with a group of Year 6 children today has made us aware that a significant number of children are using What’s App to communicate outside school. When discussing the ‘**Group Chat/Call**’ function of this app the children shared some well-considered and sometimes troubling insights about how their use of this tool impacts upon their lives and well-being. Some of their comments are detailed below and are being shared with their permission:-

- ‘Group chats get out of control’
 - ‘You don’t always know everyone who is taking part in a group chat’
- ‘The control that the group administrator has leads to problems – they can add/remove whoever they like as well as pass the control on to someone else.’
- ‘People in group chats who are awake might use their phones in the middle of the night to send a message, ‘Hi’ usually, and it wakes us up because we have our phones on all night next to our bed.’
 - ‘I have been woken up at 1.00am/3.00am/4.00am/7.00am.’
- ‘The way group chats work leads to concerns about people telling the truth.’
 - ‘...can lead to confusion around friendships.’
 - ‘...interrupts other things as well as sleep.’
- ‘Not wanting to sound rude leads you to take calls or messages when you don’t want to.’
 - ‘You don’t know who you are talking to sometimes.’
- ‘If you turn your phone off, when you turn it back on it ‘blows up’ with notifications, gets ‘laggy’.....’
- ‘It gets me told off as I get notifications at bad times – it disturbs others as well as me.’

What is clear from each of these comments is that children’s engagement with this means of communication is impacting upon their sense of wellbeing. Some of the comments also signal the potential for children to be exposed to significant harm.

**Since May 2018, the minimum age for using WhatsApp is 16 years old
if you live in the European Union, including the UK.**

The world of online communication is a complex and fast-moving one – as a parent it can feel difficult to keep up with, it can even present to challenge to us all as adults from time to time! We would ask that you talk to your child and ensure that their use of technology is managed for them in a way that keeps them safe, happy and healthy.

Should you wish to talk to someone in school about your child's use of What's App or any other online tool please approach their teacher who may support you directly or signpost you to further sources of advice.

With regard to What's App and other social media applications a good place to start would be the advice detailed on the school's website, accessible through School Gateway – look for 'Parents' and 'Keeping Your Children Safe Online'.

Yours sincerely,

Scott Hampton
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