

Dear Parents and Carers,

As a school we are becoming increasingly aware of pupils using social media and messaging apps on devices such as phones, tablets and computers. Such apps are extremely difficult for our pupils, who are still developing their social skills, to navigate successfully. This is one of the reasons why the developers of the apps set age requirements to use their app. Below are the age requirements for some popular apps among children and teenagers:

Age Restrictions for Social Media Platforms

What is the minimum age for account holders on these social media sites and apps?



WhatsApp Age requirement: 16 years +

What is WhatsApp? It is an instant messaging app which lets you send messages, images, and videos in one-to-one and group chats with your contacts. You can choose to share your live location for up to eight hours with one contact or a group.

Concerns

- Location can be shared with contacts.
- Pictures, voice notes and videos can be sent. Once this is done, the sender no longer has control over that content - it can be shared and passed on forever!
- Example: If a pupil makes a mistake and is unkind to a person face to face, it will most likely eventually be forgotten, and the friendship can move on. If they are unkind over a social media app and the content still exists and is continuously shared, the friendship can be tainted by the act for a very long time and may never recover.

- Up to 256 people can be in one group chat. As we stated above our pupils are still developing their social skills. Currently, their empathy is at a level where they cannot read situations over group messaging as well as they would face to face and so misunderstandings can occur easily.



TikTok Age requirement: 13 years +

What is TikTok? It is a Chinese video-sharing social networking service owned by ByteDance. It is used to create short music, lip-sync, dance, comedy and talent videos of 3 to 15 seconds, and short looping videos of 3 to 60 seconds.

Concerns

- Anyone can post content meaning a lot of content is unsuitable for children to see.
- Anyone can see the videos which are posted by you. Pupils can gain the attention of people they do not know, which can jeopardise their safety.
- Anything posted on TikTok can be recorded and shared by others, even if you decide to delete it afterwards - Again, primary school pupils can find it very difficult to successfully use their empathy to avoid cyber bullying on such sites.
- Example: there is a big difference between calling someone stupid on a playground (an unkind statement during an argument) and posting a video talking about how stupid the person is, online for all to see (cyber bullying) - a distinction that some pupils struggle to understand.

So please, if you have not done so already, click on the link attached to the letter, and find out all the ways you can support your child with their online presence. The link takes you to a site run by the NSPCC. Its guidance includes: - how to put parental controls on apps - how to deal with exposure to indecent content - how to talk to children about online safety - and much more.

Information to support you with all of the above can be found using the following links:

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/>

<https://www.urchfontprimary.co.uk/index.php/parents/e-safety>

On Tuesday 7th February we will be joining schools and youth organisations across the UK in celebrating Safer Internet Day 2023. Safer Internet Day is a global campaign to promote the safe and responsible use of technology, which calls on children and young people, parents, carers, teachers, social workers, law enforcement, companies,

policymakers and more, to help to create a better internet. Using the internet safely and positively is a key message that we promote in school, and celebrating Safer Internet Day is a great opportunity for us to re-emphasise the online safety messages we deliver throughout the year.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact myself directly.

Mrs. Chrissie Adams

Computing Lead.