



Yardley Primary School

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As a result of incidents of children sending inappropriate and abusive messages to each other online, outside of school, we feel it is imperative for you to take immediate action.

The very real dangers of children being online, unmonitored, especially using social media apps and websites UNDERAGE are as follows:

- Serious bullying or distress
- Grooming by paedophiles or criminal factions
 - Child sexual exploitation
- Radicalisation/coercion of extremist viewpoints
- Invasion of privacy and theft of children's identities
 - Financial loss to parents

There are very real instances of all these dangers involving primary school aged pupils, in the U.K. For our part, we are seeking advice and support from West Midlands Police and online safety agencies.

PLEASE READ THE LETTER BELOW.

Use of WhatsApp, TikTok, Snapchat, Instagram and other apps/websites

We are aware that a number of our pupils use apps and social media services such as WhatsApp, TikTok, Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook and more, even though the permitted minimum ages to use these apps/sites is at least 13 years of age (16 years of age in the case of WhatsApp).

We understand that it is increasingly difficult to keep up with the ways that children are using new and ever changing technologies. Our children are immersed in a society that has become dependent on powerful computers, including smart phones, tablets/iPads, interactive online games and virtual communities.

Our school is committed to promoting the safe and responsible use of technology and as such, we feel it is our responsibility to raise this particular issue as a growing concern due to the increase in inappropriate use of these social media and messaging apps and websites. Many of the issues that have been brought to our attention recently have involved the use of:

	App/Social Media Service	Age requirement
	Instagram - an online photo and video sharing app which enables its users to take pictures and videos and share them. It also enables users to send messages to each other online and comment on the content of others.	13
	TikTok - a video and messaging app which allows users to create and share 60 second short videos. It allows users to comment on the content of others.	13
	WhatsApp – An instant messaging app for smartphones that allows users to send photos, videos and messages.	16
	Snapchat – a messaging app used to share videos, pictures and messages.	13
	Facebook - a social networking site used to share videos, pictures and text. It allows users to comment on the content of others.	13



Although we have dealt with issues involving the above mentioned apps, we are fully aware of many more apps and services that children are using in addition to these.

These apps and social media services offer amazing communication and social connections, however they are created with their audience in mind and this is specifically over a specified age. If a child under the age restriction has an account, then they have lied/provided false date of birth details in order to obtain it. Possible risks for children under 13 using these services may include:

- Inappropriate conversations/exchanges with 'friends' or 'peers' from school. This can then create problems between pupils when they come into school (despite the fact the exchanges happen outside of school). It can also create problems between parents/families and if the children were not allowed under age access to these apps and social media sites, this would not occur.
- "Age targeted" advertising could expose a child to adverts of a sexual or other inappropriate nature, depending on the age they stated they were when they registered.
- Children may communicate with people they don't know in real life which could increase the risk of inappropriate contact or behaviour.
- In most cases, language, games, groups and content posted or shared is not moderated, and therefore can be offensive, illegal or unsuitable for children.
- Photographs shared by users are not moderated and therefore children could be exposed to inappropriate images or even post their own.
- Underage users are less likely to keep their identities private and lying about their age can expose them to further risks regarding privacy settings and options.
- Social media services could be exploited by bullies and/or sexual predators for other inappropriate contact.
- Many apps and social media services do not verify their members, therefore it is important to remember that if your child can lie about who they are online, so can anyone else!

Primarily, these occurrences and reported incidents of misuse of social media apps/sites happen at home, after school hours when children have access to sites and services that are blocked in school. With this in mind, and in response to concerned parents who have asked for advice regarding internet safety, we feel it important to point out to parents the risks of unregulated use of such sites, so you can make informed decisions as to whether to allow your child to have a profile or not and when and how to monitor their use, particularly at night time. **We strongly advise a device free bedroom policy after bedtime in order to keep your children safe and to allow for uninterrupted sleep and rest.**

Although we cannot govern matters occurring out of school hours which are parental responsibility, we will take action if a problem comes to our attention that involves the safety or wellbeing of any of our pupils, including inappropriate or abusive messages being sent or received. We will:

- Report underage profiles when possible.
- Report the use of inappropriate images of young people to the police.
- Follow school behaviour policies and impose sanctions in school for pupils sending inappropriate or abusive messages online.

Should you decide to allow your child to have an online profile (**although we strongly advise you do not**) you should:

- Check your child's profile is set to private and that only their friends can see information they post.
- Monitor your child's use and talk to them about safe and appropriate online behaviour such as not sharing personal information and not posting or messaging offensive/inappropriate messages or images.
- Monitor your child's use of language and how they communicate to other people, ensuring profanity is discouraged.
- Have a look at advice for parents on the internet and on our school website (see below).
- Set up your own profiles/apps so you understand how the site works and ask them to have you as their friend on their profile so you know what they are posting online.

- Make sure your child understands the following rules:
 - Always keep your profile private.
 - Never accept friends you do not know in real life.
 - Never post anything which could reveal your identity including photographs wearing school uniform.
 - Never post anything you wouldn't want your parents or teachers to see.
 - Never agree to meet somebody you only know online without telling a trusted adult.
 - Always tell someone if you feel threatened or someone upsets you.

We recommend that all parents visit the Internet Matters website here (<http://www.internetmatters.org>) and the 'Stay Safe Online' area of our school website here (<https://bit.ly/2Dj1tNi>) for more information on keeping your child safe online.

If you have any concerns and would like to discuss them with us, please don't hesitate to contact Ms Moore or Mr Walmsley at the school.

Thank you for your support with this serious matter.

Ms G Moore (Headteacher) & Mr A Walmsley (Deputy Headteacher/Digital Safety Leader)