



Grand Avenue Primary & Nursery School

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Tuesday, 4th February 2025

Dear Year 5 and 6 Parent /Carer,

With our Safer Internet Day coming up on the 11th February, I thought it would be a good opportunity to send a reminder about the use of mobile phones.

In my role as Safeguarding Lead, I often have issues reported to me in relation to the misuse of WhatsApp. I wanted to inform you that these incidents commonly involve children being part of chat groups. I have seen evidence over the last year of children being exposed to racist, sexual and homophobic language, sharing images without consent, threatening behaviour and general unpleasant taunting/teasing.

Within these group chats are also a large number of deleted messages. I would suspect that if children are deleting messages then they know that what they have written is inappropriate. From dealing with these incidents, often low level issues often escalate and then this affects behaviour, anxiety and subsequently lesson time and the learning of pupils in school.

WhatsApp is a chat application which can be used on a mobile phone or tablet, it lets you send messages, images and videos to friends. You can have one to one and group conversations. This letter is to make you aware that your child may be using WhatsApp with or without your knowledge. We ask that you carefully monitor what your child is viewing online, and that they are reminded that they must tell you if they receive anything inappropriate from any application. We would also encourage you to have further conversations with your child in regards to appropriate language and how they should communicate with others if they do use messaging apps.

However, as a school we strongly advise you to remove the chat groups involving other children. If your child insists in engaging with this app, then we would advise that they are only communicating with other children that they class as close friends. If you do allow your child to use this app we would suggest that you closely monitor your child's phone usage. The following information may be useful in regards to setting controls on the device.

How to block unwanted contacts

Tap the cog – or Settings – icon on the bottom right of the WhatsApp's main page, then Account, then Privacy. Now tap Blocked and select the people you want to block. Anyone who you do block will no longer be able to call or message.

Change group privacy settings

1. Go to WhatsApp Settings. Tap Privacy > Groups.
2. Select one of the following options:
 - Everyone: Everyone, including people outside of your phone's address book contacts, can add you to groups without your approval.
 - My Contacts: Only contacts in your phone's address book can add you to groups without your approval. If a group admin who's not in your phone's address book tries to add you to a group, they'll get a pop-up that says they can't add you and will be prompted to tap Invite to Group or



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press Continue, followed by the send button, to send a private group invite through an individual chat. You'll have three days to accept the invite before it expires.

- My Contacts Except...: Only contacts in your phone's address book, except those you exclude, can add you to groups without your approval. After selecting My Contacts Except... you can search for or select contacts to exclude. If a group admin you exclude tries to add you to a group, they'll get a pop-up that says they can't add you and will be prompted to tap Invite to Group followed by the send button to send a private group invite through an individual chat. You'll have three days to accept the invite before it expires.

3. If prompted, tap Done.

How to report other users

As with all social networks, there is ample wiggle room on WhatsApp for trolls and other online predators to abuse the system and post inappropriate and offensive material. Any group member doing this should be reported. In order to do this, just tap the cog – or 'Settings' – then 'Help' and then 'Contact Us' and share details of the situation with the moderators.

We cannot regulate the online access that pupils have outside school, but if an issue of cyberbullying is reported to us, we have a duty of care to inform the parents of the children involved. I would ask parents therefore, to be vigilant and monitor what children are posting online. Threatening and abusive content could result in police involvement if a child is over the age of 10.

I hope this information proves valuable, and together we can guide our children in understanding appropriate conduct, equipping them to navigate the online world safely and responsibly.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs Pitcher
Headteacher



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