

Newington Green Primary School

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Re: Internet Safety and the use of Social Media

Dear Parents/Carers,

Newington Green Primary School is committed to promoting the safe and responsible use of the internet 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 WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook and other texting sites. Many of the issues that have been brought to our attention recently have involved the use of:

- WhatsApp – An instant messaging app for smartphones. The user agreement requires users to be age 16 or older.
- Instagram - an online mobile photo sharing, video sharing and social networking service which enables its users to take pictures and videos and share them on a variety of social networking platforms. You are required to be at least 13 years old before you can create an account.
- Facebook - a social networking site. You are required to be at least 13 years old before you can create an account.

We feel that it is important that you, as parents, know the different types of concerns we are dealing with on a day to day basis. Below we have outlined just a few of the 'issues/concerns' that have arisen relating to WhatsApp:

1. Children have been contacted by people that they do not know. The 'strangers' who have made contact have requested to be group administrators and have offered various rewards to children (bribery).

- This happens by users being invited into group chats with people that they do not know. This is potentially very dangerous. Users can pretend to be anyone that they want; users have been known to use fake photographs and falsify their ages in order to hide their true identity.

2. Children have been using WhatsApp at inappropriate times with some evidence showing that some of our children have used WhatsApp in the early hours of the morning.

- We advise that no child has access to any electronic devices within their bedroom, particularly at night time when it is extremely difficult to monitor. Children are most vulnerable when they are using their devices in private areas such as their bedrooms.

3. Children are sending and receiving an incredible a number of messages through WhatsApp and in some cases children are arriving to their device to find that they have over a thousand notifications. Often these notifications are due to private conversations between just two people and/or conversations with no purpose e.g. silly images, singular words and emojis.

- We advise that if children need to contact each other directly that they do so through other means e.g. a text message or a telephone call. We do not promote private conversations in a group format. We have found that these types of group

chats lead to arguments and disagreements amongst our children as they become involved with discussions which they should not be part of.

4. Children are misinterpreting some messages that they read and then fall out and have disagreements with their friends. The same message can be read in many different ways; with many different meanings. For example a simple comment such as "I don't want to go!" might be perceived as someone shouting and in total resentment of something when actually the person who wrote it might just be stating that they don't want to go somewhere.

- We advise children are educated in how some messages are misinterpreted; through our PSHE lessons we will tackle this subject but we feel that you, as parents and carers could provide some advice to your children too as they become increasingly involved in communication which is not face to face.

What's App is a Social Media app designed for children aged 16+; this means that none of our children should be using it.

We understand that there is only so much control we have on what the children access at home but we urge you to be extra vigilant of your child's use of social media in its many different and ever growing forms. Additional information about WhatsApp (and other apps) can be found

here: <https://www.netaware.org.uk/networks/whatsapp/> and www.thinkuknow.co.uk

Although we are constantly educating children about the importance of using the internet safely, we do not have the resources or the jurisdiction to resolve every issue that takes place out of school hours. In order to maintain the safety of the children of Newington Green it is vitally important that we work together to raise awareness and increase understanding of the potential dangers in this area.

Primarily, these occurrences and reported incidents of misuse of social media sites happen at home, after school hours when children have access to web sites 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 to allow for uninterrupted sleep and rest.

Although we cannot govern matters occurring out of school hours which is parental responsibility, we will take action (such as reporting under age profiles) if a problem comes to our attention that involves the safety or wellbeing of any of our pupils, including reporting the use of inappropriate images of young people to the police, as this is a legal matter. This also refers to inappropriate text messages.

If you have any questions or queries then please do not hesitate to contact the school.

Many thanks

Jess Beesen-Smith
Deputy Headteacher and Designated Safeguarding Lead