Dear Parents/Carers,   16th June 2025

As digital communication becomes an essential part of our daily lives, it is important to ensure that the children use platforms like WhatsApp safely and responsibly. With millions of users around the world, WhatsApp offers convenience—but also presents certain risks if not used carefully. It has come to our attention that there are a number of children in year 6 who were joining large groups on WhatsApp to make calls, including videos, over the weekend. Alarmingly, this has involved an unidentified adult male unexpectedly joining the group.

WhatsApp has fewer built-in parental controls compared to some child-friendly platforms.

Children can be particularly vulnerable when using WhatsApp group calls due to a combination of technical, psychological, and social factors which can then impact their mental health, wellbeing and overall their safety.

- Group calls can include people the child doesn't know well, increasing the risk of interacting with strangers or inappropriate individuals.
- Group calls may become spaces for bullying, especially if some children are excluded or targeted. There is no active moderation during calls, therefore these calls go unchecked by WhatsApp
- Calls can be screen recorded or audio captured, and then used to embarrass or harass a child later.
- When added to a group by someone else, other participants may gain access to the child's phone number.
- Young children may not recognise manipulative behavior, grooming, or subtle forms of peer pressure. They may assume all participants of the group are trustworthy, especially if added by a known contact.
- Late-Night Group Calls: Children may join long or late-night calls, impacting their sleep (several children I spoke to confirmed this is the case)
- Pressure to be online and part of group conversations can lead to stress and anxiety

As a school, we encourage parents to support us with the education and wellbeing of their children, as well as to eliminate these opportunities for children to be exposed to negative situations. There is a reason why there is an age limit on certain apps - many pupils below these ages are not yet mature enough to use these tools responsibly, but are also vulnerable to the dangers which they could become exposed to. Therefore, we would like to kindly ask parents and carers to check what your children are accessing and participating in. As a school, we can teach the children about the dangers of using apps, devices and the internet but it is the responsibility of parents and carers to check and prevent their children from using and having access to these tools outside of school. We continue to teach pupils of all ages in the school about the many benefits of using digital technology and online tools, but also the dangers and harm these can potentially bring if not used appropriately. We will continue to promote the safe use of social media and internet use to highlight to the children about the importance of being a responsible digital citizen, but we strongly urge parents and carers to support us with this as we're unable to monitor and enforce it outside of school.

The children engage in IT and PSHE lessons regularly to learn about how to stay safe in Modern Day Britain. In addition to this there are a range of organisations such as Brook, Police, and Youth Services coming into school to deliver workshops and assemblies on how to stay safe.

We would appreciate it if parents/carers can encourage their children to avoid responding to messages from unknown or suspicious numbers. Avoid Sharing Sensitive Information and only join trusted groups if they are to use these platforms. It is vital that parents **Control Your Privacy Settings**. You can manage who sees your child's profile photograph, last seen, and status under the "Privacy" section in Settings.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for supporting school with these ongoing challenges that the online world brings.

Kind regards

J Gamwell