

WOODHAM BURN PRIMARY SCHOOL

NEWSLETTER 10TH JANUARY 2025

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Message from Mr Sparrow

Happy New Year to one and all.

I hope everyone was able to enjoy a positive Christmas and were able to spend some time with loved ones. It has been great to have the children back in school and they have settled quickly back into routine. We have had to stay in due to the ice on the yard but the children have coped with this well and have understood why this had to be done. We are looking forward to a busy term with many exciting things taking place across the next 14 weeks.

Phones

Whilst it remains parent's decision to allow children to have phones and to access various apps on them, I can't urge you enough to ensure that you regularly check your child's phone. We have had a number of issues in school where children are falling out using phones into the evening and then bringing this into school. We have also seen incidents of inappropriate content being shared. Apps such as WhatsApp are very popular but do have an age restriction of 13; this restrictions in in place as young people haven't fully developed their social skills and don't yet fully understand how to deescalate group discussions. It is also the case the children are staying on devices until late into the night. Should you have made the decision to allow your child to have access to a phone can we please suggest the following simple steps to help safeguard them.

+ Phones to be viewed by yourself at least twice a week

+ You are to know all passwords and login details

+ Phones to have a clear time that they must not be used and charged outside of their bedrooms (e.g. kitchen)

+ Clear rules with your child as to what they can and can't use on their phone with an understanding of what would happen if they break these rules.

Mobiles phones are a brilliant tool and many of us use them daily- there is a good chance you are reading this on your phone. We also need to remember that a phones can however put young people in touch with pornography, hate speech, pedophiles. Arguments with peers and much much more.

I have added the 'Need to Know About' sheet at the end of this newsletter for your information.

Sharing behaviours

In school we have long since had a system where children who struggle to follow our school values will receive up to two warnings before then having to spend some time either in another room or at another spot within their room. If there continues to be issues following this behavior they need to miss some of their break or lunch time; this time is spent primarily with Mrs Anderson and or Mrs Robinson. The focus during missed time is to help complete work but also to try and support the child to make better choices moving forward.

We are however, due to wanting to work with you, making a slight change, we would like to share with you when your child has had to be spoken to on a number of occasions in school. This will be a brief message on dojo to let you know that there has been an issue in school. We always want you to know how your child is doing in school and we feel that we can best support children when home and school work together.

Children will continue to work towards being Star of the Week, dojo's to get their certificate and potentially their rainbow badge. We will also continue to shout out positives in and around school and I will continue to give out Head Teacher certificates and wrist bands.

Children will and do make mistakes, this is an important part of growing up. School is not only where children learning to read and write but it is also a space where children learn to interact with others; like with any learning, some find this more challenging that others but we are here to help them.

What Parents & Educators Need to Know about

WHATSAPP

AGE RESTRICTION
13+

With more than two billion active users, WhatsApp is the world's most popular messaging service. Its end-to-end encryption only allows messages to be viewed by the sender and any recipients: not even WhatsApp itself can read them. The UK's Online Safety Bill proposes to end such encryption on private messaging, but for the time being, this controversial feature remains.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

EVOLVING SCAMS

WhatsApp's popularity makes it a lucrative hunting ground for scammers. Recent examples include posing as the target's child, requesting a money transfer because of a spurious 'emergency' – plus a scam where fraudsters trigger a verification message by attempting to log in to your account, then (posing as WhatsApp) call or text to ask you to repeat the code back to them, giving them access.

CONTACT FROM STRANGERS

To start a chat, someone only needs the mobile number of the WhatsApp user that they want to message. Therefore, if a child has ever given their number out to someone they don't know, that person could then contact them via WhatsApp. It's also possible that the child might be added to a group chat or community (by one of their friends, for example) containing other people that they don't know.

CHAT LOCK

In 2023, WhatsApp introduced a feature that lets users keep their chats in a separate 'locked chats' folder, saved behind their phone's passcode, fingerprint or face ID authentication. They subsequently developed an additional feature – 'Secret Code' – where users set a unique password for their locked chats. Unfortunately, this function creates the potential for young people to hide conversations and content they suspect their parents wouldn't approve of (such as age-inappropriate material).

COMMUNITIES AND GROUPS

A community is a collection of related groups on WhatsApp. They can consist of thousands of users. Communities can often be used by scammers to target large groups, hoping someone clicks on their link or responds to their requests. In communities and groups, there are multiple ongoing conversations, which results in pressure to respond. Members – even if they are not each other's contacts – will be able to see any messages sent into the group.

'VIEW ONCE' CONTENT

The ability to send images or messages that can only be viewed once has led to some WhatsApp users sharing inappropriate material or abusive texts, knowing that the recipient can't re-open them later to use as evidence of misconduct. People used to be able to screenshot this disappearing content – but a recently added WhatsApp feature now blocks this, citing protection of privacy.

FAKE NEWS

WhatsApp's connectivity and ease of use allows news to be shared rapidly – whether it's true or not. To combat the spread of misinformation, messages forwarded more than five times on the app now display a "Forwarded many times" label and a double arrow icon. This makes users aware that the message they've just received is far from an original ... and might not be entirely factual, either.

VISIBLE LOCATION

WhatsApp's 'live location' feature lets users share their current whereabouts, which can be helpful for friends meeting up or parents checking that their child is safe while out, for example. However, anyone in a user's contacts list or in a mutual group chat can also track their location – potentially letting strangers identify a child's home address or journeys that they make regularly.

Advice for Parents & Educators

EMPHASISE CAUTION

Encourage children to treat unexpected messages with caution: get them to consider whether it sounds like something a friend or relative would really send them. Make sure they know never to share personal details over WhatsApp, and to be wary of clicking on any links in messages. Setting up two-step verification adds a further layer of protection to their WhatsApp account.

ADJUST THE SETTINGS

It's wise to change a child's WhatsApp settings to specify which of their contacts can add them to group chats without needing approval. You can give permission to 'My Contacts' or 'My Contacts Except ...'. Additionally, if a child needs to use 'live location', emphasise that they should enable this function for only as long as they need – and then turn it off.

DISCUSS GROUP CHATS

Make children aware that there could be members of a group that they don't know well and that words can be misinterpreted. Encourage them to leave a good impression, to avoid joining in if conversations turn towards bullying, and to respond to such situations in an appropriate way. Make sure they know that it's OK to leave a group chat if it makes them uncomfortable – or for any reason, in fact.

THINK BEFORE SHARING

Help children understand why it's important to stop and think before posting or forwarding something on WhatsApp. It's easy – and all too common – for content that a user posts to be shared more widely, even publicly on social media. Encourage children to consider how an impulsive message or forwarding might damage their reputation or upset a friend who sent something to them in confidence.

CHAT ABOUT PRIVACY

Check in with the child about how they're using WhatsApp, making sure they know you only have their safety at heart. If you spot a 'Locked Chats' folder, you might want to talk about the sort of content they've stored in there, who they're talking to, and why they want to keep these chats hidden. Also, if children send any 'view once' content, it could be helpful to ask them why.

Meet Our Expert

Dr Claire Sutherland is an online safety consultant, educator and researcher who has developed and implemented anti-bullying and cyber safety policies for schools. She has written various academic papers and carried out research for the Australian government comparing internet use and sexting behaviour of young people in the UK, USA and Australia.



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