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E-SAFETY AND CYBERBULLYING

Dear Parents and Carers,

We are writing to you to address a serious issue that has come to our attention involving student interactions on the messaging app WhatsApp, outside of school hours. We have received reports of incidents related to abusive and threatening language, inappropriate content, and general cyberbullying within various WhatsApp group chats involving our students.

We must bring to your attention that all social media platforms, including WhatsApp, have minimum age requirements for users. As of April 2024, the minimum age to use WhatsApp in the UK is 13 years old. Other platforms such as Snapchat and TikTok also generally require users to be 13 years old.

It is the responsibility of parents and carers to ensure their children meet these age requirements before accessing these platforms. While it is not strictly illegal for a child to have an account under the minimum age (it is a breach of the platform's terms of service, which can result in the account being deleted), it is a serious issue because children under the age of 13 are generally considered not mature enough to use these apps safely and are more vulnerable to online risks and harmful content.

Online Incidents

The monitoring of your child's online activity at home is the direct responsibility of the parent or carer. Especially, where parents and carers have made the decision to allow their children to access apps, they should not have access to. While we are happy to offer guidance on online safety and try to minimise the impact such incidents may have on well-being and school behaviour, the school cannot regulate online access that occurs off school site and outside of school hours.

We will deliver additional lessons on Online Safety, the law around online interactions and also educate the children on what would constitute as cyberbullying and the impact of that. Further incidents of cyberbullying will be taken seriously and may result in consequences, in line with our school Behaviour Policy. This could also include a ban on smart phones being brought into school or incidents being reported to the Police.

Action for Parents

We urge you to take the following actions immediately:

- **Check your child's phone** for social media apps, especially WhatsApp, and check the content of the group chats.

- **Remove your child** from any group chats that contain inappropriate content or are causing distress.
- **Monitor** what your child is viewing and communicating online and discuss online safety with them regularly.
- **Review** the privacy settings on any accounts your child uses. The [Internet Matters website](#) offers useful guides on safety settings.

Reporting Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is a form of harassment and is a serious matter. If your child is a victim of ongoing harassment or you encounter content that is illegal, the appropriate course of action is to report it directly to the police. We also recommend taking screenshots of any abusive messages as evidence before deleting them.

For additional support and information on how to keep children safe online, we recommend visiting the following resources:

- [NSPCC guidance on social media safety](#)
- [UK Safer Internet Centre advice and resources](#)

By working together, we can help ensure our children have safe and positive online experiences.

Thank you for your support in this important matter.

Yours sincerely,

Miss Elise Gribble

Headteacher