



# Headteacher Update



2025 - 2026

## Online Safety and WhatsApp Use

I am writing to make you aware of an online safety concern that has recently been brought to our attention. We have been informed of multiple WhatsApp group chats involving pupils from a range of our older year groups. Unfortunately, some of the content being shared in these chats has not been appropriate, respectful, or kind.

While we understand that messaging apps are a normal part of many children's social lives, it is important to highlight that **WhatsApp has a minimum age requirement of 13+**. This is set by WhatsApp itself due to the nature of the platform, the data it collects, and the level of responsibility required to use it safely. We encourage all families to consider this carefully when deciding whether their child should have access to the app.

### Keeping Children Safe on WhatsApp

If your child does use WhatsApp, we strongly recommend the following safety measures:

- **Review privacy settings together**  
Ensure your child's profile photo, status, and "last seen" information are set to *My Contacts* only.
- **Check who they are messaging**  
Encourage your child to speak to you about the groups they are part of and who is included.
- **Turn off "Live Location"**  
This should always be set to *Nobody* unless there is a specific, supervised reason to use it.
- **Use parental controls where possible**  
Many devices allow parents to limit app downloads, set screen time boundaries, and monitor usage.
- **Discuss expectations for online behaviour**  
Remind children that the same rules of kindness, respect, and responsibility apply online as they do in person.

### School's Role

As a school, we are committed to promoting safe, responsible online behaviour and we regularly teach pupils how to stay safe and act respectfully online.

However, it is important to note that **the school is not responsible for managing or resolving issues that arise from online activity taking place outside school hours and off school premises**. We will always support pupils in school where needed, but we cannot intervene directly in private group chats or family-managed devices.

### Working Together

We kindly ask for your support in monitoring your child's online activity and ensuring they are using messaging apps safely and appropriately. By working together, we can help our pupils develop healthy, respectful online habits.

If you would like further guidance on online safety or support in setting up parental controls, please do not hesitate to contact us.

These are also helpful websites that you can use:

[Chat apps | NSPCC](#)

[What Parents Need to Know About WhatsApp - OpenView Education](#)

[Everything you need to know about WhatsApp | Parent Zone](#)



The infographic features a WhatsApp logo at the top left, the title 'WhatsApp safety guide for parents', and the 'internet matters.org' logo at the top right. It includes three statistics in yellow boxes: '13+' (WhatsApp's minimum age in the UK), '58%' (Kids aged 3-17 who use WhatsApp), and '37%' (Kids under 13 who use WhatsApp). An illustration of a woman with a smartphone and a checkmark is on the right. Below is a section '5 tips to keep kids safe on WhatsApp' with numbered icons and text. At the bottom, there are social media links for Facebook, X, Instagram, YouTube, and LinkedIn, along with the 'internet matters.org' logo.

## WhatsApp safety guide for parents

internet matters.org

**13+**  
WhatsApp's minimum age in the UK

**58%**  
Kids aged 3-17 who use WhatsApp

**37%**  
Kids under 13 who use WhatsApp

### 5 tips to keep kids safe on WhatsApp

- 1 Review privacy settings** WhatsApp has a range of privacy and security settings to keep users safe. Customise groups, app access, live location and more.
- 2 Customise contacts** Show your child how to report and block unwanted contacts. Then, work with them to add their friends and family. Review and talk about their contacts regularly.
- 3 Talk about personal information** Make sure your child understands what personal information is. Talk about the importance of keeping that information private on WhatsApp.
- 4 Show them where to get support** If something goes wrong or they see something worrying on WhatsApp, make sure they know to come to you, and talk about other sources of support.
- 5 Check in regularly** Once you've done all of the above, check in with them regularly to review settings and how they use WhatsApp.

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# What Parents & Educators Need to Know about WHATSAPP

AGE RESTRICTION  
13+

WhatsApp is a free messaging app owned by Meta, allowing users to send text and voice messages, share multimedia, make video calls, and chat in groups. With end-to-end encryption, only the sender and receiver can view messages. This may offer privacy, but it also comes with risks that parents and educators need to be aware of.

## WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

### GROUP CHAT PRESSURES

Group chats enable multiple users to message in the same space, but this can also make it easier for young people to feel excluded or overwhelmed. Negative comments can escalate quickly, and young people may feel pressure to respond or stay engaged even when the conversation is uncomfortable or upsetting.

### SCAMS TARGETING YOUNG USERS

Scammers are increasingly using WhatsApp to trick users into sharing personal information. Common scams include fraudsters posing as family members in an emergency or tricking users into revealing security codes. These can lead to identity theft or access to private conversations.

### DISAPPEARING AND HIDDEN MESSAGES

WhatsApp offers features like disappearing messages and 'Chat Lock', which can give users a false sense of security. While intended to protect privacy, they can be used by young users to hide inappropriate conversations or content, making it harder for adults to spot potential issues.

### EXPOSURE THROUGH CHANNELS

'Channels' are an optional feature that allows users to follow updates from public figures or organisations; however, there is no way to block this feature or filter its content by age. Young users may encounter adult or distressing content, including misinformation and harmful ideologies.

### UNWANTED CONTACT AND LOCATION SHARING

WhatsApp users can share their live location, and if not managed carefully, this can allow others – even those in mutual groups – to track someone's whereabouts. Also, without the right privacy settings, young users may be contacted by strangers.

### COMMERCIAL AND AI CONTENT

WhatsApp now includes ads in the 'Updates' feed and has introduced an AI assistant – Meta AI – across the app, which cannot be removed. These additions raise concerns about targeting, privacy, AI use, and the type of content children and young people might interact with.

## Advice for Parents & Educators

### REVIEW PRIVACY SETTINGS TOGETHER

Help young users check who can see their profile photo, status, and location. Activate the 'Silence Unknown Callers' setting and set group chat invitations to 'My Contacts' or 'My Contacts Except...' for added safety.

### TEACH HOW TO SPOT SCAMS

Encourage caution around unusual and unexpected messages, especially if they involve money or codes. Help young users understand the signs of scams and what to do if they receive a suspicious message. Enable two-step verification to add an extra layer of protection.

### BE OPEN ABOUT HIDDEN CHATS

Discuss why children and young people might use features like disappearing messages or 'Chat Lock'. Encourage them to share if something made them uncomfortable, even if the messages are gone. Let them know that privacy should not mean secrecy.

### TALK ABOUT ADVERTISING AND AI

Explain that WhatsApp now includes ads and AI tools. Discuss the difference between genuine and sponsored content, and the potential for AI to share inappropriate or age-inappropriate responses. Encourage young users to think critically before trusting or interacting with these features.

### 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.



See full reference list on our website

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