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Friday 15<sup>th</sup> March 2024

Parents of Year 5 pupils

Dear Parents,

I am writing to you regarding a matter that is becoming increasingly concerning to me.

Over the past few weeks, I have had to deal with several incidents of pupils coming in to school in a distressed state because of messages and comments made by other children on WhatsApp.

In all of these cases, the messages posted have been abusive and in some cases threatening.

Children are coming in to school upset and wound up by these incidents and it is spilling over into their school lives. Staff are spending valuable time investigating these incidents and dealing with the aftermath.

All social media apps have minimum age requirements of at least 13 years. **WhatsApp itself has a minimum age of 16.** This means that none of the children at Green Park should be accessing them. The minimum ages are set for very clear reasons, and it is evident from the events of the past few weeks that children aged 9, 10 and 11 are not mature enough to use them. Children have written things that they would never say to each other face to face.

The fact that children have open access to the internet, via smartphones that have been brought for them, brings the challenge of ensuring that their conduct is appropriate to the fore. Children are **not permitted to bring phones to school** and I would urge all parents to carefully consider whether purchasing a smart phone for their child, aged 9 is appropriate.

Many of the parents I have spoken to were completely unaware that their children were even using these apps. Other parents were aware, but felt that

it was okay because the apps were installed simply for family communications. In both circumstances, parents are being misled by their children. Messages can be quickly deleted and parents are blissfully ignorant of the real situation.

I am writing to implore you to speak to your children regarding their use of these apps. The legal minimum age is at least 13 for all of the apps I have mentioned. No children in Year 5 should be using them, but if they are, they need to be doing so in a way that is acceptable and safe.

In the meantime, please check your child's phone/tablet/game system and be sure that you know what they are doing with them.

We will continue to work with children on keeping themselves safe on-line, but we need your support in making this a reality.

This link offers guidance for parents: [What is WhatsApp? A safety guide for parents | Internet Matters](#)

Yours sincerely,

Richard Hawkins  
Head Teacher