

Tuesday 10th February 2026

Dear Parents and Carers,

Today is Safer Internet Day and the second day of Children's Mental Health Week. Coincidence of the calendar or not, the overwhelming factor that's currently having a negative impact on children's mental health is, undoubtedly, their online activity. Most specifically, group chats and social media.

The guidance and information below isn't designed to preach or chastise but to bring our concerns to the forefront and hopefully support parents to remove or restrict social media and messaging apps. Over the last 5 years, the number of online-related incidents that have led to in-school upset or distress has multiplied immeasurably. Over the last 2 weeks alone, more than 10% of children in Years 4 to 6 have been involved in group chats that have caused upset, concerns and distress both at home and in school. Over 20 children – just in the last 2 weeks.

In our school, children in Key Stage Two were asked which of the following apps they access regularly, from their own devices:

| | Year 3 | Year 4 | Year 5 | Year 6 |
|-----------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| WhatsApp | 13% | 18% | 50% | 53% |
| TikTok | 23% | 18% | 38% | 35% |
| Snapchat | 20% | 19% | 22% | 27% |
| Instagram | 2% | 13% | 28% | 10% |

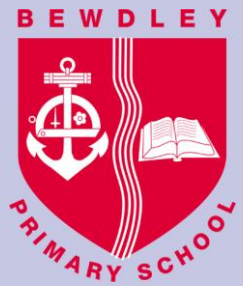
All of the apps above have a minimum age requirement of 13, meaning that all primary-aged children are below the permitted age to use the app. This may seem high to some, when the technology itself appears safe and controllable, such as with WhatsApp.

This age limit exists because children are still developing the emotional, social and decision-making skills needed to manage online communication safely and confidently.

In recent years, research and national guidance have highlighted growing concerns around children's mental health and online group messaging. Studies show that:

- Children and young people experience increased anxiety and stress linked to constant messaging, fear of missing out and pressure to respond quickly.
- Group chats can escalate quickly, with misunderstandings, unkind comments or exclusion happening outside of adult awareness.
- A significant proportion of online bullying at primary age now happens in private group chats, rather than on public platforms.
- Children under 11 often find it hard to recognise risky behaviour online or to know when and how to ask for help.

We are also increasingly aware of the impact messaging apps can have on children's sleep. Research shows that notifications, group chats and worry about online conversations can delay bedtime, disrupt sleep and increase anxiety. For primary-aged children, good-quality sleep is essential for emotional wellbeing, concentration and learning. Even when phones are not used late at night, the anticipation of messages or fear of missing out can affect children's ability to rest and switch off.



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Issues that begin online are frequently spilling into friendship issues and learning during the school day. This can be upsetting and confusing for children and is becoming increasingly tricky for adults to help resolve.

We completely understand that parents may choose to allow messaging apps for a range of reasons — staying in touch with family, convenience or helping children feel socially included. However, we are increasingly seeing that for primary-aged children, the risks are outweighing the benefits, particularly in large or unsupervised group chats.

For these reasons, we strongly encourage parents not to allow their children to use WhatsApp or similar messaging apps at this age. Where children do have access to online communication, we recommend:

- Close adult supervision and regular conversations about online behaviour
- Keeping group sizes small and known
- Turning off notifications to reduce pressure
- Adding restrictions to ensure that permissions must be given by the user before being added to a group
- Reassuring children that they can always talk to a trusted adult if something online makes them feel uncomfortable or upset

Children in Key Stage 2 (Year 3-6) have had an assembly today highlighting the risks of group chats and how they can be brave and remove themselves from being part of a world that they are not yet mature enough to be a part of. Please use this as a conversation starter with your child and be part of a growing movement that is putting children's mental health and wellbeing at the forefront.

No child *needs* to have access to social media and the evidence for the damage that is done by apps and group chats is ever increasing. Perhaps we should start to think about internet safety a little more like we would road safety. If there's a choice of sending your child to play in a safe, pedestrianised area or on a busy motorway, no parent is willingly sending their child off to play on the M5.

We are committed to working in partnership with families to help children grow up safe, confident and resilient in an increasingly digital world.

More advice and guidance regarding this issue can be found at:

<https://www.smartphonefreechildhood.org/>
<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/social-media/>
<https://kidsonlinesafety.campaign.gov.uk/parental-controls/>

Many thanks,



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