



14 October 2022

Dear All parents and carers,

Recently, a serious incident occurred at Ark Alexandra Academy where some 45+ Year 8 students formed a WhatsApp group. To our knowledge, the group had expanded to contain students from other local schools, but also young people from London. Due to the sharing of racism, sexism and pornography, the Police have been involved. The risk students were putting themselves in is worrying; not only reading and posting shameful/illegal material, but we don't know if there were adults posing as young people in this group, and neither do any of the students involved.

As a parent, it is also becoming harder to keep up with the sudden changes to what students are using to message each other. Now we have Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp, TikTok, BeReal and Omegle.

This is one of the reasons why the developers of the apps set age requirements to use their app. We have provided further information and guidance on the age requirements for some of the most popular apps among children and teenagers via our website <https://arkalexandra.org/about-us/information-parents>.

Please, if you have not done so already, check what your child is accessing;

- Put parental control on apps (for Apple go here <https://support.apple.com/en-gb/HT201304> and Android go here <https://support.google.com/googleplay/answer/1075738?hl=en-GB>)
- Monitor the use of apps and devices in your household
- Talk to your child/ren about online safety
- Check your child's phone regularly

Be watchful if your child;

- Starts to use their phone, more often in private eg; taking it into the toilet or being secretive or wary of an adult seeing the phone/device screen whilst they are using it
- Changes the password and you are not aware of it
- Refuses to allow you to look at their phones.

Warning about a site called Omegle. Never let your child use this site!

- Omegle puts you in a chat room with a stranger
- Users are anonymous
- Webcams can be turned on
- So, if your child is on Omegle, they can talk to and be seen by an anonymous stranger.

Please get in touch with the school if you would like our support in checking or removing a phone from your child.



Information to support you with all of the above can be found here:

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/> and find out all the ways you can support your child with their online presence. The link takes you to a site run by the NSPCC.

Its guidance includes:

- how to put parental controls on apps
- how to deal with exposure to indecent content
- how to talk to children about online safety - and much more

The school chrome books have safeguarding controls on them and the school is alerted of any suspicious searches so encourage your child to use their chrome book at home rather than a family device.

We will be having a parent/carers meeting after school, after half term, on e-safety and we encourage you to please attend to gain some further guidance on e-safety and to be able to ask questions.

With regards,



Liam Collins
Principal

Attachment: guidance and information

Age Restrictions for Social Media Platforms

What is the minimum age for account holders on these social media sites and apps?



WhatsApp

Age requirement: 16 years +

What is WhatsApp? It is an instant messaging app which lets you send messages, images and videos in one-to-one and group chats with your contacts. You can choose to share your live location for up to eight hours with one contact or a group.

Concerns

- Location can be shared with contacts
- Pictures, voice notes and videos can be sent. Once this is done, the sender no longer has control over that content – it can be shared and passed on forever.

For example, If a student makes a mistake and is unkind to a person face to face, it will most likely eventually be forgotten, and the friendship can move on. If they are unkind over a social media app and the content still exists and is continuously shared, the friendship can be tainted by the act for a very long time and may never recover.

- Up to 256 people can be in one group chat. As we stated above our students are still developing their social skills; their empathy is at a level where they cannot read situations over group messaging as well as they would face to face. This results in students– who would never be involved in an act of bullying in person – being more likely to participate in cyber bullying.



TikTok

Age requirement? 13 years +

What is TikTok? It is a Chinese video-sharing social networking service owned by ByteDance. It is used to create short music, lip-sync, dance, comedy and talent videos of 3 to 15 seconds, and short looping videos of 3 to 60 seconds.

Concerns

- Anyone can post content meaning a lot of content is unsuitable for children and young people to see
- Anyone can see the videos which are posted by you. Children and young people can gain the attention of people they do not know, which can jeopardise their safety
- Anything posted on TikTok can be recorded and shared by others, even if you decide to delete it afterwards
- Again, children and young people can find it very difficult to successfully use their empathy to avoid cyber bullying on such sites.

Warning about a site called Omegle! Never let your child use this site!



- Omegle puts you in a chat room with a stranger
- Users are anonymous
- Webcams can be turned on
- So, if your child is on omegle, they can talk to and be seen by an anonymous stranger

So please, if you have not done so already, click on the link attached to the letter (<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/>) and find out all the ways you can support your child with their online presence. The link takes you to a site run by the NSPCC.

Its guidance includes:

- how to put parental controls on apps
- how to deal with exposure to indecent content
- how to talk to children about online safety - and much more