



**MERCHANT  
TAYLORS'  
SCHOOLS**

For Boys and Girls  
aged 4 to 18 years

**9th May 2018**

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s),

**Re: WhatsApp in Year 7**

Thank you very much for your support in helping to educate the young people of our school in the important topic of eSafety. As you are well aware, the exposure to various social media software, apps, websites, online games and other media is ever growing.

As a result, in school, we are spending an increasing number of hours investigating potential eSafety risks and scrutinising cyber communications. In particular, more recently there has been a rise in the number of concerns we have had in relation to WhatsApp, specifically in Year 7.

We feel that it is important that you, as parents, know the different types of concerns we are dealing with on a day to day basis. Below we have outlined just a few of the 'issues/concerns' that have arisen relating to WhatsApp and general online behaviour:

1. Pupils have been using Social Networks, Computer Games and Youtube to access adult material. This has included some unpleasantness online and some unwelcomed posts made by boys in Year 7. We are urging all of our students to review what they send, and what they are accessing online including what they themselves photograph and video.
  - We have seen a sharp rise in the number of issues relating to inappropriate use of phones and sharing of images which contain the use of adult content.
2. Pupils have been contacted by people that they do not know.
  - This happens by users being invited into group chats with people that they do not know. This is potentially very dangerous. Users can pretend to be anyone that they want; they have been known to use fake photographs and falsify their ages in order to hide their true identity. This includes receiving content via 'Airdrop' and I have urged all boys to change their settings so that only 'Contacts' may send them things using iPhones.
3. Pupils have been using WhatsApp at inappropriate times with some evidence showing that some of our students have used WhatsApp in the early hours of the morning.
  - We advise that no child has access to any electronic devices within their bedroom, particularly at night time when it is extremely difficult to monitor. Young people are most vulnerable when they are using their devices in private areas such as their bedrooms.

4. Pupils are sending and receiving an incredible a number of messages through WhatsApp and in some cases your sons are arriving to their device to find that they have over a hundred notifications. Often these notifications are due to private conversations between just two people and/or conversations with no purpose e.g. silly images, singular words and emojis.

- We advise that if students need to contact each other directly that they do so through other means e.g. a text message or a telephone call. We do not promote private conversations in a group format. We have found that these types of group chats lead to arguments and disagreements amongst our pupils as they become involved with discussions which they should not be part of.

5. Pupils are misinterpreting some messages that they read and then fall out and have disagreements with their friends. The same message can be read in many different ways, with many different meanings. For example, a simple comment such as “I don’t want to go!” might be perceived as someone shouting and in total resentment of something when actually the person who wrote it might just be stating that they don’t want to go somewhere.

- We advise our young people are educated in how some messages are misinterpreted; through our PSHE lessons we will tackle this subject but we feel that you, as parents and carers could provide some advice to your children too as they become increasingly involved in communication which is not face to face.

WhatsApp is a Social Messenger app designed for children aged 16+ although the age currently stands at 13 y/o but is under review; this means that none of our students Year 7 should be using it. We understand that there is only so much control we have on what the children access at home but we urge you to be extra vigilant of your child’s online use in its many different and ever growing forms. Additional information about WhatsApp (and other apps) can be found here: <https://www.net-aware.org.uk/networks/whatsapp/>

Although we are constantly educating our boys about the importance of using the internet safely, we do not have the resources or the jurisdiction to resolve every issue that takes place out of school hours. In order to maintain the safety of the pupils of MTBS it is vitally important that we work together to raise awareness and increase understanding of the potential dangers in this area.

If you have any concerns then please do not hesitate to contact me – [n.hunt@merchanttaylor.com](mailto:n.hunt@merchanttaylor.com).

Many thanks for your support.



**Neill Hunt**

Head of Lower School  
CEOPS Ambassador