

Dear Parents and Carers,

The Centre is dealing with an ever-increasing number of issues relating to social media use that has occurred outside of school time. Issues are happening over the weekends, and then spilling into the school day. This can mean children are left feeling upset, so are not in a state to be learning. Staff time should be focussed on teaching and learning activities, rather than dealing with problems resulting from inappropriate technology use.

The amount of time that staff are spending trying to resolve these issues is unsustainable, given that we have no control over what children are doing outside of school.

The school has the following clear recommendations for all parents and pupils.

1. Children **should not** have any app or game on any device for which they are below the minimum age.
2. Parents should be fully aware of what their child is accessing, sending and receiving online. You should discuss and monitor your child's online activity and set access and time restrictions.

Many of the apps that the children are using are extremely difficult for our pupils, who are still developing their social skills, to navigate successfully. This is one of the reasons why the developers of the apps set age requirements to use them. Below are the age requirements for some of the most popular apps.

One of the biggest problems we are having is through WhatsApp groups and comments that are being made, and then also shared to other people. The issue here is that any content that is posted can be shared and passed on forever. The sender will no longer have any control over it. If a pupil does make 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 is then shared with others, the friendship can be tainted over a very long period and may never recover. As previously stated, our children are at an age where they are learning and developing.

## Age Restrictions for Social Media Platforms

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



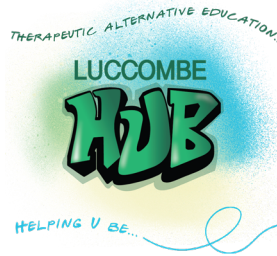
Their empathy tends to be at a level where they cannot read situations over group messaging as well as they would face to face. This can result in children being more likely to participate in cyber bullying.

### Example

- 6 children are in a WhatsApp group together.
- 2 of the children have a disagreement at Luccombe
- One pupil makes an unkind comment about the other in the WhatsApp group
- The rest of the group join in sharing emoji's, agreeing or adding comments etc
- At the centre the learner would see this as 5 pupils versus 1, would read the situation using their empathy and stop. On a messaging app they find it more challenging to make the connections.

Another site we are concerned to see children using is **Tik Tok**. **Concerns:**

- Anyone can post content meaning a lot of the content is unsuitable for children to see
- One of the main things that young people do is lip synch along to music videos. Many of these have extremely inappropriate language and actions.
- Anyone can see the videos which are posted. Pupils can gain the attention of people they do not know which can jeopardise their safety.
- Anything that your child posts on Tik Tok can be recorded and shared by others – even if you decide to delete it afterwards



- Again, primary age pupils can find it very difficult to successfully use their empathy on such sites. There is a big difference between calling someone stupid at the centre (an unkind statement during an argument) and posting a video about how stupid the person is, online for all to see – a distinction that some pupils struggle to understand.

Children are obviously not allowed phones during school hours, and internet safety is taught as part of the curriculum. Parents will also be aware of the safer school and communities' team who came in recently and spoke to the children as part of delivering the importance of being safe online.

Whilst we do have a duty of care, and safeguarding responsibility to protect children **we cannot be a child's primary defence against risks when they are not in school; it is up to parents and carers at home.** The age restrictions for using social media such as Whatsapp, Instagram and Tik Tok exist for a reason. **It is not safe or appropriate for children of primary school age to be using these products.**

I would, therefore, respectfully ask that:

- Parents monitor their children's phones and usage regularly.
- Parents ensure that children are not using apps or online games that are not age appropriate.
- Parents remove children from all of the apps listed at the start of this letter that are age inappropriate .
- Set up parent locks on apps you do not want your children to use.
- Parents talk to children regularly about online safety.

The fact that other children or your children's friends may have access to these sites is not an excuse for putting your child at risk by allowing their use.

Despite giving parents the recommendations, there have been occasions when we have then been informed of continuing issues without the recommendations being followed.

Unfortunately, the situation is getting to the stage where **the Centre will report underage usage straight to the companies, citing the accounts that are being used for minors. We will also attach screenshots of inappropriate comments, soundbites, and pictures.**

We will also record incidents as part of our safeguarding responsibility, **which may include sharing information with external agencies such as Dorset Children's Social Care alongside any of our recommendations given to parents that have not been followed.**

(Please be advised that the definitions in Appendix 1 are taken directly from the 'Keeping Children Safe in Education 2022' document). It is also important to consider that threatening or abusive behaviour could result in police involvement if a child is over the age of 10

For more information

You can find out more about how children use social media, the apps they use, the risks they face, how to use privacy settings and tips on how to talk to your children on the following websites:

[www.childnet.com.sns](http://www.childnet.com.sns) [www.internetmatters.org](http://www.internetmatters.org) [www.nspcc.org.uk/onlinesafety](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/onlinesafety)  
[www.parentzone.org.uk](http://www.parentzone.org.uk) [www.thinkyouknow.co.uk/parents](http://www.thinkyouknow.co.uk/parents) [www.askaboutgames.com](http://www.askaboutgames.com)