ALPINGTON & BERGH APTON
Church of England VA Primary School
"Let every light shine"
Matthew 5 v 16

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**Headteacher** - Mrs Rosie Welch

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Dear parents and carers

As you will be aware, there is a national debate about the impact of smart phones on children. Issues related to screen time, gaming and access to potentially age inappropriate social media form part of the debate, as does the use of messaging apps, including WhatsApp and Snap Chat. It seems likely that a ban on some social media for children aged under 16 will come into force in the coming months.

Ultimately, the decision about when and if children are ready for a smart phone, the apps and games that they have access to, and their use of social media is a parental decision. However, over recent years there has been an impact in school on children's behaviour and relationships based on their online interactions at home, both online games and mobile phones. Arguments and use of inappropriate and discriminatory language online have spilled over into school from online gaming. WhatsApp messaging has also caused extensive issues and potential harm which has spilled over into school. Parents have been anxious about other children's behaviour which has damaged relationships between parents in our school community.

There are also some alarming features of WhatsApp which make it relatively easy for unkind, unwise and even bullying behaviour to go unseen. Disappearing messages and photographs are potentially a big problem, as is the features which allows the admin of a group to control who is and is not allowed in a group. Some children are unaware that anything they say can be shared or forwarded to others outside the group or chat or that "disappearing" messages can be screen shot and shared. The age rating for WhatsApp is 13+. Although there is usually no verification process, children will have had to enter a false date of birth in order to register.

I am very aware that the children are learning about social media and what is, and is not, acceptable. Our online safety policy and our children's code of conduct both talk about "treat others as you would like to be treated" and press the point that children (and adults) should not say or do anything in a message that they would not say to someone in person. Another way to put it is that they shouldn't post or say anything that they would not want you or I to see or find out about! Encouraging the children to make positive use of their phones and messaging apps is everyone's responsibility. It is about setting an example in our own communications, and about helping the children to sort out mistakes so there is no lasting impact.

The school has a clear policy that the children are not allowed to bring mobile phones into school. If for any reason it is unavoidable for a child to bring a phone to school, it must be handed to Miss Pike immediately on arrival. It will then be kept securely all day and can be collected from her at the end

of the day. Please note that children are not allowed to have smart watches in school that have internet connectivity or have the capacity to take photographs.

Online safety and the safe and appropriate use of mobile phone technology is part our

curriculum, taught every year. All the children will cover this in the autumn term. Our anti-bullying curriculum also covers bullying online and via messaging, also covered this term.

Please could you take the time to talk to your child about their phone, any messaging apps or social media they have access to and the messaging aspects on any online games. It is worth talking about family rules about where phones are kept and online games can be played, especially overnight. It would also be good to set some expectations around how you check your children's messages, online or on phones. There are lots of tools available to parents to support you to monitor your child's online activities. Children are learning about online interactions and it is inevitable that they will make mistakes. If all the adults at home and at school are giving the same messages about how these mistakes can be resolved and how to keep yourself and others safe online, the children will become increasingly able to act accordingly and to report any issues quickly so we can help them sort it out.

The NSPCC website has lots of tools and resources to support parents, including ways of starting a discussion with your child and sensible rules and safeguards you can put in place. Scroll down to the bottom of the page for the Online support page. There is also information about specific apps, the risks and advice for safe use.

Support & advice for parents | NSPCC

We will continue to monitor the children in school and support their relationships in all the ways available to us.

If you would like to talk further, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

Thank you for your support with this.

Yours faithfully

Rosie Welch

Headteacher

Alpington and Bergh Apton CE VA Primary School