



Digital Bulletin – WhatsApp Security

We have had a report of a WhatsApp hack, which although this has not been widely reported on the news has impacted a member of the school community. With this in mind, we wanted to bring this to your attention, so that others can avoid their accounts being hacked or being frozen out.

WhatsApp

WhatsApp is primarily a messaging app, particularly used to communicate with groups of people. It is linked to the phone number of the user, rather than email address or any form of specific username that is created. Until May 2018, the minimum age to use WhatsApp was 13, similar to other social media platforms. However, at this point the age changed to 16. This was mainly due to access WhatsApp had to children's data, rather than any suitability or content concern. As a result of this, we do not recommend students use WhatsApp for any school communication as it excludes all students below the Fifth Form.

What is security threat?

When installing WhatsApp, a code will be sent to the phone number of the account by SMS. This then needs to be entered to verify that the person installing WhatsApp has possession and access to that phone number. The security hack we are looking at uses an already hijacked account to communicate with contacts from that account by sending a message. This will often request a WhatsApp code that has been sent 'by mistake'. Many people will not have problem sending on this information as the request has come from a trusted friend or contact. However, the person sending on this code will give away access and indeed control of their own WhatsApp account. This will generally mean that they will be locked out of WhatsApp and their account will need resetting.

For more information

For a news report on the security hack, please [click here](#). This is a comprehensive guide to the security threat and the actions that can be taken to avoid having a WhatsApp account hijacked.

Summary

The main advice to WhatsApp users to avoid this security hack are:

- Do not send a WhatsApp generated code to anyone, even if they say it is for their account
- If you receive such a request from somebody you know, check that they sent this message through another means (in person, by phone, SMS etc). It may be that they are not aware that their account has been hacked
- There is a two step verification process. This will not be used every time you use the app; however, it will periodically ask for it. It will also ask for this when changing a phone. Details on how to set this up can be found in the article above.

If there are any topics that you would like more information about, or if you have any concerns regarding online safety, please feel free to contact me.