



# Digital Bulletin – Age Restrictions

This week, the First, Second and Fourth Form students heard an assembly from the Lower Sixth about things that they wished they knew, when they were at that age and starting to use social media. The assembly reiterated that different people start using social media at different ages and that there was no rush to begin. This week, I would like to clarify a few issues relating to age requirements with online usage.

## Age 13

Google, Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat set their minimum age for users as 13 years old. Despite what many think, this isn't to limit exposure to inappropriate content but because of the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act, which prevents companies from collecting certain information from children under 13. Rather than create an environment that protects children from data tracking, Facebook and other websites and apps choose to restrict access to those under 13.

## Starting to use social media

I am aware that many children ignore these age restrictions and use social media earlier; however, this should be done with caution. Don't forget, that if a 10 year old child says that they are 13, then when they are 15, the internet will treat them like an 18 year old. Also in a school setting (and due to its nature), being part of social media is only enjoyable and worthwhile if others are also online. This means that as soon as any child signs up, there is the potential that others will feel pressured to follow suit. My advice would be to as a family, agree an age that everybody is happy with and stick to that age. From my conversations at school, students respect this decision and appreciate clarity.

## How to use social media responsibly

In school, we are very careful not to discourage the use of online and mobile technology, but to demonstrate responsible usage. For more information on advice given to students, click [here](#). This is a link to the Online Safety presentation that was I made for the First Form PSHEE session in March.

## Changes to WhatsApp

You may have heard that WhatsApp has recently changed the minimum age for users from 13 to 16 as a part of the new GDPR laws. Despite being owned by Facebook, WhatsApp does not currently cross-reference Facebook or Instagram accounts to check age. Such websites and apps are now obliged to "make reasonable efforts to verify" that a parent or guardian has given consent for their child's data to be handled. I have heard a rumour that there are plans to enforce the new age restriction by asking users to tick a box to confirm that they are 16 or over. Obviously this is not particularly stringent it is questionable as to whether this warrants "reasonable efforts to verify" the age of the user.