



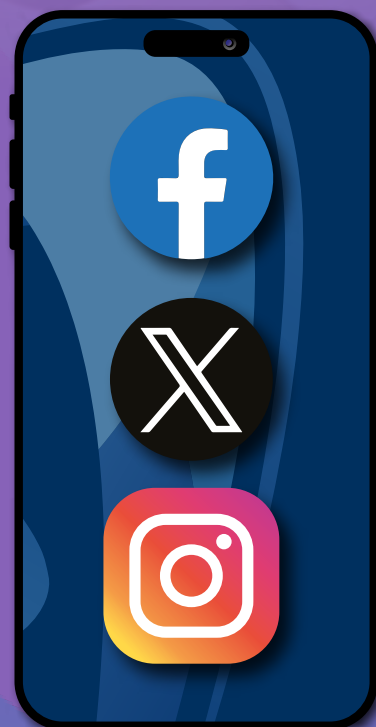
"Be The Best You Can Be"

Safeguarding Newsletter

2026/27

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Welcome to Our Term 1 Safeguarding Newsletter

A Parent & Carer Guide to Phones, WhatsApp, Group Chats and Online Safety

Keeping our young people safe online
Secondary schools often see an increase in safeguarding concerns linked to online behaviour, peer relationships, social pressures, and increased independence outside school. This Newsletter offers guidance for parents and carers on how to support children safely and confidently.

- Technology is an important part of our children's lives. It helps them learn, communicate, socialise and develop independence.
- However, the online world can also expose young people to risks that can be difficult for parents and schools to see.
- At school, we increasingly see that issues which begin online can have a significant impact on friendships, wellbeing, behaviour, attendance and safeguarding.

Our message to parents is simple: stay interested, stay calm and keep talking.

You do not need to be an expert in every app your child uses. What matters is that your child knows they can come to you when something goes wrong.

What does KCSIE 2026 say about online safety?

Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) 2026 is the statutory safeguarding guidance currently in force for schools in England.

- It makes clear that safeguarding includes protecting children from harm online as well as offline.
- Schools are expected to have effective approaches to online safety, including appropriate filtering and monitoring of school systems.

Online risks can include:

CONTENT What children may see online	This can include pornography, violence, hate, misogyny, self-harm content, extremist material, misinformation & other harmful or inappropriate content.
CONTACT Who children communicate with.	This can include bullying, pressure from peers, and contact from strangers, manipulation, grooming or harmful interactions.
CONDUCT How children behave online.	This can include bullying, harassment, sharing images without consent, exclusion from groups and encouraging others to participate in harmful behaviour.
COMMERCE How children can be exposed to financial or commercial risks online.	Children may encounter scams, gambling-related content, inappropriate advertising, in-app purchases or pressure to spend money.

Online safety is therefore much more than simply limiting screen time.

WhatsApp & Group Chats

WhatsApp can be a useful way for young people to stay connected with friends.



However, group chats can change very quickly. A conversation that starts as a group of friends sharing jokes can develop into:

- arguments or bullying
- exclusion of particular children
- sharing screenshots of private conversations
- rumours and gossip
- pressure to respond immediately
- inappropriate images or videos
- sexualised content
- threats or intimidation
- sharing somebody else's photograph without consent
- adding people who are not actually known to the group
- messages being forwarded to people outside the original group.

Parents should know:

- WhatsApp's current minimum age is 13.
- A child being included in a group chat does not mean they have to participate in everything that happens in it.

Encourage your child to:

- Leave a group if it becomes uncomfortable or inappropriate.
- Block people who repeatedly contact or upset them.
- Report inappropriate behaviour.
- Think before forwarding messages, photographs or videos.
- Never share another person's private information or image without permission.
- Tell an adult if they are being threatened, pressured or bullied.

"Mum, Dad – Don't Look at My Phone!"

This can be a difficult conversation. As children become teenagers, they naturally want greater privacy and independence. However, privacy does not mean that parents should be completely unaware of what is happening online.

We encourage parents to establish expectations around phone use before problems arise.

For example:

"Your phone is your personal space, but while you are under our care, keeping you safe comes first." Rather than routinely searching every message, consider agreeing with your child what level of supervision is appropriate for their age and circumstances.

This might include:

- knowing which apps they use
- knowing their usernames or account names
- checking privacy settings together
- discussing who they communicate with



- checking safety settings
- agreeing when phones are put away
- talking about group chats
- agreeing what would happen if a safeguarding concern arose
- reviewing screen-time information

If you have a reason to be concerned...

If you notice a significant change in your child's behaviour, mood, sleep, friendships, attendance or willingness to attend school, it is reasonable to take a closer look at their online world.

If you believe your child may be experiencing bullying, exploitation, grooming, threats or another safeguarding concern, do not be afraid to ask to see what is happening on their device.

The priority should be safety, not punishment

"It's Only a Group Chat..."

Sometimes children minimise what is happening online a useful question is:

"Would you be comfortable saying this to someone's face in front of their parents and teachers?"

If the answer is no, it probably should not be sent. Remind your child that:

- Screenshots last.
- Even if a message is deleted, someone may already have taken a screenshot or forwarded it.
- "Everyone else was doing it" is not a defence.
- Your child can still make a safe choice.
- Being added to a group does not mean you have to stay in it.
- Forwarding harmful content can make your child part of the problem rather than simply a bystander.

New Mobile Phone Guidance for Schools – September 2026

There has been a significant change to the national guidance around mobile phones in schools.

From 1 September 2026, schools in England are expected to follow statutory DfE guidance designed to make schools mobile-phone-free environments by default.

The guidance expects schools to prohibit the use of mobile phones throughout the school day, including:

- Lessons
- Movement between lessons
- Breaktime & lunchtime

The policy can also cover other smart technology with similar functions, such as devices capable of sending messages or recording audio/video.

What does this mean for parents?

We have a mobile-phone policy explaining:

- where phones should be kept
- when phones may be accessed
- what happens if a phone is used
- any sanctions or consequences
- any agreed exceptions

- arrangements for medical, SEND or other individual needs.

Important:

This does not mean that it is illegal for your child to own a mobile phone.

It means that schools are expected to have arrangements that prevent pupils from accessing or using mobile phones during the school day, except where the school's policy provides an appropriate exception.

Why are schools doing this?

Mobile phones can be a significant distraction during the school day. The DfE identifies risks including:

- loss of focus
- disruption to learning
- increased bullying
- inappropriate recording
- online communication during the school day.

Schools also have safeguarding responsibilities when online incidents affect pupils. The new guidance emphasises that restricting phones in school should sit alongside teaching children about the risks of mobile-phone use and helping them develop safe online behaviour.

So, this is not simply about taking phones away. It is about helping young people learn when technology is appropriate and how to use it safely.

What can parents do at home?

1. Create phone-free times

Consider having regular periods when everyone puts their phone away. For example: During meals, during homework, in the hour before bed. Parents following the same expectations can make this much easier.

2. Keep phones out of bedrooms overnight.

Notifications can interrupt sleep and encourage children to remain online late at night. Consider charging phones downstairs or in another shared area.

3. Talk about group chats

Ask: "What WhatsApp groups are you in?"

"Who is in them?"

"What happens if someone says something unkind?"

"Do you ever feel pressured to reply?"

These questions can tell you much more than simply asking "Are you okay online?"

4. Check privacy settings together

Make sure your child understands:

- who can contact them
- who can add them to groups
- who can see their profile information
- who can see their location
- what information they are sharing.

5. Don't just focus on the amount of screen time

Ask what your child is doing online.

Two hours spent researching homework is very different from two hours spent receiving abusive messages in a group chat.

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Look for changes in behaviour

Online problems do not always result in a child saying "I'm being bullied."

Instead, you may notice:

- becoming unusually quiet
- anxiety when receiving notifications
- hiding their screen
- becoming upset after using their phone
- suddenly leaving group chats
- difficulty sleeping
- reluctance to attend school
- changes in friendships
- increased secrecy
- loss of confidence
- becoming unusually angry or withdrawn.

One change does not necessarily mean something is wrong. But a pattern of changes is worth exploring.

If something goes wrong online

Tell your child:

1. **STOP-** Don't respond to threats, abuse or pressure.
2. **BLOCK-** Use the platform's blocking tools where appropriate.
3. **REPORT-** Report harmful content or behaviour to the platform.

TELL- Tell a trusted adult.

This could be: Parent/carers, Teacher, Head of Year, Pastoral Team or Designated Safeguarding Lead. Your child will not be in trouble for asking for help.

If they have made a mistake online, the safest thing they can do is tell someone.

When should parents contact the school?

Please contact the school if an online issue is:

- affecting your child's wellbeing
- affecting friendships
- affecting attendance
- affecting their ability to learn
- involving threats or intimidation
- involving sexualised behaviour or images
- involving bullying
- involving suspected grooming or exploitation
- involving a significant risk of harm.

Problems that happen outside school can still affect children in school. If an online incident involves pupils from the same school, please let us know.



A final message for parents

We cannot remove every risk from our children's online lives. Nor should the aim be to monitor every conversation they have.

Our aim should be to help young people develop the knowledge, confidence and judgement to navigate the online world safely.

Talk. Check. Listen. Set boundaries. Keep communicating.

Most importantly: Make sure your child knows they can come to you – even when they have made a mistake.

Useful Resources and Information for Parents & Carers

- NSPCC Online Safety Hub
- Internet Matters Parent Guides
- UK Safer Internet Centre
- Childline Report Remove Tool
- CEOP Safety Centre
- Keeping Children Safe in Education – Keeping children safe in education 2026: September 2026
- Mobile Phones in Schools – Mobile phones in schools - GOV.UK
- WhatsApp Safety & Privacy- WhatsApp Help Centre
- Online Safety Parent Hub – Help your child stay safe online - Kids Online Safety

Our safeguarding message

If you are worried about something happening to your child online, please speak to us. You do not need to be an expert in technology to raise a safeguarding concern.

If in doubt – talk to us.

Age Restrictions – Did you know?

The age restrictions regarding social media and gaming sites.

- Age limits are legal minimums, not recommendations
- Always enable privacy settings and parental controls
- Talk regularly with children about online safety and behaviour
- Be aware of in-app purchases and chat features

A note about forthcoming UK online-safety changes

The Government has announced further measures intended to prevent social-media platforms from offering their services to under-16s. The Government currently expects these changes to be implemented in spring 2027, following further regulations and implementation work.

Importantly, the Government's current proposals do not intend to include messaging services such as WhatsApp and Signal within the under-16 social-media ban.

Parents should therefore continue to supervise and discuss messaging apps rather than assuming that future legislation will remove the risks.

Social Media Age Restrictions (UK / Global Standards)

Platform	Minimum Age	Notes for Parents
WhatsApp	13	Messaging app; group chats and media sharing
Snapchat	13	Ephemeral messages; location sharing feature (Snap Map)
TikTok	13	Short-form videos; content algorithm can expose varied material
Instagram	13	Photo/video sharing; private accounts recommended for younger users
Facebook	13	Social networking; includes messaging and groups
Messenger (Facebook)	13 (or Messenger Kids below with parental controls)	Messaging app with supervision options for children
YouTube	13 (or supervised/YouTube Kids under 13)	Wide range of content—use parental controls
Discord	13	Chat platform often used by gamers; includes voice channels
X (formerly Twitter)	13	Public posting platform; less content filtering
Reddit	13	Community forum; content varies widely and may be unsuitable
BeReal	13	Daily photo-sharing app with social pressure element

Video Game Age Ratings (PEGI – UK Standard)

Rating	Age	What It Means	Examples
PEGI 3	3+	Suitable for all ages; no frightening or violent content	Mario Kart, Minecraft (E10 equivalent content)
PEGI 7	7+	Mild violence or potentially frightening scenes	Pokémon, Lego games
PEGI 12	12+	Moderate violence, mild bad language	Fortnite, Rocket League
PEGI 16	16+	Realistic violence, stronger language, mature themes	Call of Duty, Apex Legends
PEGI 18	18+	Strong violence, sexual content, drugs, gambling	GTA V, Red Dead Redemption 2



Popular Online Games (Combined with Age Guidance)

Game	PEGI Rating	Online Interaction Notes
Fortnite	12	Chat with strangers; in-game purchases
Minecraft (online)	7 / 12	Safe offline; online servers vary widely
Roblox	7+ (platform guidance 13+)	User-generated content—quality and safety varies
Call of Duty	18	Strong violence; voice chat with others
FIFA / EA Sports FC	3	Online play; includes in-game purchases (loot boxes concern)
GTA V	18	Highly unsuitable for children despite popularity
Among Us	7	Online interaction; text chat risks

We need your help in keeping school up to date with any changes

Kinship Care

What is Kinship Care ?

If a child is living with and cared for by relatives or close family friends instead of their parents. . This arrangement helps ensure the child is cared for by someone they already know and trust whether a permanent or temporary arrangement. Please complete the form below so we know if this applies to any student attending the Abbey School and we can update our records.

[Kinship Care – Fill in form](#)

Keeping school informed

We would like to remind all parents and carers of the importance of informing the school in advance whenever your child will be staying away from home, whether they are staying with relatives, friends, or another caregiver.

Please ensure that the school is provided with the following information:

The address where your child will be staying.

A contact telephone number for the adult responsible for their care during this time.

This information is essential to ensure that we can contact the appropriate adult in the event of an emergency or if we need to get in touch with your child while they are away from home.

We appreciate that arrangements can sometimes change at short notice. In such circumstances, please notify the school as soon as possible.

Thank you for your cooperation and support in helping us safeguard all our children and ensure their safety and wellbeing.

*Please could you also put in the message regarding out of hours



Parent and Carers message who to contact for support/safeguarding after school hours

We want to remind you about how to seek help if you have a safeguarding concern about a child, particularly outside of school hours.

Our Safeguarding and Pastoral Team are available from 8.30am to 4.30pm, Monday to Thursday & Friday until 3.30pm, during term time. We are always happy to listen, support families and respond to concerns raised with us during these hours.

Please be aware that school email inboxes are not monitored outside of these hours, particularly during evenings and weekends. If you email the school with a safeguarding concern after 4.30pm or over the weekend, your message may not be seen until the next working day. This means that emailing the school should not be relied upon where a child may need immediate help or protection.

If you are worried about a child's immediate safety or welfare, please contact the appropriate service directly:

If a child is in immediate danger or there is an immediate risk of serious harm: please call 999 and ask for the Police.
For a non-emergency concern requiring Police assistance: please call Kent Police on 101.

For concerns about a child's safety or welfare: contact Kent Children's Services (The Front Door) on 03000 41 11 11.
Outside normal hours, including evenings and weekends: Kent Children's Services can be contacted on 03000 41 91 91.

We appreciate that knowing who to contact can sometimes feel difficult, particularly when you are worried about a child. Our priority is to make sure that concerns reach the right professionals as quickly as possible, so please use the appropriate service rather than waiting for the school to respond to an email.

Of course, if your concern is not urgent and you would like to speak to a member of our Safeguarding or Pastoral Team, please contact us during our normal school hours. We are here to listen and support you.

Thank you for working with us to help keep our children and young people safe.

Safeguarding and Pastoral Team
8.30am to 4.30pm, Monday to Thursday & Friday until 3.30pm, during term time only

Mental Health Support

For immediate assistance regarding mental health support and resources, please refer to the following organisations:

- [Home - Kooth](#)
- [YoungMinds](#)
- [Shout](#) - Text "SHOUT" to 85258 for 24/7 support
- [Qwell](#): If you are an adult requiring mental health
 - [Kent Resilience Hub](#)

If you have any urgent concerns for a young person (self harming/attempted suicide) please take directly to A&E and request Crisis Team or 999

For financial/ cost of living difficulties

- [Citizens Advice](#)
- [Faversham Foodbank](#)

For support around domestic abuse

- [SATEDA](#)
- [Refuge](#)
- [Oasis Domestic Abuse Service](#)

For support with homelessness or housing issues

- [Porchlight](#)
- [Shelter England](#)

If you have urgent child protection concern please contact:
[Kent Children's Portal](#) or call 03000 411111

Or call 999 and report to Kent Police.

NO EXCUSE FOR ABUSE

At The Abbey School, we strive to create a **safe and secure** environment for the school community. Our school is a **welcoming and inclusive place** where we all show one another respect and look out for each other.

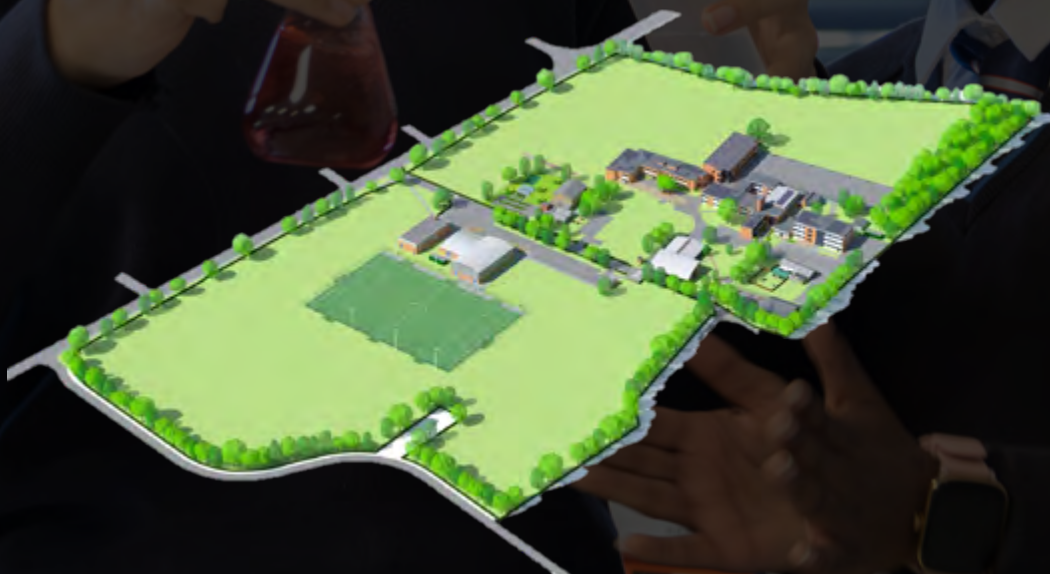
We will not tolerate any **threatening, abusive or violent** behaviour and action will be taken when necessary.





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“BE THE BEST YOU CAN BE”



The Abbey
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