



Community Spirit and Digital Responsibility: A Guide to Parent Social Media Groups

A very warm welcome to any new parents and carers who are joining our wider school community here at Vyners. Over the course of the past few years we have seen first-hand how helpful it can be to connect with each other digitally, for example through parent-led social media and WhatsApp groups.

We are aware that many of you find it helpful to connect with one another through independent social media groups or messaging platforms and you may have found these helpful during primary school for your children. **While the school does not officially endorse or monitor these private channels, we recognise some families find them a useful source to stay organised and connected.**

To ensure these spaces remain **safe, positive and supportive environments** for everyone, the Senior Leadership Team would like to offer some gentle guidance on best practice.

The Purpose: Information, advice, and guidance

The most effective school-related groups act as a **digital noticeboard**. Their primary goal should be the exchange of practical information:

- **Clarifying school events** and deadlines
- **Sharing advice** on lost property or local activities.

Given the change from smaller settings in primary school to a larger cohort of 240+ students, you may wish to consider whether joining such groups in the first place is the right choice for you. Students do tend to take the lead more on remembering school events and deadlines, for example. The role of a moderator or 'admin' position will come with a larger amount of responsibility in our school setting.

The Role of Moderators

A successful group is rarely a 'free-for-all.' The most constructive forums usually have clear **ground rules** and active **moderators**. These moderators act as 'guardians of the group,' ensuring conversations stay on track and helping to redirect off-topic or inappropriate content. If you choose to initiate a chat group, please ensure that you establish a basic set of 'community Standards' and that you uphold these standards throughout. We would also ask administrators **not to use the school badge or logos** for their groups as this may imply that these are official groups.

Navigating the Emotional Response

We all care deeply about our children's education, which can naturally lead to high emotions. However, WhatsApp is a notoriously difficult medium for nuanced conversation.

A Golden Rule: If a message feels emotionally charged or is written in the heat of the moment, it is likely not appropriate for the group chat.

Sharing frustrations or unverified information can lead to the rapid spread of misinformation. This often creates unnecessary anxiety for other parents/carers or their children and can inadvertently damage the reputation of staff members or students. We are increasingly becoming concerned about the number of items of communication addressed to the school about the content of such WhatsApp chats, which are beyond our jurisdiction and control.

If you choose to join a chat, you may wish to turn off notifications to help navigate the potential emotional response of others.

Addressing Concerns and Complaints

While it may feel tempting to 'vent' in a group chat, these forums are not the place for grievances. Using them as such often escalates issues rather than solving them.

In any large secondary school there will always be issues that arise throughout the course of an academic year. The overwhelming majority of issues and concerns will be relatively minor. In these instances, we urge parents and carers to discuss the matter with their child in a solution-focused manner to see if the issue can be readily resolved without contacting the school. Where issues persist or escalate then parents and carers may wish to contact the school.

By keeping WhatsApp and other social media groups focused on helpful information and mutual support, we protect the positive atmosphere of our school community and we protect the data and information of our children, as well as our school values of Community and Respect.

Let's work together to keep our digital spaces as respectful and welcoming as our school environment.

The Senior Leadership Team
Vyners School