



7<sup>th</sup> March 2022

Dear Parents/Carers

## Online Safety: Virtual Chat Rooms

I am writing to inform you of the increased use of virtual chat rooms amongst our students for example Omegle. Chat rooms have been used for years as a way to socialise with others, but I am writing to alert you to the potential safeguarding risks of some of them.

Some of these chat rooms (Omegle for example) are a video-chatting website that pairs random users identified as 'You' and 'Stranger' to chat online via 'Text', 'Video' or both. Chats are anonymous unless the user states who they are, it is free and no account sign up is required. **In theory, students can be talking to anyone anywhere.**

Some of these chat rooms do not appear to have robust moderation nor is there a registration or age verification making them a potential target for online predators. The site states "**predators have been known to use Omegle, so please be careful**".

We know that sexually explicit videos and live streams have been accessed via these chat rooms which spread across the site during the Covid-19 pandemic. This puts our students at very serious risk. The BBC reported that there were also investigations into online child abuse on Omegle along with reports of racism, extremist views, scams, and cyberbullying.

You can read more about these chat rooms here:

<https://www.internetmatters.org/hub/news-blogs/what-is-omegle-what-parents-need-to-know/>

How you can help to keep your child safe:

- Having regular conversations with your child about their online life is an important way to keep them safe online – such as talking to strangers online.
- Set up parental controls – you can enable filters, block certain websites and much more.
- Report it! If you suspect a child is a victim of online sexual abuse, report it immediately to CEOP or contact the police.

Please do not hesitate to contact your child's form tutor if you have any questions and they can direct them to the safeguarding team.

Yours faithfully

Laura Betty  
Deputy Headteacher