



Social Media Policy for Schools

June 2014

Introduction

The widespread availability and use of social media applications bring opportunities to understand, engage, and communicate in new and exciting ways. It is important that we are able to use these technologies and services effectively and flexibly. However, it is also important to ensure that we balance this with our duties to our school, the community, our legal responsibilities and our reputation.

For example, our use of social networking applications has implications for our duty to safeguard children and young people.

The policy requirements in this document aim to provide a framework of good practice. They apply to all members of staff and governors at the school.

Purpose

The purpose of the policy is to:

- Ensure employees use social media in a way which will not bring the school into disrepute.
- Safeguard all children
- Ensure that any users are able clearly to distinguish where information provided via social media is legitimately representative of the school

Definitions

Social networking applications include Facebook and Twitter, messaging on MSN and on mobile phones, blogs, LinkedIn, online discussion forums, YouTube, 'Micro blogging' applications, online gaming environments, and comment streams on public websites such as newspaper site.

Many of the principles of this policy also apply to other types of online presence such as virtual worlds. The absence of, or lack of, explicit reference to a specific website or service does not limit the extent of the application of these guidelines.

All members of staff should bear in mind that information they share through social networking applications, even if they are on private spaces, are still subject to copyright, data protection and Freedom of Information legislation, the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 and other legislation. They must also operate in line with government guidance on safeguarding children and the school's Equalities and Child Protection policies.

Within this policy there is a distinction between the uses of school-sanctioned social media and personal use of social media.

Personal use of social media

- There is an acknowledgment that school staff may/will have pre-existing engaged communications with parents from the school community. However, school staff are advised not to invite, accept or engage in communications

with new parents and should not accept or engage in communications with children from the school community in any personal social media whilst in employment at **[insert school name]**. Those pre-existing communications should be responsible and comply with the points listed below.

- Any communication received from children on any personal social media sites must be reported to the designated person for Child Protection
- If any member of staff is aware of any inappropriate communications involving any child in any social media, these must immediately be reported as above
- Members of the school staff are strongly advised to set all privacy settings to the highest possible levels on all personal social media accounts
- All email communication between staff and members of the school community on school business must be made from an official school email account
- Staff should not use personal email accounts or mobile phones to make contact with members of the school community on school business, nor should any such contact be accepted, except in circumstances given prior approval by the Headteacher.
- Staff are advised to avoid posts or comments that refer to specific, individual matters related to the school and members of its community on any social media accounts
- Staff are also advised to consider the reputation of the school in any posts or comments related to the school on any social media accounts
- Staff should not accept any current pupil of any age or any ex-pupil of the school under the age of 18 as a friend, follower, subscriber or similar on any personal social media account

School-sanctioned use of social media

When using social media for educational/promotional purposes, the following practices should be observed:

- The content of any school-sanctioned social media site should be solely professional and should reflect well on the school.
- Staff must not publish photographs of children without the written consent of parents /carers, identify by name any children featured in photographs, or allow personally identifying information to be published on school social media accounts
- Care must be taken that any links to external sites from the account are appropriate and safe
- Any inappropriate comments on or abuse of school-sanctioned social media should immediately be removed and reported to a member of SLT

Monitoring of this Policy

Any violation of this policy may be considered as potentially gross misconduct under the school's Disciplinary Policy and Procedure (staff); under the Code of Practice (governors) and under the school's Behaviour and Exclusion Policies (children). **[insert relevant school policies]** which may result in disciplinary action being taken up to and including dismissal.

All staff, children and Governors are encouraged to report any suspicions of misuse to the Headteacher or a trusted adult. If the Headteacher receives a disclosure that an adult employed by the school is using social networking in an inappropriate way as detailed above, this should be dealt with in accordance with the Child Protection Policy and/or Disciplinary Policy and Procedure.

Children should be strongly encouraged to report to a trusted adult any worries they have about cyber bullying or improper contact. The school has a duty of care to investigate and work with children and families where there are reports of cyber bullying/misuse of social media during out of school hours.

The Law

Whilst there is no one specific offence of cyber bullying, certain activities can be criminal offences under a range of different laws, including:

- The Protection from Harassment act 1997
- The Malicious Communications act 1988
- S.127 of the Communication act 2003
- Public Order Act 1986
- The Defamation Acts of 1952 and 1996

A school cannot be 'defamed'; only individuals or groups of individuals can bring action for defamation. Staff who are concerned that comments posted about them are defamatory in nature, should seek advice from their Trade Union or HR Adviser.

The Headteacher may seek legal advice on any matters related to the potential misuse of social media.