

# West Exmoor Federation



## Guidelines on Parental use of Social Media

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## **West Exmoor Federation**

### **Guidelines on Parental use of Social Media and Internet Sites**

#### Overview

Social media and internet sites allow people to communicate in ways that were not previously possible, but sites can also be used inappropriately through putting children at risk of harm, or by expressing negative or offensive views about schools and their staff.

The West Exmoor Federation takes seriously its responsibility to safeguard its children from physical and emotional harm. It also has a duty of care towards its staff and volunteers in respect of negative or offensive comments posted on social media and internet sites. In addition to the impact on those staff and volunteers, such comments may also adversely affect the attainment of pupils.

Consequently, this document sets out guidelines for staff and parents, including action which may be taken when it is considered that parents have used such facilities inappropriately. In this document “parent” also include carers, relatives or anyone associated with the federation.

#### Objectives

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Safeguard pupils from the risk of physical or emotional harm;
- Encourage social media and internet sites to be used in a beneficial and positive way by parents;
- Guard staff and anyone associated with the school from the negative effects of social media and the internet;
- Prevent unfounded reputational damage to the federation by unwarranted abuse via social media and the internet;
- Clarify what the school considers to be appropriate and inappropriate use of social media and the internet by parents.

#### Appropriate use of social networking sites by parents

The West Exmoor Federation recognises that many parents and other family members will have personal social media accounts which they might use to discuss/share views about federation issues with friends and acquaintances.

As a guide, individuals should consider the following prior to posting any information on social media or internet sites about the federation or its pupils, staff, or anyone else associated with the federation:

- will the item identify, or put at risk of harm, children other than their own without their parent’s consent; or, where appropriate, the federation’s consent;
- is the item defamatory, demeaning or insulting, or likely to upset the child or their parents;
- is social media the appropriate channel to raise or discuss matters about the federation or its staff;
- in respect of allegations being made/concerns being raised, would a confidential discussion with the Executive Headteacher or use of the federation’s complaints procedures be more appropriate;
- are such comments likely to cause emotional or reputational harm to individuals which could not be justified;
- the reputational damage that such material may have to the federation, and any detrimental harm that the federation may suffer as a result of the posting, and the impact that such a posting may have on pupils’ attainment.

### Inappropriate use of social media and internet sites by parents

The following examples are considered to be inappropriate uses of social media sites. This list is non-exhaustive and intended to provide examples only:

- naming children directly or through association, posting any comments or images of children who attend the West Exmoor Federation without parental consent;
- posting comments which may place children at risk of harm;
- making any posts that could be deemed to be cyber-bullying;
- making allegations about staff or anyone else connected with the federation;
- making complaints about the federation or staff within the federation;
- making defamatory, offensive or negative statements about the federation, the staff or any other individual connected to the federation;
- posting comments which are racist or threaten violence.

### Parental responsibility re children's use of social media and the internet

- Parents should also ensure that their children are not using social media and internet sites in an inappropriate manner. It is expected that parents/carers explain to their children what is acceptable to post online.
- Parents/carers are also expected to monitor their children's online activity, including in relation to their use of social media and the internet.
- Please note that most social media sites require the user to be at least 14 years old.

### Procedure the school will follow if inappropriate use continues

The West Exmoor Federation recognises that parents may not always realise when they have used social media or internet sites inappropriately and will always try to deal with concerns raised by parents in a cooperative and appropriate manner.

Therefore, as a first step the federation will endeavour to discuss the matter with the parent to try and resolve it and request that the relevant information be removed from the social networking site in question. However, in the event that a parent continues to use social media in an inappropriate manner, the federation reserves the right to take further action.

In the first instance, the federation will set out its concerns in writing, requesting that the material in question is removed. Other possible course of action includes:

- if the inappropriate comments have been made on a federation website or online forum, the federation may take action to block or restrict that individual's access to that website or forum;
- contact the police where the federation feels it appropriate – for example, if it considers a crime (such as harassment or public order offences) has been committed or in cases where the posting has a racial element, is considered to be grossly obscene, grossly offensive or is threatening violence;
- contact the host/provider of the social media or internet site to complain about the content and ask for removal of the information;
- raise the matter with the Information Commissioner
- consider taking legal advice and/or legal action where the information posted is defamatory in any way or if the circumstances warrant this.