

Policy on Staff/Governor Use of Social Networking and Internet Sites

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. Social media includes online social forums such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn and websites such as YouTube and Flickr. This type of media which is now widely used allows people to communicate instantly and share data in a public forum.
- 1.2. This Policy sets out the School's approach to staff use of social media and internet sites and action that may be taken when it is considered a member of staff may have breached this Policy.
- 1.3. There are many more examples of social media than can be listed here and this is a constantly changing area. Staff should comply with this Policy in relation to any social media that they use.
- 1.4. The term "staff" in this document, should also be read to include any contractors or volunteers at the school. There is a separate section in relation to school governors towards the end of this document.
- 1.5. In using social networking and internet sites, clear and explicit professional boundaries will be adhered to as outlined in Section 12 of 'Guidance for Safer Working Practice for those working with Children and Young People in Education Settings' (Safer Recruitment Consortium 2015), which can be found at the following link <http://www.saferrecruitmentconsortium.org/GSWP%20Oct%202015.pdf>

2. Objectives

- 2.1. The purpose of this policy is to:
- 2.2. Clarify what the School considers to be appropriate and inappropriate use of social networking and internet sites by staff;
- 2.3. Encourage social networking/internet sites to be used in a beneficial and positive way;
- 2.4. Safeguard staff, pupils, parents and members of the public from abuse on social networking sites;
- 2.5. Safeguard the reputation of this School; other schools; the Local Authority and other organisations, from unwarranted abuse on social networking sites;
- 2.6. Set out the procedures that will be followed where it is considered that staff have inappropriately or unlawfully used social networking/internet sites.

3. Personal use of social media at work

- 3.1. Staff are allowed to make reasonable and appropriate use of social media websites from the School's computers or devices, provided that this does not interfere with their duties.
- 3.2. [However, the School has specifically blocked use of [Twitter/Facebook/other social media websites blocked] on its computers and may at its discretion block further sites.]
- 3.3. The School understands that staff may wish to use their own computers or devices, such as laptops and palm-top and hand-held devices, to access social media websites while they are at work. Staff must limit their use of social media on their own equipment to their official rest breaks (such as their lunch break) and must still ensure that they continue to follow the requirements set out in this Policy.
- 3.4. If it is believed employee member of staff has engaged in unlawful activity on a social media site or activity in breach of this Policy and the 'Guidance for Safer Working Practice for those working with Children and Young People in Education Settings' (Safer Recruitment Consortium 2015), Section 12, communication with children (see link in 1.5) an investigation will be instigated which may result in disciplinary action and potentially dismissal. The School's disciplinary policy will be followed.

4. Use of social media and the internet for work purposes

In specific circumstances it may be appropriate for a member of staff to use social media as part of their work. This should only take place with the [written] approval of the [head teacher/*other specified member of staff*]. In such circumstances while contributing to the School's social media activities the same safeguards must be adhered to as would be with any other form of communication about the School in the public domain. Any communications made in a professional capacity through social media must not either knowingly or recklessly:

- 4.1. Place a child or young person at risk of harm;
- 4.2. bring the School into disrepute;
- 4.3. breach confidentiality;
- 4.4. breach copyright;
- 4.5. breach data protection legislation; or
- 4.6. do anything that could be considered discriminatory against, or bullying or harassment of, any individual, for example by:
 - 4.6.1. making offensive or derogatory comments relating to sex, gender reassignment, race (including nationality), disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief or age;
 - 4.6.2. using social media to bully another individual; or
 - 4.6.3. posting images that are discriminatory or offensive or links to such content.

5. Excessive use of social media/internet at work

- 5.1. Staff must not spend an excessive amount of time while at the School on personal use of social media or internet sites. They must ensure that use of social media/internet does not interfere with their duties.

6. Monitoring use of social media/internet on school equipment during work time

- 6.1. The School reserves the right to monitor staff internet usage. The School considers that valid reasons for checking internet usage include concerns that social media/internet sites have been accessed in breach of this Policy.

7. Inappropriate use of social media/internet

The following list gives examples of use of social media/internet sites that the school may consider to be inappropriate:

- 7.1. Publishing defamatory; discriminatory; illegal; sexual; racist or other offensive material;
- 7.2. Publishing any material which is confidential or would breach copyright or data protection principles;
- 7.3. Promoting personal financial interests, commercial ventures or personal campaigns in school time;
- 7.4. Publishing anything of an abusive or harassing nature;
- 7.5. Using social media/internet sites in a manner that would put staff/governors in breach of school codes of conduct or existing policies;
- 7.6. Discussing matters relating to school, staff, pupils or parents/carers for which the social media is not considered to be an appropriate forum;
- 7.7. Inappropriately holding yourself out as, or implying that you are, a representative of the school when using social media/internet sites in a private context;
- 7.8. Interacting with pupils via social media/internet sites [*unless properly authorised as part of school duties*];
- 7.9. Interacting with parents/carers of pupils via social media/internet sites;
- 7.10. Interacting with any ex-student who is under the age of 18 (staff should exercise extreme caution in interacting with any ex-pupils regardless of age);
- 7.11. Actively providing false or misleading information about the school, its staff or pupils;
- 7.12. Cyber-bullying;
- 7.13. Inappropriately referencing other staff members, governors, students, parents or school activities/events - unless it is a legitimate part of the staff member's role;
- 7.14. Using social media/internet sites to raise complaints/grievances – any issues should be raised via the appropriate channels (e.g. school complaints procedure).

The above is a non-exhaustive list. It is intended to provide some examples of what the School considers to be inappropriate. Each matter will be dealt with based on its own facts.

School policies will be followed where relevant (e.g. the School's disciplinary/bullying /complaints policy etc). The School will contact the Police where it is necessary to do so.

8. Social media in your personal life

- 8.1. The School recognises that many people make use of social media in a personal capacity. While they are not acting on behalf of the School, staff must be aware of the potential damage that could be caused to the School if they are recognised as being a member of staff.
- 8.2. Staff may say that they work for the School but their online profile (for example, the name of a blog or a Twitter name) must not contain the School's name.
- 8.3. If staff do discuss their work on social media (for example, giving opinions on their specialism or the sector in which the School operates), where appropriate they should include on their profile a statement along the following lines: "The views I express here are mine alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of the School."
- 8.4. Any communications that staff make in a personal capacity through social media must not bring the School into disrepute.

9. Disciplinary action over social media use

- 9.1. All staff are required to adhere to this policy. Staff should note that any breaches of this policy may lead to disciplinary action. Serious breaches of this policy, for example incidents of bullying of colleagues or social media activity causing serious damage to the School, may constitute gross misconduct and lead to summary dismissal.
- 9.2. Similarly, where there is a serious breach of this policy, action may be taken in respect of other members of staff who are not employees which may result in the termination of their appointment.
- 9.3. Staff have a duty to report abuses of this policy in accordance with the schools whistleblowing policy.

10. Child protection guidance

- 10.1. If the head teacher (*or other member of staff*) receives a disclosure that a member of the School's staff is using a social networking/internet site in a way that may put a child at risk, this should be recorded in line with the School's child protection policy and whistleblowing policy as an allegation. In accordance with *the Department for Education's (DfE) Working Together to Safeguard Young People (2015)*, the head teacher will refer all allegations of a safeguarding nature to the Designated Officer (DO) in the Local Authority before undertaking any internal investigations.

11. Staff/governors interacting with each other online

- 11.1 Governors are advised not to be "friends" with members of staff online. Reasons for this include:
 - 11.1.1 Potential for a conflict of interest where a governor is on a selection panel/disciplinary panel where a "friend" is involved;

11.1.2 Due to the role of the governing body and its general responsibility for the conduct of the school, it is sensible to maintain a certain level of separation between governors and staff.

11.2 Teachers and other staff members should also exercise caution when considering inviting work colleagues to be 'friends' on social networking sites, as this may create a conflict/difficult situation in the future.

12. Application of this Policy to school governors

12.1. Whilst some aspects of this Policy are clearly more targeted at school staff, many have equal application to governors. For example, section 7 of the Policy provides guidance for all on what is considered to be inappropriate use of social media/internet sites. All governors should ensure that they comply with the spirit of the Policy.

12.2. Though governors would not be subject to the same disciplinary process as staff, there are still forms of redress available where a governor behaves in an inappropriate manner. The appropriate procedures would be followed in such cases.

13. Involvement with the PTA

This policy will continue to apply to members of staff who are acting in their capacity as a member of Parent-Teacher Association (PTA). Therefore they should ensure that they are acting in the spirit of this policy when acting in this capacity.

I have read and understood and agree to comply with the School's Policy on Staff Use of Social Media/Internet Sites.

Signed:

Print name:

Date:

This Policy is due for review by: September 2025