



SOCIAL NETWORKING POLICY

January 2024

Next Review: January 2026

Approved by: Headteacher

Introduction

The school is aware and acknowledges that increasing numbers of adults and children are using social networking sites. The widespread availability and use of social networking applications bring opportunities to understand, engage and communicate with audiences in new 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 safety and our reputation.

This policy and associated guidance is to protect staff and advise school leadership on how to deal with potential inappropriate use of social networking sites. The requirements in this document aim to provide a balance to support innovation whilst providing a framework of good practice.

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to ensure:

- That the school is not exposed to legal risks
- That the reputation of the school is not adversely affected
- That our users are able to clearly distinguish where information provided via social networking applications is legitimately representative of the school.

Scope

This policy covers the use of social networking applications by all school stakeholders including employees, governors and pupils. These groups are referred to collectively as 'school representatives' for brevity.

Social networking applications include, but are not limited to:

- Blogs, eg Blogger
- Online discussion forums, eg netmums.com
- Collaborative spaces, eg Facebook
- Media sharing services, eg YouTube
- Micro-blogging applications, eg Twitter

All school representatives 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 the school's Equality Policy.

Use of Social Networking

School representatives must adhere to the terms of use outlines below which apply to all uses of social networking applications by all school representatives. This includes, but is not limited to, public facing applications such as open discussion forums and internally-facing uses such as project blogs regardless of whether they are hosted on the school network or not.

Where applications allow the posting of messages online, users must be mindful that the right to freedom of expression attaches only to lawful conduct. We expect that users of social networking applications will always exercise the right of freedom of expression with due consideration for the rights of others and strictly in accordance with the following terms of use.

Terms of Use

Social networking applications must not:

- Be used to publish any content which may result in actions for defamation, discrimination, breaches of copyright, data protection or other claim for damages. This includes but is not limited to material of an illegal, sexual or offensive nature that may bring the school into disrepute.
- Be used for the promotion of personal financial interests, commercial ventures or personal campaigns
- Be used in an abusive or hateful manner
- Be used for actions that would put school representatives in breach of school codes of conduct or policies relating to staff
- Be used to discuss or advise any matters relating to school matters, staff, pupils or parents

Staff members should not:

- Have a pupil or former pupil under the age of 18 as a 'friend' to share information with.
- Breach the school's misconduct, equal opportunities or bullying and harassment policies
- Identify themselves as a representative of the school

References should not be made to any staff member, pupil, parent or school activity/event unless prior permission has been obtained and agreed with the Head Teacher.

Use of social networking applications in work time for personal use only is not permitted, unless permission has been given by the Head Teacher.

All proposals for using social networking applications as part of a school service (whether they are hosted by the school or by a third party) must be approved by the Head Teacher first.

Consequences of Misuse

Staff should be aware that if their out-of-work activity causes potential embarrassment for the employer or detrimentally effects the employer's reputation then the employer is entitled to take disciplinary action.

Violation of this policy will be considered as gross misconduct and can result in disciplinary action being taken against the employee up to and including termination of employment.

Guidance/Protection for Staff on Using Social Networking

- No member of staff should interact with any pupil in the school on social networking sites
- No member of staff should interact with any ex-pupil in the school on social networking sites who is under the age of 18
- No member of staff should request access to a pupil's area on a social networking site. Neither should they permit the pupil access to the staff members' area, eg by accepting them as a friend
- Where family and friends have pupils in school and there are legitimate family links, please inform the Head Teacher in writing. However, it would not be appropriate to network during the working day on school equipment
- It is illegal for an adult to network, giving their age and status as a child
- If you have any evidence of pupils or adults using social networking sites in the working day, please contact one of the Designated Safeguarding Leads in school.

Guidance/Protection for Pupils on Using Social Networking

- No pupil under 13 should be accessing social networking sites. This is the guidance from both Facebook and MSN.
- No pupil may access social networking sites during the school working day
- All mobile phones must be handed into the teacher at the beginning of the school day and the internet capability must be switched off.
- No pupil should attempt to join a staff members' area on networking sites. If pupils attempt to do this, the member of staff is to inform the Head Teacher. Parents will be informed if this happens

- No school computers are to be used to access social networking sites at any time of day
- Any attempts to breach firewalls will result in a ban from using school ICT equipment other than with close supervision
- Please report any improper contact or cyber bullying to your teacher in confidence as soon as it happens
- The school has a zero tolerance policy to cyber bullying.

Child Protection Guidance

If the Head Teacher receives a disclosure that an adult employed by the school is using a social networking site in an inappropriate manner as detailed above they should:

- Record the disclosure in line with the child protection policy
- Refer the matter to the LADO. They will advise whether the member of staff should be suspended pending investigation after contact with the police. It is not recommended that action is taken until advice has been given
- If the disclosure has come from a parent, take normal steps to calm the parent and explain processes
- If the disclosure comes from a member of staff, try to maintain confidentiality
- If the disclosure comes from a child, follow normal process in the child protection policy until the police investigation has been carried out.