

Use of Social Networking and Internet Sites

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Document information

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Purpose	This Policy sets out the school/academy 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.		

Document accessibility

If you would like this information in another language or format please speak to your Headteacher/Principal.

HR Contact Details

Human Resources – Schools

Phone 01922 655868

E-mail HRSchoolsConsultancy@walsall.gov.uk

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/academy 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/academy. There is a separate section in relation to school/academy 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 the Guidance for Safer Working Practice for Adults who work with Children and Young People in Education Settings, which can be found at the following link:**

[saferrecruitmentconsortium](#)

2. Objectives

The purpose of this policy is to:

- 2.1 Clarify what the school/academy considers to be appropriate and inappropriate use of social networking and internet sites by staff
- 2.2 Encourage social networking/internet sites to be used in a beneficial and positive way
- 2.3 Safeguard staff, pupils, parents and members of the public from abuse on social networking sites
- 2.4 Safeguard the reputation of this school/academy; other schools/academies; the Local Authority and other organisations, from unwarranted abuse on social networking sites
- 2.5 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

Option 1 - strict ban on the use of social media at work

- 3.1 Staff are not allowed to access social media websites from the school/academy computers or devices at any time. [This includes [laptop/palm-top/hand-held] computers or devices distributed by the school/academy for work purposes.]
- 3.2 [The school/academy 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/academy 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) whilst ensuring that they continue to follow the requirements set out in this Policy.

- 3.4 If it is suspected that a member of staff has engaged in activity on a social media site in breach of this Policy and the **Guidance for Safer Working Practice for Adults who work with Children and Young People in Education Settings, Section 12, communication with pupils** (see link in 1.5) an investigation will be instigated which may result in disciplinary action and potentially dismissal. The school/academy disciplinary policy will be followed.

OR:

Option 2 - limited use of social media at work

- 3.1 Staff are allowed to make reasonable and appropriate use of social media websites from the school/academy computers or devices, provided that this does not interfere with their duties and should only be used during official breaks.
- 3.2 [However, the school/academy 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/academy 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 activity on a social media site in breach of this Policy and the **Guidance for Safer Working Practice for Adults who work with Children and Young People in Education Settings, Section 12, communication with pupils** (see link in 1.5) an investigation will be instigated which may result in disciplinary action and potentially dismissal. The school/academy 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 [Headteacher/Principal or other specified member of staff]. In such circumstances while contributing to the school/academy social media activities the same safeguards must be adhered to as would be with any other form of communication about the school/academy 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/academy 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:
- making offensive or derogatory comments relating to sex, gender reassignment, race (including nationality), disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief or age
 - using social media to bully another individual or
 - posting images that are discriminatory or offensive or links to such content

5. Inappropriate posts about staff

- 5.1 Where pupils post inappropriate or offensive material about staff they will be subject to the school/academy discipline policy.
- 5.2 Where pupils, parents or others post inappropriate or offensive material about staff the school/academy will approach third party agencies on their behalf in order to request that the material is removed.
- 5.3 Where appropriate the school/academy will contact the police or third party agencies.

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

- 6.1 The school/academy will monitor the use of computers/internet access on a regular basis to ensure compliance with relevant legislation and school/academy procedures.

7. Inappropriate use of social media/internet

The following list gives examples of use of social media/internet activities that the school/academy 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/academy 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/academy codes of conduct or existing policies
- 7.6 Discussing matters relating to school/academy, 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/academy when using social media/internet sites in a private context
- 7.8 Interacting or 'befriending' pupils via social media/internet sites [*unless properly authorised as part of 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 caution in interacting with any ex-pupils regardless of age)
- 7.11 Providing false or misleading information about the school/academy, its staff or pupils
- 7.12 Cyber-bullying
- 7.13 Inappropriately referencing other staff members, governors, students, parents or school/academy 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/academy complaints procedure). The above is a non-exhaustive list. It is intended to provide some examples of what the school/academy considers to be inappropriate. Each matter will be dealt with based on its own facts. School/academy policies will be followed where relevant (e.g. the school/academy disciplinary/bullying /complaints policy etc).

8. Social media in your personal life

- 8.1 The school/academy recognises that many people make use of social media in a personal capacity. While they are not acting on behalf of the school/academy, staff must be aware of the potential damage that could be caused to the school/academy if they are recognised as being a member of staff.
- 8.2 Staff may say that they work for the school/academy but their online profile (for example, the name of a blog or a Twitter name) must not contain the school/academy 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/academy 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/academy."
- 8.4 Any communications that staff make in a personal capacity through social media must not bring the school/academy 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/academy, 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 school/academy whistleblowing policy.

10. Child protection guidance

- 10.1 If the Headteacher/Principal (*or other member of staff*) receives a disclosure that a member of the school/academy 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/academy child protection

policy and whistleblowing policy as an allegation. In accordance with *the Department for Education's (DfE) [Working together to safeguard children 2023: statutory guidance](#)*, the Headteacher/Principal will refer all allegations of a safeguarding nature to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) before undertaking any internal investigations. [Contact at WMBC for MAST/Safeguarding/child protection concerns could be included here]. (The school/academy where it appears that there may have been criminal activity, will contact the Police where it is necessary to do so).

11. Staff/governors interacting with each other online

- 11.1 Due to the role of the governing body and its general responsibility for the conduct of the school/academy, it is sensible to maintain a certain degree of separation between governors and staff.
- 11.2 Teachers and other staff members should also exercise caution when communicating with work colleagues and governors on social networking sites, as this may create a conflict/difficult situation in the future.

12. Application of this Policy to school/academy governors

- 12.1 Whilst some aspects of this Policy are clearly more targeted at school/academy 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 Whilst governors are not subject to staff disciplinary procedures, there are steps available where a governor is deemed to have behaved in an inappropriate manner. The appropriate procedures would be followed in such cases. (Please contact Governor Support for further advice on this).

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.

14. Requirements for creating social media sites

Creation of Sites

- 14.1 Staff members participating in social media for work purposes are expected to demonstrate the same high standards of behaviour as when using other media or giving public presentations on behalf of the school/academy.
- 14.2 Prior to creating a site, careful consideration must be given to the purposes for using social media and whether the overall investment is likely to be worthwhile for achieving the proposed pedagogical outcome.
- 14.3 The proposed audience and level of interactive engagement with the site, for example whether pupils, school/academy staff or members of the public will be able to contribute

content to the site, must be discussed with the Headteacher/Principal (or appropriate manager).

- 14.4 Staff members must consider how much time and effort they are willing to commit to the proposed site. They should be aware that maintaining a site may not be a one-off task and could involve a considerable time commitment.
- 14.5 The Headteacher/Principal of relevant managers must take overall responsibility to ensure that enough resources are provided to keep the site refreshed and relevant. It is important that enough staff members are trained and are able to maintain and moderate a site in case of staff absences or turnover.
- 14.6 There must be a careful exit strategy and a clear plan from the outset about how long the site will last. It must not be neglected, creating a potential risk to the school/academy brand and image.
- 14.7 Consideration must also be given to how the success of the site will be evaluated to assess whether the site has achieved the proposed objectives.

15. Children and Young People

- 15.1 When creating social media sites for children and young people and communicating with them using such sites, staff members must at all times be conscious of their responsibilities; staff must always act in the best interests of children and young people.
- 15.2 When creating sites for children and young people, staff members must be alert to the risks to which young people can be exposed. Young people's technical knowledge may far exceed their social skills and awareness – they may post sensitive personal information about themselves, treat online 'friends' as real friends, be targets for 'grooming' or become victims of cyberbullying.
- 15.3 If children and young people disclose information or display behaviour or are exposed to information or behaviour on these sites that raises safeguarding or other concerns, appropriate authorities must be informed immediately. Failure to do so could expose vulnerable young people to risk of harm.
- 15.4 Staff members must ensure that the sites they create or contribute to for work purposes conform to the *Good Practice Guidance for the Providers of Social Networking and Other User Interactive Services* (Home Office Task Force on Child Protection on the Internet)
- 15.5 Staff members must also ensure that the webspace they create on third party sites comply with the site owner's minimum age requirements (this is often set at 13 years). Staff members must also consider the ramifications and possibilities of children under the minimum age gaining access to the site.
- 15.6 Care must be taken to ensure that content is suitable for the target age group and contributors or 'friends' to the site are vetted.
- 15.7 Careful thought must be given to the profile of young people when considering creating sites for them. For example, the internet may not be the best medium to communicate with vulnerable young people (or indeed any age group) receiving confidential and sensitive services from the school/academy/Local Authority. It may not be possible to maintain

confidentiality, particularly on third-party-hosted sites such as social networking sites, where privacy settings may not be strong enough to prevent breaches of confidentiality, however inadvertent. If in doubt, you must seek advice from your Headteacher/Principal (or appropriate manager).

16. Approval for Creation of or Participation in Webspace

- 16.1 The school/academy social media sites can be created only by or on behalf of the school/academy. Site administrators and moderators must be school/academy employees or other authorised people.
- 16.2 Approval for creation of sites for work purposes, whether hosted by the school/academy or hosted by a third party such as a social networking site, must be obtained from the staff member's line manager, (or appropriate manager) and Headteacher/Principal.
- 16.3 Approval for participating, on behalf of the school/academy, on sites created by third parties must be obtained from the staff member's line manager, (or appropriate manager) and Headteacher/Principal.
- 16.4 Content contributed to own or third-party hosted sites must be discussed with and approved by the staff member's line manager (or appropriate manager).
- 16.5 The Headteacher/Principal (or appropriate manager) must be consulted about the purpose of the proposed site and its content. In addition, the Headteacher/Principal (or appropriate manager's) approval must be obtained for the use of the school/academy logo and brand.
- 16.6 Staff must complete the Social Media Site Creation Approval Form (Appendix 1) and forward it to the Headteacher/Principal (or appropriate manager) before site creation.
- 16.7 Be aware that the content or site may attract media attention. All media enquiries must be forwarded to the Headteacher/Principal (or appropriate manager) immediately. Staff members must not communicate with the media without the advice or approval of the Headteacher/Principal (or appropriate manager).

17. Content of Webspace

- 17.1 School/Academy-hosted sites must have clearly expressed and publicised Terms of Use and House Rules. Third-party hosted sites used for work purposes must have Terms of Use and House Rules that conform to the school/academy standards of professional conduct and service.
- 17.2 Staff members must not disclose information, make commitments or engage in activities on behalf of the school/academy without authorisation.
- 17.3 Information displayed should be of educational value and accurate; remember what is published on the site will reflect on the school/academy image, reputation and services.
- 17.4 Stay within the law and be aware that child protection, privacy, data protection, libel, defamation, harassment and copyright law may apply to the content of social media.
- 17.5 Staff members must respect their audience and be sensitive in the tone of language used and when discussing topics that others may find controversial or objectionable.

- 17.6 Permission must be sought from the relevant people before citing or referencing their work or referencing service providers, partners or other agencies.
- 17.7 School/academy-hosted sites must always include the school/academy logo or brand to ensure transparency and confidence in the site. The logo should, where possible, link back to the relevant page on the school/academy website.
- 17.8 Staff members participating in the school/academy-hosted or other approved sites must identify who they are. They must disclose their positions within the school/academy on these sites.
- 17.9 Staff members must never give out their personal information such as home contact details or home email addresses on these sites.
- 17.10 Personal opinions should not be expressed on official sites.

18. Contributors and Moderation of Content

- 18.1 Careful consideration must be given to the level of engagement of contributors – for example whether users will be able to add their own text or comments or upload images.
- 18.2 Sites created for and contributed to by pupils must have the strongest privacy settings to prevent breaches of confidentiality. Pupils and other participants in sites must not be able to be identified.
- 18.3 The content and postings in school/academy-hosted sites must be moderated. Moderation is the responsibility of the team that sets up or initiates the site.
- 18.4 The team must designate approved Administrators whose role it is to review and moderate the content, including not posting or removal of comments which breach the Terms of Use and House Rules. It is important that there are enough approved moderators to provide cover during leave and absences so that the site continues to be moderated.
- 18.5 For third-party-hosted sites such as social networking sites used for work purposes, the responsibility for protection and intervention lies first with the host site itself. However, different sites may have different models of intervention and it is ultimately the responsibility of the staff member creating the site to plan for and implement additional intervention, for example in the case of content raising child safeguarding concerns or comments likely to cause offence.
- 18.6 Comments, text or imagery likely to cause offence, for example racist or homophobic insults, or likely to put a young person or adult at risk of harm must never be tolerated. Such comments must never be posted. Appropriate authorities, for example the Police or Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP), should be informed in the case of illegal content or behaviour.

NOTE: the school must amend this statement in line with their own rules. The safer alternative for schools is not to allow any outsiders to become friends of the site and to limit the site to known people only, in the case of adults, those who have undergone appropriate security checks.

- 18.7 Any proposal to use social media to advertise for contributors to sites must be approved by the Headteacher/Principal (or appropriate manager).
- 18.8 Approval must also be obtained from the Headteacher/Principal (or appropriate manager) to make an external organisation a 'friend' of the site.

I have read and understood and agree to comply with the Social Networking Policy.

Signed:

Print name:

Date:

Appendix 1

Social Media Site Creation Approval Form

Use of social media on behalf of insert school/academy name must be approved prior to setting up sites.

Please complete this form and forward it to the **Headteacher/Principal (or appropriate manager)**.

TEAM DETAILS

Department	
Name of author of site	
Author's line manager	

PURPOSE OF SETTING UP SOCIAL MEDIA SITE

(please describe why you want to set up this site and the content of the site)

What are the aims you propose to achieve by setting up this site?	
What is the proposed content of the site?	

PROPOSED AUDIENCE OF THE SITE

Please tick all that apply.

- ☐ Pupils of insert school/academy name (provide age range)
- ☐ Insert school/academy name staff
- ☐ Pupils' family members
- ☐ Pupils from other schools/academies (provide names of schools/academies)
- ☐ External organisations

- ☐ Members of the public
- ☐ Others; please provide details

PROPOSED CONTRIBUTORS TO THE SITE

Please tick all that apply.

- ☐ Pupils of **insert school/academy name (provide age range)**
- ☐ **Insert school/academy name** staff
- ☐ Pupils' family members
- ☐ **Pupils from other schools/academies (provide names of schools/academies)**
- ☐ External organisations
- ☐ Members of the public
- ☐ Others; please provide details

ADMINISTRATION OF THE SITE

Names of administrators (the site must have at least 2 approved administrators)	
Names of moderators (the site must have at least 2 approved moderators)	
Who will vet external contributors?	
Who will host the site?	☐ Insert school/academy name ☐ Third party; please give host name
Proposed date of going live	
Proposed date for site closure	
How do you propose to advertise for external contributors?	
If contributors include children or adults with learning disabilities how do you propose to inform and obtain consent of	

parents or responsible adults?		
What security measures will you take to prevent unwanted or unsuitable individuals from contributing or becoming 'friends' of the site?		
(Approval from relevant people must be obtained before the site can be created. The relevant managers must read this form and complete the information below before final approval can be given by the Headteacher).		
<u>Line Manager</u> I approve the aims and content of the proposed site.	Name	
	Signature	
	Date	
<u>Communications Manager</u> I approve the aims and content of the proposed site and the use of school/academy brand and logo.	Name	
	Signature	
	Date	
<u>Headteacher/Principal</u>	Name	
	Signature	
	Date	