Social Media Policy

V1

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Introduction

The aim of this policy on social media is to provide a framework that schools can adopt to enable employees to enjoy the benefits of social networking while understanding the standards of conduct expected by the trust. It is intended to minimise the risks that can impact on the wellbeing of staff, pupils and the reputation of the schools within The Trust.

The trust recognises and embraces the numerous benefits and opportunities that social media offers. While employees are encouraged to engage, collaborate and innovate through social media, they should also be aware that there are some associated risks, especially around issues of safeguarding, bullying and personal reputation. Staff should refer to the Social Media Guidance For Staff Appendix 1 at the end of this document.

This Policy was developed following consultation through the Oxfordshire HR Forum with the recognised trade unions and associations: NAHT, NASUWT, the National Education Union and Unison.

Consistency of treatment and fairness

The Trust is committed to ensuring consistency of treatment and fairness and will abide by all relevant equality legislation, i.e. Employment Rights Act 1996, Employment Relations Act 1999, Employment Act 2002, Part-Time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2000, Fixed Term Employees (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2002 and Equalities Act 2010/2012.

We take care to ensure consistency of treatment and fairness across all of the schools and operations in our Trust.

Purpose of the policy

The purpose of this policy is to encourage good practice, to protect the trust and its employees, and to promote the effective use of social media as part of the trust activities.

This policy covers personal and professional use of social media and aims to encourage its safe use by the school and staff.

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The policy applies regardless of whether the social media is accessed using the school's IT facilities and equipment, or equipment belonging to members of staff.

Personal communications via social media accounts that are likely to have a negative impact on professional standards or the school's reputation are within the scope of this policy.

This policy covers all staff members; employees, casual workers, volunteers and agency workers.

Roles, responsibilities and procedure

Employees should:

- be aware of their online reputation and recognise that their online activity can be seen by others including parents, pupils and colleagues on social media

- ensure that any use of social media is carried out in line with this policy and other relevant policies, ie those of the employer

- be aware that any excessive use of social media in school/college may result in disciplinary action

- be responsible for their words and actions in an online environment. They are therefore advised to consider whether any comment, photograph or video that they are about to post on a social networking site is something that they want pupils, colleagues, other employees of the trust, or even future employers, to read. If in doubt, don't post it!

Managers are responsible for:

- addressing any concerns and/or questions employees may have on the use of social media

- operating within the boundaries of this policy and ensuring that all staff understand the standards of behaviour expected of them.

Definition of social media

Social media is a broad term for any kind of online platform which enables people to directly interact with each other. It allows people to share information, ideas and views. Examples of social media include blogs, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Google+, Instagram,, Tik Tok, Flickr, WeChat, QZone, Tumblr, and YouTube. This list is not exhaustive.

Acceptable use

Employees should be aware that content uploaded to social media is not private. Even if you restrict it to 'friends', there is still capacity for it to be re-posted or distributed beyond the intended recipients. Therefore, employees using social media should conduct themselves with professionalism and respect at all times and should not intentionally or unintentionally bring the trust or their school into disrepute. Employees should not upload any content on to social media sites that:

- is confidential to the trust, the school or its staff

- amounts to bullying

- amounts to unlawful discrimination, harassment or victimisation

- brings the trust into disrepute (consideration will be given to whether this was a deliberate act)

- contains lewd, sexually explicit, threatening or similarly inappropriate or offensive comments, images or video clips

- undermines the reputation of the school and/or individuals

- is defamatory or knowingly false

- breaches copyright

- is in any other way unlawful.

Employees should be aware of both professional and social boundaries and must not therefore accept or invite 'friend' requests from pupils or ex-pupils under the age of 18 on their personal social media accounts such as Facebook. The only exception to this is where the employee is a parent or carer of a pupil or ex-pupil.

Similarly, employees should not accept or invite 'friend' requests from parents on their personal social media accounts unless a previous relationship/friendship exists, for example, the parent is a relative.

Employees should be aware that where a pre-existing relationship exists, this can lead to professional and social boundaries being blurred and they should exercise professional judgement at all times in relation to accepting requests and any subsequent social media activity.

All communication with parents via social media should be through the trust's social media accounts.

If a member of staff receives unsolicited communication via social media by any of the above, this should be reported to the Designated Safeguarding Lead without delay.

Employees should note that the use of social media accounts during lesson time is not permitted.

Safeguarding

The use of social networking sites introduces a range of potential safeguarding risks to children and young people and equally poses a risk to staff as a person in a position of trust and open to allegations.

In order to mitigate these risks, there are steps you can take to promote safety on line:

- You should not use any information in an attempt to locate or meet a child.
- Ensure that any messages, photos or information comply with existing policies.
- Further advice can be found in the appendix below.

Reporting safeguarding concerns

Any content or online activity which raises a safeguarding concern must be reported to the Designated Safeguarding Lead in the school.

Any online concerns should be reported as soon as identified, as urgent steps may need to be taken to support the child.

With regard to personal safeguarding, you should report any contact, harassment or abuse you receive online while using your work or personal accounts when related to school activity.

Reporting, responding and recording cyberbullying incident

Staff should never engage with cyberbullying incidents. If in the course of your employment with this trust, you discover a website containing inaccurate, inappropriate or inflammatory written material relating to you, or images of you which

have been taken and/or which are being used without your permission, you should immediately report this to the Designated Safeguarding Lead at your school.

Staff should keep any records of the abuse such as text, emails, voicemail, website or social media. If appropriate, screen prints of messages or web pages could be taken and the time, date and address of the site should be recorded.

Action by employer: inappropriate use of social media

- Following a report of inappropriate use of social media, the Trust Disciplinary Policy will be invoked and a senior manager will conduct a prompt investigation.

- If in the course of the investigation, it is found that a student submitted the material to the website, that student may be disciplined in line with the school's behaviour policy.

- Any invoking of the policies and associated procedures set out above will follow an assessment of whether the applicable policy applies. Section 43 of this policy sets out relevant policies which may be referred to

- The Investigating Officer, where appropriate, will approach the website hosts to ensure the material is either amended or removed as a matter of urgency. If the website requires the individual who is complaining to do so personally, the school will give their full support and assistance, seeking the support of the LADO and police if required.

- The member of staff will be offered full support and appropriate stress counselling.

Breaches of this policy

- Any member of staff suspected of committing a breach of this policy (or if complaints are received about unacceptable use of social networking that has potentially breached this policy) will be investigated in accordance with the FLT Disciplinary Policy. The member of staff will be expected to cooperate with the school's investigation which may involve:

  o handing over relevant passwords and login details

  o printing a copy or obtaining a screenshot of the alleged unacceptable content

- o determining that the responsibility or source of the content was in fact the member of staff

- o The seriousness of the breach will be considered, including the nature of the content, how long the content remained visible on the social media site, the potential for recirculation by others and the impact on the trust or the individuals concerned

- o Staff should be aware that actions online can be in breach of various trust policies and any online breaches of these policies may also be treated as conduct issues in accordance with the VAT Staff Code of Conduct and FLT Disciplinary Procedure

- o Where conduct is considered to be unlawful, the school will report the matter to the police and other external agencies

Monitoring and review

- If the manager reasonably believes that an employee has breached this policy, from time to time the school will monitor or record communications that are sent or received from within the trust's network.
- This policy will be reviewed on a bi-yearly basis and will be updated in accordance with the following, on an as-and-when-required basis:
  - o legislative changes
  - o good practice guidance
  - o case law
  - o significant incidents reported that require changes

Legislation

- Acceptable use of social networking must comply with UK law. In applying this policy, the trust will adhere to its rights, responsibilities and duties in accordance with the following:
  - o Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000
  - o General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) 2018
  - o The Human Rights Act 1998
  - o The Equality Act 2010
  - o The Defamation Act 2013

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Conclusion

- The internet is a fast moving technology and it is impossible to cover all circumstances or emerging media – the principles set out in this policy must be followed irrespective of the medium.

- When using social media, staff should be aware of the potential impact on themselves and the employer, whether for work-related or personal use; whether during working hours or otherwise; or whether social media is accessed using the employer's equipment or using the employee's equipment

- Staff should use discretion and common sense when engaging in online communication. There are some general rules and best practice in the appendix which staff may find helpful.

Related Policies

- Please see the following policies for additional information
    - Staff Code of Conduct
    - Disciplinary Policy
    - IT Acceptable Use Policy
    - Safer Working Practices
    - Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy (individual school policy)

Appendix 1: Social Media Guidance for Staff

Remember that anything you post online is not really private. Below are some common sense guidelines and recommendations that staff are advised to follow to ensure responsible and safe use of social media.

- Do not add pupils as friends or contacts in your social media accounts

- Follow this social media policy.

- Always maintain professional boundaries. Do not engage in discussion with pupils online unless through official school accounts.

- Think about the potential risks: professional boundaries of adding parents to your private social media accounts (refer to policy).

- Consider using an alternative name on sites such as Facebook to make it harder for pupils to find you. For example, some members use their partner's surname online but their own surname in school. For example, Miss Hayley Jane Pearce may choose to use Hayley Jane.

- Never post anything that is offensive or aggressive, even if you are angry or upset. It can easily be taken out of context.

- Remember humour is relative. For example, posting images and/or text about a recent stag or hen night may be deemed inappropriate. Likewise, a few 'lighthearted' comments and/or images about colleagues or students may not be perceived as such by either the subject(s) of the humour or the employer. The guiding rule is: if in doubt, don't post it.

- Make sure you regularly check and refresh your site page to ensure it is free of any inappropriate comments and/or images.

- If you are tagged in something on a social media platform that you consider inappropriate, use the remove tag feature to untag yourself.

- Be cautious of accepting 'friend requests' from people you do not really know. Simply being a 'friend' of your own Facebook friend does not mean that they should automatically be given access to your information.

- Review your profile information on all sites to ensure it is appropriate as it may be accessed by others such as colleagues, pupils, parents and potential employers.

- Check your privacy and security settings regularly, and keep your date of birth and home address to yourself. Identity theft is a growing crime and this kind of information could be used to gain access to your bank or credit card account.

- Ensure that any comments and/or images could not be deemed defamatory or in breach of copyright legislation.

- Never post any information and especially not photographs which can be used to identify a pupil.

- Do not use social media in any way to attack or abuse colleagues or air any other internal grievances.

- Do not post derogatory, defamatory, offensive, harassing or discriminatory content.

- Do not engage in any conduct (using personal insults, obscenities) which would not be acceptable in the workplace. As a member of staff who works in education, you are held to a higher standard of behaviour and this includes outside of the workplace. Please remember this at all times.

- Do not use social media to 'whistleblow' – raise concerns through the proper channels which would entitle you to legal protection (Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998).