

Social Media Statement-The challenge of social media and schools



Introduction

Social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, Snapchat etc.) has had widespread impact on the way in which we communicate and express our thoughts and opinions. There are clearly many benefits for us both as individuals and also as communities, and many of our schools are exploring how they might best harness the power of social media to engage even more closely with parents and pupils.

Unfortunately, we are also experiencing an increasing number of situations where social media has been the vehicle for inappropriate behaviour by parents.

We live in a society where we are proud of our right to freedom of speech and would not wish to suggest that this should be curtailed in any way. There are occasions however, when things said in the virtual world are at best unhelpful and, at worst, may constitute harassment, bullying or intimidation that could ultimately lead to Police involvement.

Use of social media sites by employees in school

It is possible that a proportion of our staff have their own social networking accounts. It is important that they protect their professional reputation and that of school, by ensuring that they use their personal sites in an appropriate manner. Staff will be advised to:

1. Familiarise themselves with social network sites privacy settings in order to ensure that information is not automatically shared with a wider audience and that, as a minimum, all privacy settings are set to 'friends only'
2. Ensure that they do not conduct or portray themselves, or allow friends to portray them, in a manner which may:
 - Bring the school into disrepute
 - Lead to parental complaints
 - Be deemed as derogatory towards the school and / or its employees
 - Be deemed as derogatory towards pupils, parents / carers or governors
 - Contravene current National Teaching Standards
3. Ensure that they do not form online friendships or enter into communication with parents / carers as this could lead to professional relationships being compromised
4. Ensure that they do not form online friendships or enter into communication with pupils as this could lead to professional relationships being compromised and / or safeguarding allegations being raised
5. Not post pictures of [without the Headteacher's consent] or negative comments about school events

Social media and pupil bullying

There have been a growing number of situations where schools have had to deal with a parent using social media to be unkind to others. What starts as something seemingly harmless takes no account of how those on the receiving end might feel nor does it recognise how quickly things can get out of control and become extremely unpleasant. Whilst things are most likely to have taken place off the school site and outside school hours, the resulting 'fallout' in such situations can have major implications for harmonious relationships within school and a

resulting negative impact on teaching and learning. If you have concerns that your child or family might be on the receiving end of hurtful social media posts please talk to your child's teacher in the first instance who will be able to seek additional advice and support as required.

Social media as a forum for parent's views.

The staff in our school work tremendously hard to provide the very best education for our pupils and always want to work in partnership with parents and the wider community. However, we recognise that there will be occasions where, for whatever reason, parents may not agree with a particular course of action or may have specific concerns. It is entirely natural to discuss school life and express our thoughts and opinions with others face to face or on the phone. Some of these conversations are now also being aired on social media and the person posting has little control over who might ultimately see it. Sadly, some of these comments and observations could cause offence if aired in the public domain, and may in some cases be intimidating or even slanderous.

Dealing with incidents of online [cyber] bullying

All cases of online bullying will be dealt with in accordance with the school's policies. The school can take action with reference to any incident that takes place outside school hours if it:

- Could have repercussions for the orderly running of the school
- Poses a threat to a member of the school community
- Could adversely affect the reputation of the school, or its employees / governors.

Where appropriate, legal action will be taken by the school's governors.

If postings are considered to be threatening or discriminatory then the Police may become involved and have the authority to seize mobile devices and contact service providers.

How can parents help?

- If you are posting on social media and it relates to the school, pupils or other parents, please check your facts, be considerate in the way in which you express things and avoid language that others might consider to be abusive, aggressive or threatening.
- Do not post images [photos and videos] of pupils other than your own children on social media sites unless they have the permission of parents of other children pictured
- Please do not refer to individual pupils or staff on social media.
- Please do not post malicious or fictitious comments on social media sites about any member of the school community
- If you have a significant concern about an aspect of school life, please talk to someone at the school before posting on social media.
- If you have a specific complaint, please follow the school's Complaints Policy which is available on the school website.

We have no wish to stifle debate or discourage parents expressing their views, but want to encourage and promote positive role models in both the digital world as well as the real world. Whilst our pupils may be developing the skills to use modern communication technologies, it is the partnership of schools and parents that can help them learn to use it wisely, safely and responsibly.

Adopted: March 2018