

Model Social Media Policy for School Employees

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1. Introduction

The widespread availability and use of social media applications bring opportunities to engage and communicate with each other in new ways. It is important that we understand that employees will use these technologies as they are becoming integral to modern life. Indeed, it is important that employees understand these technologies as children and young people are engaging in social media more than any other group in society and it significantly influences their lives.

Alongside these opportunities there are risks attached to the use of social media. Distribution of material cannot be controlled. Once posted to an initial target audience, material can be posted anywhere through the networks of each individual in that audience and beyond.

It is important to ensure that we consider the above in line with our duties in School and as part of the wider Wakefield Council, as well as our legal responsibilities and our reputation. It is also important that we encourage an understanding that online activity via social media is subject to all of the norms, protocols and regulations that apply to relationships in “real life”.

For example, our use of social media applications has implications for our duty to safeguard children, young people and vulnerable adults.

The policy requirements in this document aim to provide this balance to support individuals’ rights whilst providing a framework of good practice.

The use of social media, as with all other communication channels, should comply with the School Code of Conduct, Use of Electronic Equipment, and School E-Safeguarding and Acceptable Use policies. There is a temptation to treat social media completely differently than other channels, whereas in fact most of the principles and guidance are the same. Therefore employees should treat the use of social media with the same consideration, as they would do when communicating over the telephone, by email and by other means.

Within this document there are references to school which is a generic term for school, academy or similar establishment in which this policy is adopted.

Similarly, where there is a reference to Headteacher, this is a generic term for the person with management responsibility for this policy in school.

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2. Aims of the Policy

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that:

- employees are aware of expectations of appropriate use of social media applications;
- the School and the Council is not exposed to legal and governance risks;
- the reputation of the School and the Council is not adversely affected;
- safeguarding of children and young people is not threatened by use of social media.

3. Scope – who does the policy apply to

This Policy covers the use of social media applications by those school employees and agency workers who are under the direction of the Governing Body.

It does not apply to those Wakefield Council employees working in school who do not fall under the direction of the Governing Body. There are separate council policies, including a Code of Conduct, that relate to these employees and adherence to these policies will be managed by the appropriate service area within the Council.

The principles and social networking standards within this policy do apply to volunteers, governors and other third parties in school (including contractors and any Wakefield Council employees not under the direction of the Governing Body), referred to in this document as “Other School Representatives”.

Who?	Policy Applies?	General Principles and Standards Apply?
School employees and agency workers under the direction of the governing body	Yes	Yes
Wakefield Council employees working in school but not under the direction of the governing body	No	Yes
Volunteers	No	Yes
Governors	No	Yes
Other third parties including contractors	No	Yes

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The requirements of this policy apply to all uses of social media applications. It applies to the use of social media for both school and personal purposes, whether during working hours or otherwise. The policy applies regardless of whether the social media is accessed using school facilities and equipment or equipment belonging to members of staff.

For the purposes of this policy “Social media” is a type of interactive online media that allows parties to communicate instantly with each other or to share data in a public forum. This policy will also apply to any new or emerging technologies or systems which may develop in the future.

Social media applications include, but are not limited to:

- Social networking sites such as Facebook or Bebo
- Blogs, for example Blogger
- Online discussion forums, such as Ning
- Collaborative spaces, such as Wetpaint
- Media sharing services, for example YouTube
- “Microblogging” applications, for example Twitter.

Employees should bear in mind that information they share through social media applications, even if they are on “private” spaces, is 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 Code of Conduct.

4. Responsibilities

Managers/Headteachers

- Will ensure this policy document is communicated and made available to all staff. They will remind employees annually
 - to familiarise themselves with the policy
 - how to access a copy of the policy
- Will investigate potential breaches of this policy and take appropriate action under the disciplinary policy
- Will make other school representatives aware of the principles and social networking standards in this policy that apply to them.

Employees

- Will familiarise themselves with, and adhere to, the policy.

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Human Resources (HR)

- Will review and update this model policy as appropriate
- Will support headteachers and managers on this policy as appropriate in accordance with the school's contract for HR services.

5. Personal Use Of Social Media On School Or Council Equipment

We recognise that employees may work long hours and occasionally use social media for personal activities in school or by means of our computers, networks and other IT resources and communications systems.

We authorise such occasional use so long as it does not involve unprofessional or inappropriate content and does not interfere with your employment responsibilities or productivity (so not during paid working time).

Using our equipment for personal social media in work time, circulating chain letters or other spam is not permitted. Circulating or posting commercial, personal, religious or political solicitations, or promotion of outside organisations unrelated to the School's or Council's business are also prohibited.

6. Failure to Comply with the Policy

Any breach of this policy by an employee may result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal. Disciplinary action may be taken regardless of whether the breach is committed outside working hours, and regardless of whether our equipment or facilities are used for the purpose of committing the breach. Any employee suspected of breaching this policy will be required to co-operate with an investigation. This would be in accordance with any policies affecting the monitoring of electronic communications and in accordance with an employee's legal rights.

Judgement as to what specific examples constitute inappropriate use will be made by the Headteacher and Governors of the school on a case by case basis taking into account the circumstances of the case, reasonableness, what risks could reasonably be known at the time the offence took place and consistency.

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Examples of cases which may involve disciplinary action or dismissal include:

- posting comments on facebook about pupils or their parents which are deemed to be inappropriate and may divulge personal information;
- commenting about other colleagues at work or sending messages to them which could constitute harassment, discrimination, victimisation or bullying and are deemed to be inappropriate;
- posting comments about personal views of issues in the public domain which could lead the school and its community to lose confidence in the employee, for example encouraging anti-social behaviour likely to cause disruption to the local community, racist comments, sexist comments or any comments relating to the other protected characteristics identified under the Equality Act 2010.
- joining groups which are deemed to be inappropriate for employees of the school or council to be members of (such as where there is a clear conflict of interests between the group and the employee's professional role or the employer);
- inappropriate relationships with pupils or former pupils where there is a breach of professional boundaries arising from social media.

The policy is not intended to restrict all activity on social media however employees are asked to exercise caution and professional judgement about what they use it for, who they communicate with and subject matter.

Employees are advised to make full use of the security settings available within the systems but note that these cannot be guaranteed to provide protection against allegations being made or disciplinary action being taken.

Concerns about Safeguarding

In some circumstances an employee's use of social media may give rise to the concern that they may have:

- behaved in a way that has harmed a child or may have harmed a child or;
- possibly committed a criminal offence against a child or;
- behaved towards a child in a way that indicates he or she would pose a risk of harm if they work regularly or closely with children.

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In these circumstances the West Yorkshire Inter-Agency Safeguarding Procedures must be followed (www.proceduresonline.com/westyorksab) and a referral must be made to the Local Authority Designated Officer who is based within Wakefield Council's Safeguarding and Family Support Service. It is also possible to seek advice and consultation with the Local Authority Designated Officer prior to making a referral.

7. Principles

Employees must adhere to the following principles and other school representatives, although not specifically mentioned in the paragraphs below, should follow the same principles:

Safeguarding

Responsibilities for safeguarding apply equally to online behaviour as they do to all other behaviour.

Employees should carefully consider in each case the appropriateness of soliciting or accepting online relationships with pupils or ex- pupils of the school. In this respect, responsible and appropriate relationships with children should be considered with regard to the employee's role in school and be consistent with all other relationships with children.

See section 6 above about the action to be taken if there are concerns about safeguarding.

Respect

We expect that employees will not post any information online that could bring the School or Council into disrepute. They must respect pupils, colleagues, parents and other school users' rights to fair and equitable treatment. Abusive or hateful content will not be tolerated.

It is unacceptable to make derogatory or defamatory remarks about other employees, pupils or anyone else related to the school.

Confidentiality

All material posted on social media applications should respect data protection and confidentiality regulations, policies or statutes. Personal information of others including colleagues and pupils must not be placed online without the appropriate permissions.

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Political or Financial interests

Social media should not be used for any political or financial interests that may contravene other policies such as the Code of Conduct.

Illegal, Sexual or Offensive material

It is the opinion of the school that it is incompatible with the role of any employee to post any such material via social media. Therefore sourcing, sending, posting or other involvement in offensive material: sexually explicit, or offensive content related to the nine protected characteristics identified under the Equality Act 2010 (race, religion, sex, pregnancy and maternity, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnerships, disability, and age) will not be tolerated.

Representation of the School or Council

Employees must not post any School or Council information or logos online without the express permission of the Headteacher or other authorised personnel.

Employees must not breach copyright by, for example, using someone else's images or written content without permission or failing to give acknowledgement where permission has been given to reproduce something.

All employees are under a duty of care to avoid a situation arising where they are shown to be acting in conflict with the best interests of the school and should not criticise, damage or act in any ways against the best interest of the school.

Good Practice Protocols

It is advisable to follow certain protocols in personal use of social media:

- Avoid mentioning work, your opinions of your colleagues or processes and projects on your own private social media networks
- If there is reference to the School or the Council on a personal social media profile then ensure that there is a declaration on the profile or page that the views expressed are yours alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of the School or Council.
- Consider carefully whether it is appropriate to accept colleagues, parents or other school users as "friends" on your private social networks. It may be advisable to manage your online "friends" in social networks by creating

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friend groups then restricting access to certain information and photographs by particular groups.

- Avoid personal social media relationships with pupils and ex pupils.

It can be problematic to ban certain relationships online, for example a parent may also be a relation or a colleague may also be a spouse, but at all times the individual is responsible for ensuring that their online relationships are appropriate to their position in school and, given their choice of online relationships that they ensure the information posted online is appropriate to those relationships.

There may be occasions when there is a legitimate reason to join in a social media conversation personally, as a representative of the school, to set the facts straight; for example to correct some inaccurate information that has been posted relating to the school. This only applies where it is appropriate for the factual information to be in the public domain. In this case it is good practice to introduce themselves as an employee at the school, politely correct the information, and then sign off without getting involved in any debate taking place.

Communication with Children and Young People

Communication between children and adults should remain professional at all times.

- Do not share any personal information with a child or young person
- Do not request, or respond to any personal information from a child or young person, other than that which is appropriate as part of your professional role
- Ensure that all your communications are transparent and open to scrutiny
- Do not give your personal contact details to children including email, home or mobile telephone numbers unless the need to do so is agreed with senior management and parents/carers.
- Do not use social media communication channels to send personal messages to a child or young person.

If there is a legitimate, professional requirement to communicate on-line with children this communication should be conducted through the approved school secure e-mail system which is backed up and from which e-mails can be recovered if required

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Raising concerns

Other policies and procedures adopted by the school, such as those covering Whistleblowing, Grievance, and Bullying and Harassment should be used to raise any concerns about your treatment at work or any other concerns you may have. The use of social media to raise such concerns will be considered inappropriate.

8. Associated Documents

Social media should not be used in a way that breaches any of the school's other policies. This policy should be read in conjunction with the following documents:

- The School's Code of Conduct
- E-safeguarding and Acceptable Use Policies in school
- The Use of Electronic Equipment Policy
- The School's Disciplinary Policy
- Data Protection Policy

9. Acknowledgement

Sheffield City Council is acknowledged for allowing us to use and adapt their policy.

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Social Networking Standards

Below sets out the standards expected of all staff representatives when using social media:

DO

- **Act responsibly at all times.** Even if you do not identify your profession or place of work, please be aware that your conduct online could jeopardise any professional registration and/or your employment
- **Protect your own privacy.** Think about what kind of information you want to share online and who you want to share this with. Adjust your privacy settings accordingly.
- **Remember everything is public.** Even with the highest level of privacy settings, once something is online it can be copied and redistributed and it is easy to lose control of the information. Work on the assumption that everything you post online will be permanent and will be shared with others.
- **Take appropriate action if you are the target of abuse online.** If you are the target of bullying or abuse online you can take action in dealing with this, such as blocking individuals from interacting with you and reporting inappropriate activity.
- **Be considerate to your colleagues.** Pictures or information about colleagues should not be posted on social networking sites unless you have the agreement of the individual concerned. Always remove information about a colleague if they ask you to do so.
- **Respect the privacy of others.** If photographs are taken at an event then check whether those in attendance expect that any photos may appear on a public social networking site before posting. Remember it may not always be an appropriate way to share information whether work related or not.
- **Remember the benefits.** Used responsibly, social media can be accessed to keep up to date with a number of professions and information.

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DO NOT

- **Share confidential information online.** In line with the Data Protection Act 1998 employees should not share any child / family identifiable information online or any personal information about colleagues. In addition to this, any confidential information about the school should not be revealed online.
- **Build or pursue relationships with children, parents, families.** Even if the child / client or parent is no longer within your care, the school does not deem this as appropriate behaviour. If you receive a request from a child / client or parent then many sites allow you to ignore this request without the individual being informed to avoid any offence. If you are concerned about this in any circumstance, please discuss with your Manager.
- **Use social networking sites to inform professional practice.** There are some circumstances/job roles where this may be appropriate however careful consideration and discussions with management should be applied
- **Discuss work related issue online.** This takes into account conversations about parents, children, colleagues or anything else which may identify the school online and bring it into potential disrepute. Even if you think these conversations have been anonymised they are very likely to be deemed inappropriate.
- **Post pictures of children/young people/ their parents.** Never post pictures of clients / parents or their children online even if they have asked you to do this. Employees should never take pictures of parents and children unless they are relevant and within the boundaries of the school's policy on taking digital images. Permission from the subject and parents of children should always be obtained. ***If your mobile phone has a camera then this should not be used in the workplace. (This should be considered depending on the school's policy for taking digital images)***
- **Raise concerns about your work.** Social networking sites should never be used for raising or escalating concerns at work. If you have concerns then these should be raised through either discussing with your line manager or following the relevant policy/procedure for raising concerns at work.
- **Engage in activities online which may bring the Organisation into disrepute.** Think through what activities you take part in whilst online and what you do or say that may bring the school into disrepute. Any reports of this will be reviewed in line with their appropriateness.

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- **Be abusive to or bully other colleagues.** Social networking sites should not be used as a forum for abusive behaviour towards colleagues.
- **Post derogatory, defamatory or offensive comments about colleagues, the child / parents / clients / families, your work or school.** Everything posted on a social networking site should be deemed as open to the public and it is therefore unacceptable to use this as a forum for posting inappropriate comments.
- All of the above applies to both open and private sections of any social networking site employees identify themselves with.

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APPENDIX 2

Version History

Version: 1.0

Author: Jane Illsley

Date Approved: 31/7/14

Approved by: Helen Grantham

Date Issued: 31/7/14

Version Control (most recent first):

Version	Date Issued	Reason for Review	Key Amendments	Date Comp. Impact Assessment was Reviewed
1.0	31/7/14	Schools identified a need	Whole new policy	31/7/14

Details of Most Recent Comprehensive Impact Assessment	Date completed	28/4/14, approved 31/7/14
	Issues (if any)	None

Review date: 31/10/2016