



Social Media Policy

Our vision is to enable all to flourish.

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1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 The internet and social media provide a range of social media tools that allow users to interact with one another.
- 1.2 It is recognised that there are benefits to effectively using social media for business and personal purposes. This policy provides clarity to the Trust community about the way in which social media is used and sets out expectations as to an employee's conduct regarding social media.
- 1.3 It is vital that pupils, parents and the public have confidence in the Trust and its schools' decisions and services and that the reputation of the Trust and its schools and the confidentiality of information about pupils and staff is safeguarded. This policy seeks to ensure that school staff use social media responsibly and to avoid them inadvertently placing themselves in a situation where their conduct is called into question due to unacceptable use of social media.

2.0 Scope

- 2.1 For the purposes of this policy, social media is any type of interactive online media that allows parties to participate in interactive discussions and share information in a public forum. It is important to note that this may apply to some forums that are private but are shared or made public i.e., the policy may extend to 'closed groups' where a matter in breach of this policy is brought to the attention of the Trust or one of its schools.
- 2.2 Examples of some popular forums are X (formally Twitter), Facebook, Threads and LinkedIn, but social media also includes podcasts, open access online encyclopaedias, social bookmarking sites, blogs and video, live streaming forums and image-sharing websites such as YouTube, TikTok, Twitch and Instagram. It is impossible to list all relevant media as this is a constantly changing and growing area.
- 2.3 This policy applies to all paid employees of the Trust, volunteers, students on placement at a Trust school, members of the Trust Board, local governors and parents and carers. It also applies to school parent and teacher associations when using social media in relation to the school.
- 2.4 This policy covers personal use of social media as well as the use of social media for official Trust or school purposes, including sites hosted and maintained by and on behalf of the Trust or school.

3.0 Legal framework

- 3.1 Employees must remember that information they share through social media and networks, even on private accounts, is still subject to copyright, data protection and Freedom of Information legislation, the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006, and UK libel and defamation laws.
- 3.2 The Trust could be held vicariously responsible for acts of their employees in the course of their employment. For example, staff members who harass co-workers online (including sexual harassment) or who engage in cyberbullying or discrimination on the

grounds of any protected characteristic, or who defame a third party while at work may render the Trust liable to the injured party.

4.0 Social media relating to the Trust or its schools

- 4.1 Authorisation to share specific Trust or school business via communication channels which cannot be directly managed by the Trust or school (such as personal social media) must be sought from the employee's headteacher or line manager prior to sharing.
- 4.2 This includes opinions shared on social media that can be, or perceived to be, attributable to the Trust, its schools, its representatives and/or its decision-makers.
- 4.3 Sharing of any aspects of Trust or school business or relevant communications from the Trust or its schools via authorised social media platforms used and managed by the Trust or its schools must be approved by the relevant headteacher or line manager.
- 4.4 Any authorised messages must be constructed to be unambiguous, accurate, politically neutral, fair and transparent if they are to formally represent the Trust or its schools.

5.0 Creation of social media accounts by school staff or the central team

- 5.1 All social media services that are to be used for work purposes must be approved by the headteacher of each school in advance of any educational work being undertaken.
- 5.2 All social media services must be approved by the CEO in advance of any work being undertaken by the central team.

6.0 Personal use of social media by employees

- 6.1 It is accepted that employees and members of the Trust community will have their own social networking accounts. However, it is important that they protect their professional reputation, the reputation of the Trust and its schools and the privacy of colleagues, pupils and parents.
- 6.2 Employees are required to familiarise themselves with social network sites' privacy settings and are encouraged to make their settings 'private' in order to ensure that information is not automatically shared with a wider audience than intended e.g. on Facebook opting out of 'public' settings.
- 6.3 Employees must be aware that even with high privacy settings, their posts are never truly private as friends/connections could save or share these posts, so this policy may still apply even if the profile is private.
- 6.4 Employees must not conduct or portray themselves, or allow friends to portray them, in a manner which may:
 - bring the Trust or its schools into disrepute
 - lead to valid parental/carers complaints
 - be deemed as derogatory towards the Trust its schools and/or its employees
 - be deemed as derogatory towards pupils, parents/carers, Trustees or local governors

- bring into question their appropriateness to work with children (including behaviour that is illegal)
 - contravene current National Teacher Standards (or other relevant professional standards)
- 6.5 In addition to posts written by the employee, this can also include posts that the individual has shared, liked, retweeted etc. as well as tagged photographs where the content contravenes this policy.
- 6.6 Further to this, Trust employees should not:
- form online friendships or enter into communication with parents/carers as this could lead to professional relationships being compromised
 - form online friendships or enter into online communication with pupils as this could lead to professional relationships being compromised, and/or safeguarding allegations being raised
 - post pictures of or negative comments about their employment, Trust or school events (sharing information and posting pictures about Trust or school events should be done through the Trust or its school's authorised social media site(s) or with advance authorisation from the headteacher or CEO.
- 6.7 It is recognised that employees may be known in the community in which they work and may have connections to parents/carers of pupils on social media (either relatives or close friends). Employees in this situation are responsible for their own social media and hold such connections at their own risk. Breaches under this policy in relation to this type of connection are managed in the same way.

7.0 Further guidance on the use of social media

- 7.1 All employees and volunteers must be conscious at all times of the need to keep personal and professional lives separate on social media and should not:
- Put themselves in a position where there is an actual or perceived conflict between work for the Trust or school and their own personal interests.
 - Engage in activities involving social media which might risk bringing the Trust or its schools into disrepute.
 - Represent personal views as those of the Trust or its schools on any social media platform.
 - Discuss personal information about pupils, Trust or school business or other employees and other professionals interacted with as part of their role in the Trust.
 - Use social media and the internet in any way to attack, insult, abuse or defame pupils, their family members, carers, colleagues, other professionals, other organisations (e.g. OFSTED), the Trust, its schools, or other schools.
 - Unilaterally use social media as a communication channel about Trust or school business, even if that communication relates to matters which are

already cleared to be shared with parents (Communication to parents is managed through the channels that have been approved by the headteacher.)

- Share Trust intellectual property without express permission from the Headteacher for information created by the school or the executive leaders of the Trust for Trust resources and information.

7.2 Employees of the Trust should refrain from identifying themselves as employees of the Trust in their personal social media. This is to prevent information on these sites from being linked with the Trust or school and to safeguard the privacy of staff members, pupils and relatives of pupils.

7.3 It is recognised that personal use of social media can relate to professional life i.e. LinkedIn. However, employees identifying their place of work do so at their own risk and if this policy is breached in relation to those sites it is applied in the same way.

8.0 Breaches of the policy

8.1 Any breach of this policy may lead to disciplinary action being taken against the staff member(s) involved in line with the Trust's Conduct Policy.

8.2 Inappropriate use of social media by employees or volunteers should be referred to the headteacher or in the case of the centra team, the Head of Governance and People in the first instance so that appropriate action can be taken to protect confidential information and limit the damage to the reputation of the Trust or school. Where there has been a breach of confidential information, the breach must be reported to the Trust Data Protection Officer – see the Data Protection Policy for contact details.

8.3 A breach of this policy leading to breaches of confidentiality, or defamation or damage to the reputation of the Trust or school, including incidents of bullying or harassment (including sexual harassment) or any illegal acts or acts that render the Trust liable to third parties may result in disciplinary action and lead to summary dismissal from service.

8.4 Any illegal acts may be reported to the police and/or the relevant professional body.

9.0 Parents/carers (the 'wider' Trust and school community) on social media sites

9.1 It is important that Parents/Carers understand that they have a role and responsibilities with regard to their use of social media related to the school. Parents/carers will be communicated with regarding their use of social media (in particular when they or a child they are responsible for joins a Trust school) via the school website, letter and school newsletters particularly with regard to the following. The following bullets points set out the expectations of parents and carers when using social media:

- Parents/carers are asked not to post images (photos and videos) of pupils other than their own children on social media sites unless they have the permission of parents/carers of other children pictured.
- Parents/carers are asked to raise queries, concerns or complaints directly with the school rather than posting them on social media.

- Parents/carers should not post malicious or fictitious comments on social media sites about any member of the Trust or school community.
- 9.2 While the Trust or its schools cannot monitor all use of social media in the wider community, the communication to parents/carers aims to protect pupils and staff at the school and the confidentiality of information about pupils and staff.

10.0 Dealing with incidents of online (cyber) bullying

- 10.1 Cases of online bullying will be dealt with in accordance with the Trust's relevant policies and could lead to action being taken under the Trust Conduct Policy.
- 10.2 Serious breaches of this policy, for example incidents of bullying or harassment (including sexual harassment) of colleagues or social media activity that might cause serious damage to the Trust or its schools, may constitute gross misconduct and lead to summary dismissal.
- 10.3 The Trust can take action with reference to any incident that takes place outside an employee's working hours if it:
- 10.4 poses a threat to a member of the Trust or school community,
 - 10.5 could have repercussions for the orderly running of the Trust or its schools,
 - 10.6 could adversely affect the reputation of the school, or its employees/governors.
- 10.7 There are UK statutes that cover the use of Internet technology in relation to bullying.
- 10.8 Where cyber bullying involves pupils, it may be necessary to deal with this under a separate policy (e.g. the schools' Anti-Bullying policy).
- 10.9 Where appropriate, legal action may be taken by the Trust Board.