Social Media Policy

Fully adopted by

HEREFORDSHIRE PUPIL REFERRAL SERVICE

HPRS

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1. Introduction

Due to the widespread availability of social media this policy is to provide guidance on the use of social media and social networking and aims to:

- Set clear expectations of behaviour and practice regarding the use of social media/networking for work or personal use, whether during school/working hours or otherwise
- Establish clear expectations for the way members of the school community engage with each other online
- Give a clear message that unlawful or unsafe behaviour is unacceptable and that, following the outcome of an investigation, disciplinary or legal action may be taken
- Support safer working practice
- Minimise the risk of malicious or misplaced allegations made against adults who work with pupils
- Reduce the incidence of positions of trust being abused or misused
- Mitigate the risk of actions which may adversely affect the school's reputation

Please note that if any variations to the policy are made, you will need to consult with the recognised trade unions.

2. Scope

The policy applies to all staff (including teachers, support staff, and supply workers), as well as governors, contractors and volunteers. The word 'staff' is used in this document to mean all of these groups. All staff must familiarise themselves with this social networking policy and any queries referred to the Headteacher.

The policy covers use of social networking for school related purposes as well as social networking outside work and supplements the school's existing policies on employee conduct, discipline, bullying/harassment, e-mail and internet use, data protection and safeguarding. All policies are available on request from the School Office.

3. What is social media?

Social media is a term used to include all technologies that allow individuals to communicate and share information (including photos and video). This includes group messaging services such as WhatsApp. Social media activities may include, but are not limited to:

- Maintaining a profile page on social networking sites such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), LinkedIn, Instagram, SnapChat and YouTube
- Writing or commenting on a blog, whether it is your own or the blog of another person
- Taking part in discussions on web forums or message boards
- Leaving product or service reviews on business websites or customer review websites
- Taking part in on line polls
- Posting or commenting on videos, podcasts

4. Guiding principals

When using social media employees should be honest, straightforward and respectful, posts or comments should not be abusive, or insulting to other employees, the school, the governing body, parents or pupils, contractors or suppliers. The lines between public and private can become blurred so assume everything written is permanent and may be viewed by anyone at any time. Employees should also assume that everything can be traced back them personally as well as colleagues, the school, partners and customers. Any communications, even those on private spaces may be made available - intentionally or otherwise to an audience wider than that originally intended. Employees must also operate with the school's and (where appropriate) Herefordshire Council's Equality and Safeguarding policies. Policies are available from the School Office or HR.

5. Sexual Harassment on Social Media

Online sexual harassment will not be tolerated including any form of unwanted sexual comments, images or behaviour on social media platforms.

Examples may include, sharing sexually explicit images, making sexual comments about someone's appearance, sending unwanted sexual messages, sharing sexually suggestive jokes or posting sexually suggestive content about a colleague. Refer to policy HR032 SCH Sexual Harassment Policy and HR004 Grievance Policy

Any employee found engaging in sexual harassment on social media will face disciplinary action, which may include dismissal in serious cases.

6. Terms of Use

All proposals for social networking applications as part of a school service (Whether hosted by the school or a third party) must be approved by the headteacher.

The school does not allow access to social networking sites from its computers for personal use at any time.

The school reserves the right to limit access to any site.

The following terms should be adhered to at all times, including during periods of leave.
Employees should ensure content, links to other content, and content that they have liked, shared or endorsed does not:
- Interfere with work commitments
- Contain libellous, defamatory, bullying or harassing content
- Contain breaches of copyright and data protection
- Contain material of an illegal, sexual or offensive nature
- Include confidential information to the employer
- Bring the school, governors, pupils, parents or employees into disrepute or compromise the employer's reputation or brand
- Use the employer to endorse or promote any opinion, product or political cause

If content published by you or others implicates you in the breach of these terms, it may lead to an investigation and disciplinary action in accordance with the school Disciplinary Policy. Employee should be mindful that they have a duty to act in good faith and in the best interests of the employer under UK law. The school will not tolerate criticisms posted in messages in the public domain, blogs about the employer or any person connected to the company.

7. Personal use of Social Media by employees

It is recommended that employees make their private social media profiles unidentifiable to pupils, although it is accepted that many employees will use sites such as X (formerly Twitter) or LinkedIn for professional purposes.
The school expects all staff, including governors and volunteers, to consider the safety of pupils and the risks (reputational and financial) to the school when using social media channels, including when doing so in a personal capacity. Staff are also responsible for checking and maintaining appropriate privacy and security settings of their personal social media accounts.

If an employee is in any doubt as to what is or is not acceptable they should seek advice from the headteacher.
When using social media, staff **must not**:

- Use personal accounts to conduct school business
- Complain about the school, individual pupils, colleagues or parents/carers
- Reference or share information about individual pupils, colleagues or parents/carers
- Post images of pupils
- Express personal views or opinions that could be interpreted as those of the school
- Link their social media profile to their work email account
- Use personal social media during timetabled teaching time
- Must never access or use the sites of pupils or accept an invitation to "friend" a pupil at the school where they are working (this includes past pupils up to the age of 18). Personal communications are considered inappropriate and unprofessional and make staff vulnerable to allegations.

Through their use of social media employees:

- Should always show respect to anyone they may come into contact with on a professional basis
- Should be aware that when sharing posts of others that by forwarding or sharing such posts may be seen as giving tacit approval to opinions expressed in the post which could bring the school / employer or other employees into disrepute
- Must be aware of and apply caution when posting other's personal details online, this should only be done with consent as such details have the potential to reach pupils, parents and friends having access to staff outside of the school environment. This also reduces the risk of theft by third parties.
- Need to review their accounts to ensure that the information available publically about them is accurate and appropriate. This includes any photographs that may cause embarrassment to themselves and the school if they were to be published outside of the site.
- Must not disclose information which may be in breach of the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) in relation to themselves or the school.
- Confidentiality must be considered at all times. Social networking sites have the potential to discuss inappropriate information and staff must ensure they do not put any confidential information on their site about themselves, their employment, their employer, their colleagues, pupils or members of the public.
- Should ensure that when they are communicating about others, even outside of work, they give due regard to the potential for defamation of character. Making allegations on social media/networking sites (even in employees own home in their own time) about other employees, pupils or other individuals connected with the school, or another school/ Herefordshire Council could result in informal/formal action being taken following investigation.
- Need to adhere to the requirements of Equality legislation in online communications
- Staff must never post, like, share or endorse derogatory remarks or offensive comments on-line or engage in online activities which may bring the school or Herefordshire Council into disrepute.
- Some social networking and web based sites have the option to fill in data regarding your user profile which may include job title, place of work etc. As a member of staff, you must be mindful that providing this information could be used to damage the reputation of the school, the profession or the local authority. Additionally, your personal safety could also be at risk by disclosing this information.
- Staff must not place inappropriate photographs on any social networking space, or post any indecent remarks.
- If a member of staff receives messages on a social networking site that they think could be from a pupil they must report it as soon as possible to their line manager/ head teacher.
- If a student does gain access to the profile of school staff by fraudulent means (impersonation or hacking) senior leadership should be informed immediately. Appropriate action and support will be provided.
- Where relationships exist between school staff and personal friends who are parents at the school, social networking is acceptable but caution must be exercised so that professional standards are maintained and individuals do not compromise themselves or the school.
- Staff must not disclose any information about the school/ local authority that is not already in the public domain.

- Staff are advised not to write about their work but where employees choose to do so, they should make it clear that the views expressed are their only and do not represent the views of the employer/ local authority. However all other aspects of this policy must be adhered to when making reference to the workplace.
- Staff should not use language which may be deemed offensive to others when using social media/ networking sites.
- Staff should report any inappropriate content to their line manager or headteacher as soon as possible.

If an employee is in any doubt as to what is or is not acceptable in relation to the Policy, they should seek advice from the headteacher.

8.   Protection of personal information

- Staff must ensure that they do not use school ICT equipment for personal use, e.g. cameras or computers.
- Staff must keep their personal phone numbers private and not use their own mobile phones to contact pupils or parents.
- Staff must never share their work log-ins or passwords with other people.
- Staff must not give their personal e-mail addresses to pupils or parents. Where there is a need for homework to be sent electronically the school e-mail address should be used.
- Staff must keep a record or their phone's unique international mobile equipment identity (IMEI) number and keep their phone secure whilst on school premises.
- Staffs are advised to understand who is allowed to view the content on their pages of the sites they use and how to restrict access to certain groups of people.

9.   Communication between pupils and school staff

- Communication between pupils and staff, by whatever method, should take place within clear and explicit professional boundaries.
- This includes the wider use of technology such as mobile phones, text messaging, e-mails digital cameras, videos, web-cams, social media, websites and blogs.
- Where appropriate, the school will provide a work e-mail address for communication between staff and pupils
- Staff must not request, or respond to, any personal information from a pupil, other than that which has been approved by the headteacher as part of staff member's professional role.
- Staff must ensure that all communications are transparent and open to scrutiny. They must also be circumspect in their communications with pupils so as to avoid any possible misinterpretation of their motives or any behaviour which could be construes as 'grooming' in the context of sexual offending.
- Staff must not give their personal contact details to pupils including e-mail, home or mobile telephone numbers.
- E-mail or text communications between an adult and a pupil outside agreed protocols may lead to disciplinary and/or criminal investigations. This also includes communications through internet based web sites. Internal e-mail systems should only be used in accordance with the school's policy.
- Staff should also be familiar with the code of conduct policy and the requirement to complete a declaration form for any social media / networking relationships with students outside of work.

10.   Social Contact

- Staff must not establish or seek to establish social contact via social media / other communication technologies with pupils for the purpose of securing a friendship or to pursue or strengthen a relationship.
- There will be occasions when there are social contacts between pupils and staff, where for example the parent and teacher/member of staff are part of the same social circle. These contacts however, will be easily recognised and openly acknowledged.
- There must be awareness on the part of those working with pupils that some social networking contacts, especially where these are not common knowledge, can be misconstrued as being part of a grooming process.

This can also apply to social networking contacts made through outside interests or through the staff member's own family.

11.   Access to inappropriate images and internet usage

There are no circumstances that will justify adults possessing indecent images of children. Staff who access and possess links to such websites will be viewed as a significant and potential threat to children. Accessing, making and storing indecent images of children are illegal. This will lead to criminal investigation and the individual being barred from working with children, if proven.

12.   Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying can be defined as 'the use of modern communication technologies to embarrass, humiliate, threaten or intimidate an individual in the attempt to gain power and control over them.'

Cyberbullying can seriously impact on the health, well-being and self-confidence of those targeted. It may also have a significant impact on the person's home and work life. Dealing with incidents quickly and effectively is essential.
It is important that the whole school community understands the definition of cyberbullying and why it is unacceptable.

Prevention activities are key to ensuring that staff are protected from the potential threat of cyberbullying and all staff are reminded of the need to protect themselves from such a threat. Following the advice contained in this policy should reduce the risk of personal information falling into the wrong hands.

If cyberbullying does take place, staff should keep records of the abuse, text, emails, website or instant message and should not delete texts or emails. Employees are advised to take screen prints of messages or web pages and be careful to record the time, date and web address of the site.

Staff are encouraged to report all incidents of cyberbullying to their line manager or the Headteacher and not to personally engage in or try to deal personally with cyberbullying incidents. All such incidents will be taken seriously and managed according to current policies, taking into account the wishes of the person who has reported the incident.

Where pupils are found to have made malicious or unfounded claims against staff, appropriate disciplinary processes may be actioned, treated similarly to cases of physical assaults.

Staff may wish to seek support of their trade union or professional association representatives or another colleague to support them through the process; particularly should they feel that a cyberbullying incident has not been dealt with satisfactorily or if they find it difficult to report instances of cyberbullying to their line manager or Headteacher.

Staff may also request to have access to the Occupational Health Counselling Service.

13.   Noncompliance

Under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA), the Headteacher can exercise their right to monitor the use of, and remove access to the school's information systems and internet, where they believe:

- unauthorised use may be taking place;
- to ensure compliance with regulatory practices;
- to ensure standards of service are maintained;
- to prevent or detect crime;
- to protect the communication system
- to pick up messages when someone is away from school.

Any monitoring will adhere to GDPR requirements and if unauthorised use of social networking sites is detected then, subject to investigation, disciplinary action may be taken.

If any instances of inappropriate use of social networking sites are brought to the attention of the Headteacher, a full investigation will be undertaken in accordance with all relevant policies. There may be instances where the School or Herefordshire Council will be obliged to inform the police or external agencies of any activity or behaviour for which there are concerns as to its legality.

Where a potential criminal offence has been identified, and reported to the police, the school will ensure that an internal investigation does not interfere with police enquiries. Safeguarding allegations will be referred to the LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer).

Any breach of this guidance is defined as misconduct and will lead to disciplinary action being taken in accordance with current policy and legislative procedures. This could ultimately result in dismissal and/or police action.
Any inappropriate social use of the internet outside the workplace could also result in disciplinary action if it brings the school's reputation into disrepute or exposes it to potential liabilities.

14.   Further training and guidance documents

The School will provide staff with information and professional development opportunities to assist in understanding, preventing and responding appropriately to cyberbullying. It is important to understand child protection and other legal issues relating to cyberbullying.

All staff should also familiarise themselves Safe to Learn Cyberbullying Guidance. This can be found online at:
https://www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/attachment/cyberbullying.pdf

14.   Document Classification

Version log

Version	Status	Date	Description of change	Reason for change
0.01	Draft	22.9.16	New Policy	New Policy
2.0	Final	October 2020	Updated hyperlinks and names of social media platforms	Update review
3.0	Final	January 2025	Section 1 - updated & new points included Section 3 - definition updated Section 6 – updated and additional bullet points Section 7 – updated Section 12 – Updated to include reference to RIPA	Update review

Consultation Log

Date sent for consultation	Consultees
January 2025	<u>Herefordshire Council</u> Liz Farr - Service Director, Education, Skills and Learning <u>Schools/Academies</u> Rachel Ussher – Head teacher – Ledbury Primary School Paul Jennings – Head teacher - Fairfield High School Helen Rees – Head teacher – Leominster Primary School Bev Blower – Executive Head - The Herefordshire PRU Tom Wiliams – Head teacher – The Bishop of Hereford's Bluecoat School Lyndsey Manning – Head teacher Trinity Primary School Steven Kendrick – Ashfield Park Primary School Tracey Kneale – CEO & Executive Head teacher, Fern Academy Trust Nikki Gilbert, Head teacher, Westfield Special School Alex Davies, CEO Orchard MAT <u>Hoople Ltd (HR Services)</u> Julie Davies - HR Services Manager Julie Bridgewater- Senior HR Business Partner <u>Trade Unions</u> Chris Lewandowski (NASUWT) Julie Turner (NASUWT) Paul Deneen (NEU) Ian Taylor (NAHT) Carol Rushton/Louise Hatswell (ASCL) Rachael Lynch (Community TU) Elaine King (GMB) David Stevens/Helen Astley (UNISON)