

# Social Media and Networking Policy

PRIMARY  
ADVANTAGE

SCHOOLS ACHIEVING  
MORE TOGETHER

Primary Advantage

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## 1. Objectives

This policy sets out the Primary Advantage Federation policy on social networking.

New technologies are an integral part of our lives and are powerful tools which open up teaching and learning opportunities for school staff in many ways. This document aims to:

- Assist school staff working with children to work safely and responsibly with the internet and other communication technologies and to monitor their own standards and practice
- Set clear expectations of behaviour and/or codes of practice relevant to social networking for educational, personal or recreational use
- Give a clear message that unlawful or unsafe behaviour is unacceptable and that, where appropriate, disciplinary or legal action will be taken
- Support safer working practice
- Minimise the risk of misplaced or malicious allegations made against adults who work with pupils
- Reduce the incidence of positions of trust being abused or misused

Whilst every attempt has been made to cover a wide range of situations, it is recognised that this policy cannot cover all eventualities. There may be times when professional judgements are made in situations not covered by this document, or which directly contravene the standards outlined in this document. It is expected that in these circumstances staff will always advise the Headteacher<sup>1</sup> of the justification for any such action proposed or already taken. The Headteacher will in turn seek advice from HR where appropriate.

## 2. Links to other policies

This policy should also be reviewed alongside the E-Safety Policy, Anti-Bullying Policy and Safeguarding Policy.

## 3. Scope

This document applies to all staff who work within the Primary Advantage Federation as adopted by the Business and Finance Committee. This includes teachers, therapists, support staff, supply staff, administration staff, site staff, governors, volunteers and contractors.

It should be followed by any adult whose work brings them into contact with pupils. References to staff should be taken to apply to all the above groups of people in schools. Reference to pupils means all pupils at the school including those over the age of 18.

This policy should not be used to address issues where other policies and procedures exist to deal with them.

## 4. Status

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this policy Headteacher also refers to Executive Headteacher and Head of School.

This document does not replace or take priority over other policies such as the school's codes of conduct, dealing with allegations of abuse and other policies issued around safeguarding or IT issues (email, ICT and data protection policies), but is intended to both supplement and complement any such documents.

## 5. Principles

- Adults who work with pupils are responsible for their own actions and behaviour and should avoid any conduct which would lead any reasonable person to question their motivation and intentions.
- Staff in schools should work and be seen to work, in an open and transparent way.
- Staff in schools should continually monitor and review their practice in terms of the continually evolving world of social networking and ensure they follow the guidance contained in this document.

## 6. Safer Social Media Practice in Schools

### What is social media?

For the purpose of this policy, social media is the term commonly used for websites which allow people to interact with each other in some way – by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests. Social networking websites such as Facebook, Twitter, Friendster and MySpace are perhaps the most well known examples of social media but the term also covers other web based services such as blogs, video and audio podcasts, wikis, message boards, photo document and video sharing websites such as YouTube and micro blogging services such as Twitter. This definition of social media is not exhaustive as technology develops with new ways of communicating advancing every day. An example of this is the use of mobile application software. Please see examples of mobile applications in section 12.

For the purpose of this document the terminology Social Media is not exhaustive and also applies to the use of communication technologies such as mobile phones, cameras, iPads/tablets/Apple Watch or other handheld devices and any other emerging forms of communications technologies.

## 7. Overview and expectations

- All adults working with pupils have a responsibility to maintain public confidence in their ability to safeguard the welfare and best interests of pupils. It is therefore expected that they will adopt high standards of personal conduct in order to maintain the confidence and respect of their colleagues, pupils or students, public in general and all those with whom they work. Adults in contact with pupils should therefore understand and be aware that safe practice also involves using judgement and integrity about behaviours in places other than the work setting.
- The guidance contained in this policy is an attempt to identify what behaviours are expected of schools' staff who work with pupils. Anyone whose practice deviates from this document and/or their professional or employment-related code of conduct may bring into question their suitability to work with children and young people and may result in disciplinary action being taken against them.
- School staff should always maintain appropriate professional boundaries and avoid behaviour, during their use of the internet and other communication technologies, which might be misinterpreted by others. They should report and record any incident with this potential.

## 8. Safer online behaviour

- Managing personal information effectively makes it far less likely that information will be misused.
- In their own interests, staff need to be aware of the dangers of putting personal information onto social networking sites, such as addresses, home and mobile phone numbers. This will avoid the potential for pupils or their families or friends having access to staff outside of the school environment. It also reduces the potential for identity theft by third parties.
- All staff, particularly new staff, should review their social networking sites when they join the school to ensure that information available publicly about them is accurate and appropriate. This includes any photographs that may cause embarrassment to themselves and the school if they are published outside of the site.
- Staff should never 'friend' a pupil at the school where they are working onto their social networking site.
- Staff should never use or access social networking sites of pupils and should never accept an invitation to 'friend' a pupil.
- Confidentiality needs to be considered at all times. Social networking sites have the potential to discuss inappropriate information and employees need to ensure that they do not put any confidential information on their site about themselves, their employer, their colleagues, pupils or members of the public.
- Employees need to ensure that when they are communicating about others, even outside of work, that they give due regard to the potential for defamation of character. Making allegations on social networking sites (even in their own time and in their own homes) about other employees, pupils or other individuals connected with the school, or another school, or the Local Authority could result in formal action being taken against them. This includes the uploading of photographs which might put the school into disrepute.
- Staff are also reminded that they must comply with the requirements of equalities legislation in their on-line communications.
- Staff must never post derogatory remarks or offensive comments on-line or engage in on-line activities which may bring the school or Local Authority into disrepute.
- Some social networking sites and other web-based sites have fields in the user profile for job title etc. If you are an employee of a school and particularly if you are a teacher, you should not put any information onto the site that could identify either your profession or the school where you work. In some circumstances this could damage the reputation of the school, the profession or the local authority.

## 9. Protection of personal information

- Staff should ensure that they do not use school ICT equipment for personal use, e.g. camera or computers.
- Staff should keep their personal phone numbers private and not use their own mobile phones to contact pupils or parents.

- Staff should never share their work log-ins or passwords with other people.
- Staff should not give their personal e-mail addresses to pupils or parents. Where there is a need for communication to be sent electronically the school e-mail address should be used.
- All telephone messages and conversations should take place on the school phone System.
- Staff should keep a record of their phone's unique international mobile equipment identity (IMEI) number and keep their phone secure whilst on school premises.
- All mobile phones should be switched off whilst staff are on duty – other than in exceptional circumstances which have been discussed and agreed with a member of the senior leadership team.
- Staff 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.
- Staff should not use personal cameras and mobile phones etc to take images of pupils.

#### **10. Communication between pupils / schools 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, websites and blogs.
- The school provides a work number and e-mail address for communication between staff and pupils. Staff should not give their personal mobile numbers or personal e-mail addresses to pupils or parents.
- Staff should not request, or respond to, any personal information from a pupil, other than that which might be appropriate as part of their professional role.
- Staff should ensure that all communications are transparent and open to scrutiny. They should also be careful in their communications with pupils so as to avoid any possible misinterpretation of their motives or any behaviour which could be construed as 'grooming' in the context of sexual offending.
- 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.

#### **11. Social contact**

- Staff should 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 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.

## 12. Examples of mobile applications used outside of the school environment

A mobile application (app) is a computer program designed to run on smartphones, tablet computers and other mobile devices. The term "app" is a shortening of the term "application software". Adults as well as pupils may use these apps on their personal phones.

It is important that parents and teachers are aware of the type of Social Networking Apps that are commonly used.

Connecting with pupils through apps

- Staff should never 'friend', 'follow' or 'connect' with a pupil or parent at the school where they are working on social apps.
- Staff should never use or access social apps of pupils or parents and should never accept an invitation from a pupil.
- Staff should not share photos, videos, audio clips with pupils or parents in the school they are working in.

## 13. 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 is illegal. This will lead to criminal investigation and the individual being barred from working with children, if proven.
- Staff should not use equipment belonging to their school/service to access any pornography; neither should personal equipment containing these images or links to them be brought into the workplace. This will raise serious concerns about the suitability of the adult to continue to work with children.
- If a member of staff receives an inappropriate images or web link this must be immediately reported to the Headteacher. If a member of staff receives an image while away from the school premises this should be notified to the Headteacher as soon as possible, or alternatively, the police.
- Adults should ensure that pupils are not exposed to any inappropriate images or web links. Schools and schools' staff need to ensure that internet equipment used by pupils have the appropriate controls with regards to access e.g. personal passwords should be kept confidential.
- Where indecent images of children are found by staff, the police and Local Authority Safeguarding Unit should be immediately informed. Schools should not attempt to investigate the matter or evaluate the material themselves, as this may lead to evidence being contaminated which in itself can lead to a criminal prosecution.
- Where other unsuitable material is found, which may not be illegal but which raises concerns about that member of staff, either Local Authority or Local Authority Safeguarding Unit should be informed and advice sought. The school should not attempt to investigate or evaluate the material themselves until such advice is received.

#### 14. 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.’
- Prevention activities are key to ensuring that staff are protected from the potential threat of cyberbullying. All employees are reminded of the need to protect themselves from the potential threat of cyberbullying. Following the advice contained in this guidance should reduce the risk of personal information falling into the wrong hands.
- If cyberbullying does take place, employees should keep records of the abuse, text, e-mails, website or instant message and should not delete texts or e-mails. Employees are advised to take screen prints of messages or web pages and be careful to record the time, date and place of the site.
- Staff are encouraged to report all incidents of cyberbullying to their line manager or the Headteacher. All such incidents will be taken seriously and will be dealt with in consideration of the wishes of the person who has reported the incident. It is for the individual who is being bullied to decide whether they wish to report the actions to the police.



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| Policy amended                                 | November 2015<br>October 2018 |
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The Business and Finance Committee has reviewed this policy with careful consideration of our approach to equalities as outlined in the Equalities Policy, December 2016.

We would like to acknowledge the work of other colleagues in drafting this policy. We have drawn on a range of sources including policies from other schools, good practice guides, published schemes and LA and Statutory guidelines where appropriate.

