



Excellence for All

## **SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY**

### **Introduction**

The widespread availability and use of social networking applications bring opportunities to communicate with various groups in new ways. Whilst recognising the benefits which using social media brings, this policy sets out the principles designed to ensure that all members of the school community use social media responsibly so that the confidentiality of students, staff and the reputation of the school are safeguarded. Staff members must be conscious at all times of the need to keep their personal and professional lives separate when using social media.

This policy covers personal use of social media as well as the use of social media for official school purposes. The policy applies to personal media platforms such as networking sites (e.g. Facebook, googlechat), blogs, microblogs such as Twitter, chatrooms, forums, podcasts, open access, online encyclopaedias such as Wikipedia and content sharing sites such as flickr and YouTube. However, this list is not exhaustive and new on-line platforms are to be considered automatically covered.

This policy also applies to online message boards/forums and comments under news items and other articles.

The internet is fast moving technology and it is impossible to cover all circumstances or emerging media therefore the principles set out in this policy must be followed closely, irrespective of the medium or platform.

### **Purpose of policy and guidance**

To minimise the reputational, legal and governance risks to the school and its employees, arising from use of social media by members of the school community in both personal and professional capacities.

To enable the safe use of social media for the purposes of communication and engagement.

To ensure a consistent approach is applied across the school.

To identify responsibilities of the school and employees in line with the Staff Handbook and the following policies:

- Safeguarding
- Communication
- GDPR
- Dignity at Work
- Electronic Communication (Acceptable Use)

## Legal implications

Staff should be aware that there are a number of legal implications associated with the inappropriate use of social media. Liability can arise under the laws of:

- Defamation
- Copyright
- Contract
- Human Rights
- Protection from harassment
- Criminal Justice
- Data Protection
- Discrimination

For purposes of this policy the term 'public' is used to refer to those outside of the immediate school community (Employees, contractors and students) and includes (but not exclusively) parents/carers and ex-students.

## Policy

It is recognised that social networking has the potential to play an important part in many aspects of school life, including teaching and learning, external communications and continuing professional development. This policy therefore encourages the responsible and professional use of the Internet and social media to support educational delivery and professional development.

The Internet provides an increasing range of social media tools that allow users to interact with each other. Whilst recognising the important benefits of these media for new opportunities for communication, this policy sets out the principles that school staff, governors and contractors are required to follow when using social media.

It is essential that students, parents and the public at large have confidence in the school's decisions and services. The principles set out in this policy are designed to ensure that staff members use social media responsibly so that confidentiality of students and staff members and the reputation of the school are safeguarded. In this context, staff members must be conscious at all times of the need to keep their personal and professional lives separate.

The policy also identifies the need for schools to offer a protection for employees who may be harassed or victimised by other members of the school community due to their professional relationship with the school.

It provides information and guidance for both professional and personal use and outlines the risks to users and schools, as well as the potential consequences of misuse of the internet and social media.

Where staff have concerns about e-safety, these should be raised with the Headteacher or Line managers as soon as possible. Advice can also be sought from professional associations and trade unions.

This policy equally applies to all employees including teacher trainees, apprentices and any other individuals who work for or provide services on behalf of the school.

The school has a designated Safeguarding Lead and a Data Protection Lead who can also be approached for advice and guidance.

## Users' responsibility

Any misuse of social media must be reported promptly to the school or headteacher, whether carried out by students, parents/guardians or staff members.

All users must be aware that as soon as a post is made online, it is no longer within the private sphere or in the control of the original poster.

If an employee is found to have breached this policy, they may be subject to the School disciplinary procedure.

## Principles

In all communications from members of staff/employees of the school, staff should:

- be conscious at all times of the need to keep personal and professional lives separate. Staff should not put themselves in a position where there is a conflict between their work and personal interests.
- not engage in activities involving social media which may bring school into disrepute.
- not represent their personal views as those of the school on any social medium.
- not discuss personal information about students, staff and any other professionals that they interact with as part of their job, on social media.
- follow safeguarding principles
- be open, honest, ethical and professional;
- use jargon-free, plain English in professional communication;
- be actioned within an agreed time frame in line with the school's communication policy;
- use the method of communication that is most effective and appropriate to the context, message and audience;
- be cost effective.

## Monitoring

All school ICT systems may be monitored in accordance with the Electronic Communication (Acceptable Use) Policy, so personal privacy cannot be assumed when using school hardware.

The school respects the privacy of its employees. However, postings made on a personal account may attain a wide readership and will therefore be considered public rather than private. Publically accessible postings may be investigated if there is a suspected breach of this or related policies.

When a public post is reported concerning non-employee members of the school community, this will be investigated and responded to by the school. Further action could be taken if an offence may have been committed.

## Personal use of Social Media

Staff members are strongly encouraged not to identify themselves as staff members of their school in their personal social media platforms. This is to prevent information on these sites from being linked with named Schools and to safeguard the privacy of staff members. This does not include professional networking sites.

Staff should not have contact through any social medium with any student from Manor Green or any other school linked to Manor Green. Staff are advised not to communicate on social media platforms with ex-students except via professional networking sites for professional reasons.

Staff should decline 'friend requests' from students they receive in their personal social media accounts.

Information staff members have access to as part of their employment, including personal information about students and their family members, colleagues and other parties must not be discussed on their personal social media platforms.

Photographs, videos or any of images of students should not be published on personal social media platforms without prior permission of parents/carers and the school. Permission should be gained through existing school procedures.

School email addresses and other official contact details must not be used for setting up personal social media accounts or to communicate through such media unless pre-approved by school leadership.

Caution is advised when inviting work colleagues to be 'friends' in personal social networking sites. Social networking sites blur the line between work and personal lives and it may be difficult to maintain professional relationships.

Staff are strongly advised to ensure that they set up and regularly review the privacy levels of their personal sites as strictly as they can and to opt out of public listings on social networking sites to protect their own privacy. Staff members should keep their passwords confidential, change them often and be careful what is posted online; it is not safe to reveal home addresses, telephone numbers and other personal information.

Staff should also select carefully their social media profile picture as it is an extension to their professional image online.

Social media should not be used for work related communication. Communication should be through school email or contact details held by the school.

Any misuse or abuse of social media must be reported to the Headteacher as soon as noticed, especially when concerning a student, parent/guardian or employee.

### **Where a member of staff is a parent/guardian as well as an employee of the school**

In cases where staff are also parents connected to the school, they are advised to use professional judgment (in reference to child protection and safeguarding policies) when communicating with children or young people also connected to the school community. They should seek advice from their Head of Department or HR if any uncertainty arises.

Staff should only accept friend requests/communicate with others linked to the school community in regards to their own children when there is a genuine need, , for example, to socialise outside of school. This relationship should stand up to scrutiny from a professional perspective and should be appropriate. Information about the school or any other member of the school community that the member of staff is only privy to because of the nature of their employment, **must not** be shared or discussed. If the member of staff is made aware of concerns they should direct them to be made through the appropriate channels at the school.

If a concern of safeguarding arises, this should be reported to the designated safeguarding lead in accordance with school policy.

### **Risks of misuse**

The school recognises the risks associated with use of social media and regulates use to ensure this does not damage the school, its staff and the people it serves. Principal amongst these risks of misuse are:

- access to inappropriate material;
- civil or criminal action relating to breaches of legislation;
- cyber bullying;
- damage to the reputation of the school;
- disclosure of confidential information;
- inappropriate behaviour, criticism and complaints from external sources;
- loss or theft of personal data;
- offending behaviour toward staff members by other staff or students;
- other misuse by staff including inappropriate personal use;
- social engineering attacks - i.e. the act of manipulating people into disclosing confidential material or carrying out certain actions;
- staff members openly identifying themselves as school personnel and making disparaging remarks about the school and/or its policies, about other staff members, students or other people associated with the school;
- damage to professional reputations with current and future employers;
- .

### **External communication with students and parents/carers**

Communication with students will take place face-to-face or via a staff member's school email address only.

Communication with parents/careers is covered in the Communication Policy.

A staff member will not communicate with a student or parent/carer via any social media platform.

### **Using Social Media on behalf of Manor Green School**

The school may use Facebook and Tweets to communicate general school information, marketing and recruitment, but this is carefully regulated and not "owned" by individual members of staff. There are designated members of the admin team who are trained to use these. Only authorised staff should only use official social media school sites for communicating.

Staff should not use personal social media accounts for official school business. Staff must at all times act in the best interests of children and young people when creating, participating in or contributing content to social media sites.

### **Use of images**

Permissions will be sought for images of children/young people to be used in school produced posts, clear reference to online usage will be made when permissions are requested.

Staff must give permission for their images to be used in relation school social media posts accessible by members of the public, whether controlled by the school or not.

Parents/carers will be reminded when attending events in school not to share pictures of other peoples' children on social media.

School photographs must be checked carefully to ensure that students who are on the restricted list are never shared on social media.

## Cyber bullying and harassment

Cyberbullying is making use of information and communications technology, particularly mobile phones and the internet, to deliberately undermine, humiliate or otherwise cause distress to the person on the receiving end.

Cyber Bullying and Cyber Harassment, like other forms of bullying and harassment, imply a relationship where an individual has some influence or advantage that is used improperly over another person or persons, where the victim is subjected to a disadvantage or detriment, and where the behaviour is unwarranted and unwelcome to the victim. However, in this case the technological environment has meant that the acts of bullying and harassment now include the use of information and communications technology including social networking.

It should be noted that a person does not need to directly experience this form of victimisation in order for it to be classed as cyber bullying/harassment. The fact that a person is unaware that offensive or derogatory comments about them have been placed on websites still fits the criteria of cyber bullying/harassment.

Staff must not use social media to attack, insult, abuse or defame students, their family members, colleagues, other professionals, other organisations (including Manor Green).

Staff should not personally engage with cyberbullying incidents if they become aware of them and should immediately report incidents to the Headteacher or for centrally employed staff, the Head of HR.

If a member of Staff is the victim (receives any threats, abuse or harassment from members of the school community or the public through their use of social media) in relation to their work at the school, they should keep any records of the abuse and if appropriate, screen prints of messages or webpages with time, date and address of the site. Staff must report such incidents using the school's procedures. Support is also available through confidential counselling support.

The school will consider it a potential disciplinary matter if users utilise any information and communications technology, including email and social networking sites, in such a way as to bully/harass others in the school or in partner organisations, or students or parents, whether this takes place during or outside of work.

Staff members and students need to be aware that no matter what the privacy settings on their social media/networking site, inappropriate/derogatory information about a colleague in the school or partner organisations, other students or parents, can find its way into the public domain even when not intended.

If a member of staff is the perpetrator of the incident/s the situation will then be investigated and if appropriate, the Disciplinary Procedure will be followed.

If a student is the perpetrator of the incident/s the situation will be initially investigated in line with the school behaviour policy. Education about online safety and cyber-bullying is covered in the PHSE curriculum.

Where a potential criminal offence has been identified, and reported to the police, the school will ensure that any internal investigation does not interfere with police enquires. Staff who are victims of cyber-bullying or harassment will be offered support by their line manager and where suitable, occupational health.

### Leadership responsibility in relation to online bullying and harassment

The school owes a duty of care to employees to take reasonable steps to provide a safe working environment free from bullying and harassment.

For this reason, it is essential that the Leadership Team take appropriate steps to deal with any incident where it is alleged that a staff member has subjected others to abusive or personally offensive messages or content on social networking platform.

If a Leader is made aware of such an allegation, the Leadership Team should deal with it in the same way as any other incident of bullying or harassment in line with school policies, by investigating the allegations promptly and appropriately and providing the victim with appropriate support to demonstrate that the matter is being dealt with seriously.

Leaders should encourage staff to preserve all evidence by taking screen-prints to support an investigation. If the incident involves illegal content or contains threats of a physical or sexual nature, the Leadership team should consider advising the employee that they should inform the police.

**In the event that such evidence contains indecent images of children, it is an offence to save, send, or alter an image or to show it to anyone else.** Therefore, the evidence must be placed in a secure location such as a locked cupboard where others will not be able to see it. In these circumstances the Police should be contacted immediately.

### Policy review

This policy shall be subject to periodic review.

The Governing Board approved this policy on date: 12<sup>th</sup> March 2020

Signed: Richard Pelly, Chair of Governors

Signed: Joolz Scarlett, Headteacher