

Personal Use of Social Media Policy

The use of the internet and social media has grown significantly, both for business and personal use, alongside the growth of blogs and social networking sites. This document provides clear guidelines regarding what is considered to be unacceptable communication by employees when either referring to the school or where they could be identified as an employee of the school.

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Where the headteacher is the employee concerned, any reference to the headteacher in this policy should be replaced with the chair of governors.

1 Types of social media

Social media is rapidly evolving and whatever sites are used many of the same principals apply :-

- Comments made, even in the belief they are private can be shared and if inappropriate or illegal can be used in an industrial tribunal or a court of law.
- Privacy settings should be carefully checked on a regular basis. Many sites update their software making once private areas available publicly.
- If using a school network or school wifi connections may be filtered and may be monitored.

There are six main types of social media:

- **Social networks** - services that allow people to connect with other people of similar interests and background e.g. Facebook, Whatsapp, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat and LinkedIn
- **Bookmarking sites** - services that allow you to save, organise and manage links to various websites and resources around the internet. Most allow you to 'tag' your links to make them easy to search and share e.g. Pinterest
- **Social news** - services that allow people to post various news items or links to outside articles and then allows its users to 'vote' on the items e.g. Digg and Reddit
- **Media sharing** - services that allow you to upload and share various media such as pictures and video. Most services have additional social features such as profiles, commenting, etc e.g. YouTube and Flickr
- **Microblogging** - services that focus on short updates that are pushed out to anyone subscribed to receive the updates e.g. Twitter
- **Blog comments and forums** - online forums allow members to hold conversations by posting messages. Blog comments are similar except they are attached to blogs and usually the discussion centres around the topic of the blog post. There are many blogs and forums including Wordpress.

2 Using social media

Social media should never be used (either within or outside of the workplace) in a way which breaches any of the school's policies or brings the school into disrepute or damages its reputation. A comment made on social media is no different to the printed or spoken word. Everything posted

or received on a social media site is public property including a private message. Once something is published online, control of it is lost and it can be accessed around the world within seconds. It can be shared or published elsewhere (online or in print).

The same standards of behaviour and conduct apply online as would be expected offline. Aspects of the Code of Conduct Policy will apply to you in the same way as they do to any other written or verbal communication.

Employees should give careful consideration to their level of privacy settings to try to control access to personal information and should be mindful that even a message sent privately can be copied, shared and then becomes 'public'.

Disciplinary action up to and including dismissal may be taken in instances where inappropriate, negative or unlawful comments, videos, photographs etc are posted by an employee that can be linked to the school, breach any of the school's policies or damage its reputation.

3 Impact of social media on employment

Social media is easily accessible and any content posted may be viewed immediately by strangers. It is important to be aware that posting information or views relating to the school, its employees, governors, parents or pupils can, if unprotected, be accessed around the world.

An employee's use of social media becomes relevant to their employment as soon as they identify themselves as being linked to the school, speak in a professional capacity or seek to use social media for school business. All communication with members of the school community regarding the business of the school must take place through school approved systems and approval obtained where required.

An employee can be held personally liable for their actions, comments and/or material added on social networking sites which could result in external people or organisations instigating legal action. Employees should think carefully about posting information and follow the advice below.

Employees should:

- Not accept pupils as friends on any personal site or app, as this would be an inappropriate relationship with a pupil
- Be very cautious about accepting any parent as a friend on social media as it increases the difficulty in maintaining a professional relationship with a parent. Employees should check what their individual school guidance is in relation to this
- Not use personal social media for any school communications
- Carefully follow the school's IT policies and procedures regarding where social media is accessed and where employees are permitted to use their devices. It is not acceptable to use any social media when responsible for the safety of children
- Not use a personal device to take pictures of children under any circumstances
- Not investigate pupils or families use of social media e.g. a bullying incident, without permission from the school
- Not project a personal image on social media that may adversely reflect on the reputation of the school

- Check the school's IT policies and procedures in on identifying themselves as an employee of the school on social media. If this link is made, anything the employee participates in or uploads can be connected with the school
- Make it clear, when talking about work or school, that their views are their own and not that of the school. It is not a legal defence to state on social media feeds that their views they are representing are their own if they are linked to the school in their profile or statuses.
- Consider their association with the school in online spaces. If they identify themselves as an employee, they must ensure their profile and related content are consistent with how they wish to present themselves professionally with colleagues and external stakeholders.
- Be aware that even if they don't intentionally identify themselves as working for the school, they should be mindful that their comments, videos and photographs could identify a link with the school e.g. a picture posted on a site or a negative comment about work that can be traced back to the school.
- Be mindful that they are personally responsible for any content that they post or write online and that this can result in the information being permanently available and open to be republished in other media in the public domain
- Not publicise anyone's personal or confidential information e.g. contact details or photographs
- Understand their own online privacy settings and should check them regularly
- Aware that their account may be vulnerable to hacking. If an account is hacked, they should report the incident to the site and keep a record of the bogus information posted.

Examples of inappropriate use of social media

- Expressing any comments that are judged as being inappropriate or negative about the school, colleagues, governors, pupils, parents or their employment when identifiable as an employee of the school
- Damaging the reputation of the school e.g. making comments and disparaging remarks on a social media platform when their profile page states the school is their employer
- Using the school logo or reproducing any other form of school communication or documents without express permission
- Commenting on the behaviour or work of a child
- 'Following' potentially negative, defamatory or unlawful third-party social media feeds. This could have an implication if their profile as a school employee could be linked to these feeds e.g. 'liking' comments relating to extremist organisations
- Failing to advise the headteacher of any potential or known conflict of interest from a 'friend' or 'follower' on social media. Employees should not put themselves in a position where there is conflict between their work for the school and personal interests
- Making offensive comments about or to colleagues, parents or public on the internet. Harassment, cyber-bullying and/or discrimination will not be tolerated and would be deemed a disciplinary offence which may constitute gross misconduct
- Publishing or disclosing any rumours, internal or confidential information about the school or related third parties e.g. parents or suppliers
- Breaching copyright, GDPR or the Data Protection Act e.g. reproducing a photograph without the permission of the photographer

- Expressing opinions on the school's behalf without the express authorisation of the headteacher
- Commenting on any current dispute or on any individual's involved in either current or past disputes
- Posting anything online that the school may deem to be inappropriate behaviour and which may be a serious breach of the implied duty of mutual trust and confidence e.g. an employee rings in sick and then posts a picture of themselves at a sporting event the same day, in apparent perfect health
- Impeding or adversely affecting the performance and/or availability of ICT facilities e.g. accessing infected sites on school equipment
- Activity connected to an employee's private commercial business being linked to their employment
- Inappropriate or unauthorised use of social media during working hours

4 Monitoring the use of social media

The school reserves the right to monitor, intercept and review without further notice, the activities of employees who are using its IT resources and communication systems including, but not limited to, social media postings and activities to ensure school policies and procedures are being complied with. Where evidence of misuse is found the school may undertake a more detailed investigation in accordance with the Disciplinary Policy.

The school is legally obliged to report to the police the discovery of certain types of electronic data, if that data is found on school equipment, or transmitted across its networks. All such monitoring or interception will be performed in compliance with GDPR, the Data Protection Act, the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA), and the Human Rights Act.

4.1 Reporting a mistake

If an individual realises that they can be identified as an employee of the school or could be linked in to the school any way, and has acted inappropriately whilst accessing social media, they must attempt to rectify it immediately. This could include, but is not limited to, removing the comments, contacting the service provider to have them removed or apologising for the comments.

In all instances, the employee is responsible for advising their headteacher as soon as possible after realising the error has occurred, even if the mistake has since been resolved. The headteacher must then consider the impact of the action and take appropriate measures. If the employee is unable to remove the material, the headteacher should seek advice from Legal Services as to what steps can be taken to secure its removal.

4.2 Reporting cyber bullying

Cyber bullying is the term used to describe bullying that takes place by electronic communication. This can include social networking channels and can often occur in blogs, social networking sites where offensive or threatening comments or images are posted about others.

Any employee who believes they have been subject to cyber bullying by fellow employees or anyone else should report the behaviour to the headteacher.

4.3 Reporting inappropriate use by a school employee

If an employee believes that a colleague has breached this guidance, they should notify the headteacher as soon as possible. Employees are advised not to respond online to anything they believe to be inappropriate.



This policy has been developed by the HR Advice and Support team, based on current legislation and best practice. If you would like any advice on the application of this policy, please do not hesitate to contact the team:

Telephone	03000 266688
Email	hradvice@durham.gov.uk

Further support can be accessed by contacting (subject to SLA buy in):

Payroll and Employee Services	pesschools@durham.gov.uk
Occupational Health	occhealthadmin@durham.gov.uk
Health and Safety	hsteam@durham.gov.uk
Employee Assistance Programme	www.healthassuredeap.com Username: durham Password: council 0800 716017

Author	Version	Last review	Next review
GS	v 1.0	September 2020	September 2022

The school complies with all relevant statutory obligations. The school privacy notice provides more specific information on data collected and how it is handled, a copy of which can be accessed from the school. For more information please contact the school directly.

If you have any concerns about how your data is handled, please contact either the school Data Protection Officer (details available from the school office), or the Information Commissioner's Office.