

Social Media (model policy)

GCC Plus (HR Policy & Guidance)



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1.0 Introduction

- 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 school 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 school's decisions and services and that the reputation of the school 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 school.
- 2.2 Examples of some popular forums are Twitter, Facebook 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 school, teachers (including trainees and apprentices), volunteers and members of the Governing Board.
- 2.4 Employees of Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) are covered by Council's own social media policy and the school should report any suspected breach by a GCC employee to GCC.
- 2.5 Schools often use contractors to carry out work and may require contractors to have their own social media (acceptable use) policy in place.
- 2.6 This policy covers personal use of social media as well as the use of social media for official school purposes, including sites hosted and maintained by and on behalf of the school.
- 2.7 For the purposes of this policy references and links to the County Council will not always apply to academies and other schools or settings that are independent from the local authority.

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 Both the School and the County Council could be held vicariously responsible for acts of their employees in the course of their employment (in local authority community and voluntary controlled schools). For example, staff members who harass co-workers online 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 School or the County Council liable to the injured party.

4.0 Related policies

4.1 This policy should be read in conjunction with the following School policies:

4.1.1 Model Code of Conduct and Confidential Reporting Procedure (Whistle-blowing) for School Employees in Maintained Schools

4.1.2 Governor Code of Conduct

4.1.3 School Conduct/Disciplinary Policy.

5.0 Social media relating to the school

5.1 Authorisation to share specific school business via communication channels which cannot be directly managed by the school (such as personal social media) must be sought from the head teacher/Governing Board of the School prior to sharing.

5.2 This includes opinions shared on social media that can be, or perceived to be, attributable to the school, its representatives and/or its decision-makers.

5.3 Sharing of any aspects of school business or relevant communications from the school via authorised social media platforms used and managed by the school must be approved by the head teacher.

5.4 Any authorised messages must be constructed to be unambiguous, accurate, politically neutral, fair and transparent if they are to formally represent the School or the County Council.

6.0 Creation of social media accounts by school staff for use in education

6.1 All social media services must be approved by the head teacher/Governing Board of the school in advance of any educational work being undertaken.

7.0 Personal use of social media by employees

7.1 It is accepted that employees and members of the school community will have their own social networking accounts. However, it is important that they protect their professional reputation, the reputation of the school and the privacy of colleagues, pupils and parents.

7.2 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.

7.3 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.

- 7.4 Employees must not conduct or portray themselves, or allow friends to portray them, in a manner which may:
- 7.4.1 bring the school into disrepute;
 - 7.4.2 lead to valid parental/carer complaints;
 - 7.4.3 be deemed as derogatory towards the school and/or its employees;
 - 7.4.4 be deemed as derogatory towards pupils, parents/carers or governors;
 - 7.4.5 bring into question their appropriateness to work with children (including behaviour that is illegal);
 - 7.4.6 contravene current National Teacher Standards (or other relevant professional standards).
- 7.5 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.
- 7.6 Further to this staff should not:
- 7.6.1 form online friendships or enter into communication with parents/carers as this could lead to professional relationships being compromised;
 - 7.6.2 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;
 - 7.6.3 post pictures of or negative comments about their employment, school events (sharing information and posting pictures about school events should be done through the school's authorised social media site(s) or with advance authorisation from the head teacher/Governing Board).
- 7.7 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.

8.0 Further guidance on the use of social media

- 8.1 School workers (paid staff and volunteers) must be conscious at all times of the need to keep personal and professional lives separate on social media. School representatives should not:
- 8.1.1 Put themselves in a position where there is an actual or perceived conflict between work for the school or County Council and their own personal interests.
 - 8.1.2 Engage in activities involving social media which might risk bringing the School or the County Council into disrepute.
 - 8.1.3 Represent personal views as those of the School or the County Council on any social medium.
 - 8.1.4 Discuss personal information about pupils, School business or County Council staff and other professionals interacted with as part of their role in the school.
 - 8.1.5 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 School, other schools or the County Council.

8.1.6 Unilaterally use social media as a communication channel about 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 Governing Board.)

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

8.3 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.

9.0 Breaches of the policy

9.1 Any breach of this policy may lead to disciplinary action being taken against the staff member(s) involved in line with the School's disciplinary procedure.

9.2 Inappropriate use of social media by employees or volunteers should be referred to the head teacher/Board of Governors in the first instance so that appropriate action can be taken to protect confidential information and limit the damage to the reputation of the school and the County Council. In local authority community and voluntary controlled schools where there has been a breach of confidential information the breach must be reported to the Data Management team at Gloucestershire County Council.

9.3 A breach of this policy leading to breaches of confidentiality, or defamation or damage to the reputation of the School or the County Council or any illegal acts or acts that render the School or the County Council liable to third parties may result in disciplinary action and dismissal from service.

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

10.0 Parents/carers (the 'wider' school community) on social media sites

10.1 Parents/carers will be communicated with regarding their use of social media (in particular when they or a child they are responsible for joins the school) via the school website, letter and school newsletters particularly with regard to the following:

10.1.1 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.

10.1.2 Parents/carers are asked to raise queries, concerns or complaints directly with the school rather than posting them on social media.

10.1.3 Parents/carers should not post malicious or fictitious comments on social media sites about any member of the school community.

10.2 While the school cannot monitor all use of social media in the wider school community the communication to parents/carer aims to protect pupils and staff at the school and the confidentiality of information about pupils and staff.

11.0 Dealing with incidents of online (cyber) bullying

- 11.1 Cases of online bullying will be dealt with in accordance with the school's fairness, diversity and equality and/or dignity and respect at work policies and could lead to action being taken under the disciplinary procedure.
- 11.2 The school can take action with reference to any incident that takes place outside school hours if it:
- 11.2.1 could have repercussions for the orderly running of the school,
 - 11.2.2 poses a threat to a member of the school community,
 - 11.2.3 could adversely affect the reputation of the school, or its employees/governors.
- 11.3 There are UK statutes that cover the use of Internet technology in relation to bullying.
- 11.4 Where cyber bullying involves pupils it may be necessary to deal with this under a separate policy (e.g. the schools' Anti-Bullying policy).
- 11.5 Where appropriate, legal action may be taken by the school's governors.