

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Introduction

St Gregory's School recognises the numerous benefits and opportunities which a social media presence offers. Staff, parents/carers and pupils are actively encouraged to find creative ways to use social media. However, there are some risks associated with social media use, especially around the issues of safeguarding, bullying and personal reputation.

Definition of social media

For the purposes of this policy, social media is a type of interactive online media that allows parties to communicate instantly with each other or to share data in a public forum. This includes online social forums such as Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest and LinkedIn. Social media also covers blogs, wikis, bulletin boards, multiplayer online gaming, chatrooms, and video/image-sharing websites such as YouTube and Flickr. There are many more examples of social media than can be listed here - it is a constantly changing area.

Scope

This policy aims to encourage the safe use of social media by all school stakeholders - including employees, parents/carers, governors and pupils. These groups are referred to collectively as *school representatives* for brevity.

The overriding function of this policy is to protect all *school representatives* from the many issues that can arise as a result of posting on social media sites.

- *Staff and governors* may be vulnerable to malicious and defamatory comments (and potentially even threats and abuse) from parents or pupils, and to allegations of grooming and other forms of online abuse.
- *Parents/carers* may become involved in online disputes with other parents through social media. They may also potentially put their child and others within the school at risk by sharing photos, videos or other information that could make the children identifiable to others.
- *Pupils* are at risk of cyber bullying and may also become involved in cyber bullying themselves. They are also vulnerable to other serious crimes such as grooming and abduction if they share too much personal information on social media. (However, it should be noted that no pupil under 13 should be accessing social media sites - this is the guidance from Facebook, MSN, WhatsApp, and many other sites).

The purpose of the policy is to:

- Safeguard all children
- Protect the school from legal risks
- Ensure that the reputation of the school and its *representatives* is protected
- Ensure that *school representatives* are able to distinguish clearly where information provided via social media is legitimately representative of the school

Use of Social Media by Staff

1. For *personal purposes*:

a) Whilst at work

- The school does not permit staff to access social media from school devices for personal purposes during their hours of work.

- The school understands that staff may wish to use their own computers or devices, such as laptops and palm-top and hand-held devices, to access social media websites while they are at work. Staff must limit their use of social media on their own equipment to their official rest breaks such as their lunch break/times.
- The school has specifically blocked Twitter, Facebook, and other social media websites on its computers.

b) Outside of working hours

- Staff must not post entries onto social networking sites which are derogatory, defamatory, discriminatory or offensive in any way, or which have the potential to bring the School, or its stakeholders, into disrepute, either by its content, by implication or by any subsequent comments made by friends or family.
- Staff should take particular care to ensure that their social media privacy settings are appropriate and do not allow private information to be shared inappropriately. Staff should ensure that appropriate professional boundaries are maintained online with pupils, parents/carers and other stakeholders.
- Staff should not accept friend requests from current pupils, or ex-pupils under the age of 18, and should notify the parents if such a request is made.

2. For work purposes:

- The school encourages staff to make reasonable and appropriate use of social media websites as part of their work, for example sharing good practice between professionals.
- The school also recognises that staff may need to provide guidance for pupils on how to use social media safely as part of an e-safety lesson, following a risk assessment and careful planning.
- Social media plays an increasingly important role in communicating with the school's stakeholders and staff may contribute to the school's social media activities by providing content for our website or Facebook page to the designated members of staff (Headteacher, *name* and *name*). Only those designated members of staff are authorised to post content to the School's website and Facebook page.
- All communications (e.g. corresponding with parents/carers) in a work capacity should take place via school approved communication channels, e.g. via the school provided email address and not via personal communication channels.

Guidance to staff on the use of social media for *personal* and *work purposes*

All staff should ensure that all use of social media complies with the following guidance, using the same principles as they would with any other form of communication about the school in the public sphere.

These principles include:

- making sure that the communication has a purpose and a benefit for the school
- obtaining appropriate permission from a manager before publishing any social media content
- getting a colleague to check the content before it is published.
- Making sure information is shared only in accordance with data protection guidance

Any communications that staff make in a personal or work capacity through social media must not:

- **bring the school into disrepute**, for example by:
 - criticising or arguing with pupils, parents/carers, school management, colleagues and other stakeholders;
 - making defamatory comments about individuals or other schools or groups;
 - posting/sharing images that are inappropriate or links to inappropriate content.
- **breach confidentiality**, for example by:

- revealing confidential or privileged information relating to the school or its employees/pupils and other stakeholders;
- discussing the school's internal school procedures and operations.
- **breach copyright**, for example by:
 - using someone else's images or written content without permission;
 - failing to give acknowledgement where permission has been given to reproduce something.
- **do anything that could be considered discriminatory against, or bullying or harassment of, any individual**, for example by:
 - making offensive or derogatory comments relating to sex, gender reassignment, ethnicity (including nationality), disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief or age;
 - using social media to bully another individual (such as an employee of the school);
 - posting images that are discriminatory or offensive, (or links to such content).
- **breach safeguarding obligations**, for example by:
 - Entering into inappropriate communication/conduct with a pupil via social media;
 - Viewing/storing/distributing obscene/pornographic or inappropriate content (or links to such content).

Use of Social Media by Parents/Carers

Parents/Carers should:

- Not post photos, videos or comments that include other children at the school
- Not use social media on their own devices when on school premises or on school visits
- Raise queries, concerns and complaints directly with the school rather than posting them on social media – whether on their own pages, in closed groups (e.g. groups set up for school parents/carers to communicate with each other) or on the school's pages
- Do not post anything malicious about the school or any member of the school community.

Use of Social Media by Pupils

Pupils should:

- Not join any social networking sites if they are below the permitted age (13 for most sites)
- Tell their parents if they are using the sites, and when they are online
- Be aware how to report abuse and inappropriate content
- Not access social media on school devices, or on their own devices while they're at school
- Not make inappropriate comments (including in private messages) about the school, teachers or other children

Statement regarding Breaches of this Policy

All *school representatives* are required to adhere to this policy.

Employees should note that any breaches of this policy may be investigated and considered in accordance with the school's disciplinary policy.

Should any breach be of a potential safeguarding nature these may be considered in accordance with the school's Child Protection policy.

Employees should be aware that serious breaches of this policy may constitute gross misconduct and lead to summary dismissal.

Employees must acknowledge their individual responsibility to bring matters of concern to the attention of the senior leadership and/or relevant agencies. If an employee has a concern about a colleague's use of social media they should refer to the Whistleblowing Policy which encourages employees to raise serious concerns, without fear of reprisal or victimisation.

Policy Reviewed: March 2017

Next review date: March 2020