

**GUIDANCE ON THE USE OF
SOCIAL NETWORKING**

**FOR ALL SCHOOL BASED STAFF
EMPLOYED IN SCHOOLS MAINTAINED BY
ROCHDALE LA**

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1. INTRODUCTION

Technology is an integral part of modern society and social networking websites such as Facebook and Twitter are regularly used by millions of people to communicate, share information and make new contacts.

While the use of social networking can offer many benefits, care must be taken to ensure that content submitted by, or held about school staff on such sites does not compromise their own reputation, or undermine the reputation of the school.

Online, as offline, school staff must ensure that they maintain suitable boundaries and conduct themselves in a manner that is appropriate, respectful and adheres to guidance within school's policies and code of conduct. The school's Safe Working Practices document contains specific guidance that relates to social media at; Section 4, "Duty of Care", Section 6, "Power and Position of Trust", Section 8, "Propriety and Behaviour", Section 12, "Social Contact", and Section 13, "Communication with Pupils using Technology".

Maintaining public confidence and trust in the integrity of the school is paramount and the behaviour of staff both inside and outside of the workplace must uphold their responsibilities as a representative of the school. These guidelines are intended to raise awareness about potential risks, promote good practice, and safeguard the interests of staff and pupils in respect of the use of social networking.

The Schools HR Service aims to regularly review all the policies and procedures we operate to ensure there are no negative equality impacts on staff based on their age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief and sexual orientation as outlined in the Equality Act 2010. Consultation with our customers is an important part of how we achieve this.

If you feel, upon reading this guidance, that there may be a negative equality impact within your school, please contact us. Please also let us know if you need to access this policy in a different format.

2. MAINTAINING PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS ONLINE

Staff working in schools must carefully consider what information they make public. It is not always easy to remove information that has been posted on the Internet and in some circumstances it is not possible to remove it. This can have long-lasting and serious implications.

Accordingly, staff and volunteers must always behave in a responsible and appropriate manner, ensure they stay safe when using technology and not put themselves in a vulnerable position.

The high standards of professionalism and integrity expected of all school staff also relates to their online behaviour. In addition, teaching staff have specific responsibilities within the new Teacher Standards from 2012, as part of the "personal and professional conduct" and "fulfil wider professional responsibilities" standards.

3. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The law states that if an action is illegal offline, it is also illegal online. Therefore, individuals could find themselves subject to legal proceedings in relation to their conduct on social networking sites.

Libel/ defamation

If an individual publishes an untrue statement about another person which is damaging to their reputation, they may choose to take legal action. This will also apply if an individual allows someone else to publish something libellous on their website/web page if they know about it and don't take prompt action to remove it. A successful libel claim will result in an award of damages against the member of staff and could put their employment at risk.

Copyright

Placing images or text from a copyrighted source (e.g. extracts from publications, photos etc) without permission is likely to breach copyright. Staff must not publish anything they are unsure about, or should seek permission in advance.

The law of copyright applies to electronic communication in the same way as it does to printed material and other forms of communication. Copyright can apply to computer software, documents, graphics and computer games for example sent by e-mail or downloaded from the internet. Files containing copyright protected material may be downloaded for appropriate and approved use. It must not however, be forwarded or transmitted to third parties without the permission of the author of the material, or with reference to the original source of the material, as appropriate. Breach of copyright may result in an award of damages against the professional.

Data Protection

Staff must avoid publishing any personal data about others unless this is part of their professional duties and they have express written permission.

Obscene material

Individuals must never publish anything online that is obscene. Publication of obscene material is a criminal offence.

4. ONLINE CONTACT WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

There is a concern that social networking may increase the potential for sexual exploitation of children and young people, or provide opportunities for "grooming" to take place. It is also possible that staff that work with children and young people may be at risk from false allegations being made against them. It is therefore vital that staff use social media responsibly, take appropriate steps to protect themselves from allegations, maintain appropriate boundaries, exercise their professional judgement and avoid any contact that may lead to their intent and motivations being questioned.

As indicated within the safe working practice guidance document at Section 12, "Social Contact", and Section 13, "Communication with Pupils using Technology", it is inappropriate and totally unacceptable for staff to communicate via social networking sites with pupils and ex pupils. As stated within Section 4, "Duty of Care", staff have a duty to safeguard children and young people and must adhere to the school's safer working practice guidance in all of their actions, including online activities.

Specifically in respect of social media, staff should not share personal information with children/young people and must not become facebook friends with any child or young person to

whom they have acted in a position of trust. It would be recommended that the same approach is taken with parents. Extreme care must be exercised when using Twitter, similar sites or online chatrooms, as it may be difficult to ascertain to whom you may be chatting. Should a young person attempt to contact a member of staff via social networking, this should be reported to their manager immediately.

Any inappropriate conduct in relation to online communication with children and young people will be taken extremely seriously and investigated in line with safeguarding and/ or school's disciplinary procedures.

5. ONLINE BULLYING AND HARASSMENT

Social media can have potential dangers and drawbacks. Adults, as well as children have found themselves the target of online abuse, bullying and harassment, (cyber bullying) including name calling/ malicious comments, exclusion, intimidation, spreading of rumours, or bombarding with unwanted messages.

Bullying or harassment of any kind, including using online channels is totally unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Cyber bullying can have a significant impact upon the health, wellbeing and confidence of those targeted, and because technology is accessible 24/7, it can impact upon an individual's private life.

Support is available for staff who feel they have been bullied or harassed via social networking sites through their Trade Union representative, as well as in school. In the first instance, staff should refer any cyber bullying concerns to the Headteacher, who will be able to provide information and guidance.

The school's Dignity at Work policy specifies the procedure should any member of staff wish to raise a complaint of bullying or harassment. All complaints will be treated extremely seriously.

6. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

All school-based staff, workers and volunteers have personal responsibility for their online behaviour and ensuring their use of social networking takes place within appropriate professional boundaries. A guidance document which can be issued direct to staff and volunteers can be found at Appendix One.

Inappropriate use of social networking sites by staff could be treated as misconduct under the school's disciplinary procedure. This could include any online activities that may bring the school into disrepute, as outlined at Appendix One.

In serious cases, for example where bullying or harassment is proven or where actions breach the Equality Act, this could potentially constitute gross misconduct which could result in dismissal.

While volunteers and other workers, for example supply teachers are not staff, they still have a responsibility to uphold the reputation and public confidence in the school and maintain appropriate standards of personal conduct within the school's expectations.

Headteachers/Managers within school are responsible for ensuring that staff, workers, volunteers and Governors are aware of their responsibilities and that child protection training within school includes social media issues. They are also responsible for circulating guidance on use of social media to pupils and parents, so that all parties are aware of expectations and how

to keep themselves safe online. The guidance at Appendix One can be used to assist/support communication of these issues.

The Headteacher/ Governing Body will be responsible for ensuring that the school has appropriate policies that cover social media usage and for investigating any potential complaints.

7. FURTHER INFORMATION

The following documents/ policies are available to staff and can be accessed from the school admin team:

Guidance for Safe Working Practices
Guidance on the acceptable use of email and the Internet
Guidance on new technologies

The School's disciplinary policy
The School's dignity at work policy
The Schools' equality policy
The School's whistleblowing policy

Further information/advice is available from school or via:-

Schools HR

- Katie Barnes – 01706 925169 or katie.barnes@rochdale.gov.uk
- Alison Aspinall – 01706 925194 or alison.aspinall@rochdale.gov.uk

Appendix One

SAFER USE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING – GUIDANCE FOR STAFF & VOLUNTEERS

Staff who choose to use social networking sites should:

- Consider how their online presence could possibly compromise your professional responsibilities. Think carefully before posting information, photographs or comments on the Internet. Things that you might have thought funny at the time could potentially cause embarrassment to yourself or others. Online records are easy to create, but can be difficult, or in some cases, impossible to remove.
- Exercise caution when divulging personal information online, for example your date of birth, home address etc, as this could potentially put you at risk of identity theft.
- Do not give out your personal contact details to pupils – mobile number, email address etc.
- Consider doing a Google search on yourself to check what information is held online about you. If any content is found that you would prefer not be accessible, you can request that this is removed, by asking the person who uploaded it if you know them, or if appropriate, by using the “report abuse” facility within the particular site.
- Ensure you protect your social networking profile by utilising privacy settings so only friends can access and comment on your pages. However, be aware that your information could still appear on friend’s pages, which may be publically accessible.
- Be aware that friends can tag you into photographs which you may not wish to be publically available– ask people not to tag you without your consent. You can also untag yourself from Facebook photographs.
- Maintain an appropriate distinction between your professional and personal life. Staff members who have an additional relationship with the school, for example if their own children are pupils, or if they are active members of the community should not use online forums to raise any grievances they may have in relation to school.
- Staff working in schools should never request/ accept Facebook friend requests, or communicate online with pupils, ex-pupils or parents. Check who is “following” you on Twitter and block pupils, ex-pupils and parents from receiving your updates.
- Refrain from identifying your place of work, or making reference to the school on social networking sites.
- Ensure you have a strong password for all social networking sites and that your electronic security is maintained by password protecting equipment, never sharing passwords and logging out fully after use. This will include ensuring that school and personal property including mobile phones, laptops, I-Pads etc are kept secure, so that children are not able to access them.
- Never make, respond, or take part in an online conversation that includes any offensive, abusive, derogatory, defamatory or inappropriate comments related to colleagues, pupils, parents or the school on the Internet. Be conscious that information you disclose and opinions you express are in the public domain and as such, could potentially bring yourself and/or the school into disrepute.
- Ensure that your own personal views cannot be misconstrued as you speaking on behalf of school. You could use statements such as, “my view is..” or “in my opinion..”
- Always comply with your school and professional body’s codes of conduct, as well as policies/ guidance on use of technology and the Safe Working Practices guidance.
- Never divulge any confidential information relating to school.
- Not use social networking sites for personal use during working hours.
- Not post any photographs or video footage taken at school onto websites without obtaining express written permission to do so.
- In the event that you feel you have been a target of cyberbullying or inappropriate online behaviour, keep the evidence (screen prints, emails etc) and report what has happened

to your Headteacher, or a member of the Leadership team. However, extreme caution must be exercised in relation to obscene material and staff members should not retain copies of information, but should instead report their concerns immediately to the Headteacher for further investigation.

- Overall, remember to be mindful of your professional responsibilities when using social media and be conscious that managing your online reputation is important for your current and future career. There is an increasing trend for employers to access social networking sites before interviewing job applicants so there is potential that your online activities could prevent you from progressing in your career. Equally, you could face disciplinary action if your employer feels that your use of social networking is inappropriate.