

Social Networking Protocol for Schools Managed Staff

Social Networking Protocol 2010

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Do not use social networking sites or online blogs to make comments on anything related to the school, its activities, its pupils, parents, partners, governors or colleagues.

1 Purpose

- 1.1 Over recent years there has been an increase in the availability and use of internet sites for social networking and communication. These websites make it easy to keep in touch informally with friends, share news, arrange events and express views and opinions; often people use it to conduct their social lives online and make new friends. Others use networking sites for formal professional means to share contacts, ideas and best practice.
- 1.2 Some examples of networking sites include Twitter, Bebo, Facebook, Friendster, LinkedIn, YouTube and My Space.
- 1.3 This protocol is designed to alert employees of expected professional standards and to alert them of the potential problems that may arise in the use of social networking sites.
- 1.4 Whilst employee's right to privacy is respected, employees have a duty to their employer and to their colleagues to maintain professional standards, not only during working hours but also outside of work if what they do, say or write may have an impact on their workplace.
- 1.5 This protocol recognises the guidance set out in the document 'Guidance for Safer Working Practice for Adults who work with Children and Young People in Education Settings' (DCSF January 2009).

2 Scope

- 2.1 This protocol applies to school based employees, temporary workers and agency workers who are in full time, part time, in fixed term employment or engaged in consultancy work for the school. (Herein referred to generically as 'employees').
- 2.2 The right to a private life is respected by the employer provided it does not adversely impact on the employee's employment with the school.
- 2.3 The school's IT Policy makes it clear what is acceptable internet use when employees are at work and access to most networking sites is restricted so access is prevented during work time.

- 2.4 Use of these sites would usually be in an employee's own personal time and accessed on their own PC, however they may also be accessed via other personal electronic communication devices (If permitted by the School).
- 2.5 There may be occasions when sites are accessed through the school's PC for work related reasons. Use of these sites during work time is prohibited, unless permission for a work purpose has been granted in writing by the Headteacher or Line Manager.
- 2.6 This protocol may be used in conjunction with other school policies to address online abuse such as inappropriate activities, obscenity, harassment and any form of discrimination or unwanted behaviour towards colleagues; children of the school and their families or partners of the school.
- 2.7 The school's code of conduct, confidential reporting, IT/Internet policies, data protection and equal opportunities policy may also set out guidance for online activity (this list is not exhaustive).
- 2.8 The protocol has been subject to consultation with recognised Teaching and Support Trade Unions and its operation will be kept under review.

3 School's Expectations

- 3.1 The pupils, parents, colleagues and school governors are entitled to expect the highest standards of conduct from all employees who work at the school.

4 Safeguarding

- 4.1 Care should always be taken to maintain appropriate personal and professional boundaries.
- 4.2 School employees should not seek to have social contact with pupils or their families on-line, unless there is good reason for this contact and it has been agreed in advance with the Headteacher.
- 4.3 If a pupil or parent seeks to establish on-line social contact, or contact occurs coincidentally, employees should be careful to exercise their professional judgement in dealing with the situation, and discuss the situation with the Headteacher or line manager and, if appropriate, with the parent of the child or young person before proceeding further.

5 Monitoring

- 5.1 The school will investigate conduct or complaints brought to its attention and may use information available on internet sites for this purpose. This may include information from employees' social networking sites, reviewing e-mails or examining accessible internet logs.

5.2 Employees who wish to send confidential personal e-mails should not use the school's e-mail addresses or computer system.

6 Disciplinary Action

6.1 The school expects employees to ensure that the reputation of the School and its staff are not harmed by employees' words or actions when using internet websites or chat forums.

6.2 Online activity which is deemed to be in contravention of these guidelines will be addressed accordingly by the Headteacher, Line Manager or School Governors.

6.3 If employees are suspected to be engaging in inappropriate conduct which may be in breach of this protocol, including where activity happens outside working hours, an investigation will be carried out under the schools managed disciplinary policy and procedure.

6.4 The investigation will determine the nature and the seriousness of the offence. This could lead to a determination that gross misconduct has occurred, which could warrant dismissal.

6.5 Such conduct could arise from the following (this list is not exhaustive):

- 1) Posts, comments or material which amount to a form of serious harassment, obscenity, bullying or intimidation, abuse, defamation or any breach of discrimination legislation etc.
- 2) Online interaction with children or parents outside of the working relationship which is deemed to be inappropriate in accordance to LA and safeguarding policies.
- 3) Improper disclosure of information, breach of privacy or data protection
- 4) Online activity which can be shown to have caused damage to the reputation of the school, and can also be shown to be malicious and unjustified.
- 5) Commentary, content, recordings or images that may be considered to be defamatory/libellous, pornographic, improper or that can create a hostile work environment or which represents or creates a threat to the health and safety of colleagues and students or which is considered generally offensive.

6.3 If employees are in doubt as to what is or is not permissible they may discuss the information with the Headteacher before posting the information concerned.

Appendix 1

Online awareness

Employees are reminded that:

- 1) They are legally liable for anything posted or presented on line.
- 2) Messages should not be regarded as private if security settings are not set to represent a group of trusted friends and acquaintances. If messages are to be posted which are not intended for public viewing, settings should be adjusted to private and trusted groups so the audience is limited and access to profiles are controlled.
- 3) If employees do not wish work colleagues to see their posts; colleagues should not be added as friends, as they are the most likely to be offended by work related comments or posts.
- 4) Employees should not give people who are not known to the employee on line access to their information. The employee may without realising, be giving access to their personal profile and web pages to people who may know the employee or who are looking for information connected with the employee or the school.
- 5) Even though employees do not directly identify names of colleagues or the school as the employer, people accessing sites may be aware of where employees work and will therefore link any comments and views, expressed about work or otherwise, with the school and its employees.
- 6) The internet is a widely used public forum, and when statements or posts are made on websites it can be in a permanent form and sometimes irreversible.
- 7) Even restricted settings do not guarantee a post or comment will not be circulated to, or read by someone who was not intended to see it; and who may take offence at the contents despite not having direct access to the information.
- 8) The usual signs that help employees avoid offence such as body language are not available on-line, and it is easy to make 'throwaway' comments in jest which may be misinterpreted, taken seriously and considered offensive.

Appendix 2

Responsibilities as an employee of the school

Putting information into a public area has the potential of directly/indirectly impacting on the workplace. Employees posting comments on any site or in any forum to which members of the public may have access should be careful to abide by the following rules:

- 1) Employees should ensure that on-line activities do not bring the school into disrepute or adversely affect the employee's position within the school.
- 2) Derogatory comments about the school or past or present colleagues which may damage their or the school's reputation should not be made.
- 3) Whilst people may seek to use these sites to 'let off steam' employees must avoid saying anything in the heat of the moment or make complaints which may undermine the school or create a poor impression, or affect colleagues, or the principles and standards and work undertaken by the school.
- 4) Statements which may have a negative or damaging effect on working relationships should not be made.
- 5) Employees should not engage in any on-line communications with colleagues and service users which may amount to harassing or bullying behaviour, or make unwanted or unwelcome on-line communications to those who do not wish to receive them. This includes posting public comments about work colleagues or service users in public forums to which they or their friends, family, neighbours or colleagues might have access.
- 6) Employees should not post gossip or circulate rumours about the school or past or present colleagues, as this will almost always adversely affect the impression others have, as well as damaging the reputation of others and the school.
- 7) Any information which is posted on line about the school should not contradict information provided by the school or to the school by the employee, or which would contradict the effect of a policy in force at the school.
- 8) Employees should make it clear that any views expressed are their own and do not reflect the views of the school, the post should not identify the

employee as a representative of the school expressing views which are related to work.

- 9) The school values diversity and has pupils and staff from a wide range of backgrounds. Employees should not post offensive or discriminatory remarks which may lead to a concern to the suitability of the post held by the employee which requires them to behave towards service users and colleagues in a manner compatible with the School's equal opportunities policies, or present a concern of the ability of the employee to commit to the policies.
- 10) Employees should be careful not to join or be associated with online groups which, due to their content or objectives, are incompatible with the policies and objectives of the school.
- 11) Confidential information about the school should not be posted. This may include aspects of school policy or details of internal discussions about work or colleagues.
- 12) Employees' email address or work numbers should not be included on personal online profiles or otherwise posted on line.
- 13) Privacy of colleagues and service users should be maintained at all times.