



Social Media Policy

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Contents

Contents.....	2
1. Introduction	3
2. Roles, Responsibilities and Procedure.....	3
3. Definition of Social Media.....	4
4. Acceptable Use	4
5. Safeguarding	4
6. Cyberbullying	5
7. Responsible Use of Social Media	5
8. Misuse of Social Media	6

1. Introduction

The Voyage Education Partnership (the Trust) recognises and embraces the numerous benefits and opportunities that social media offers. While employees are encouraged to engage, collaborate and innovate through social media, they should also be aware that there are some associated risks, especially around issues of safeguarding, bullying and personal reputation.

The purpose of this policy is to encourage good practice, to protect the Trust and its employees, and to promote the effective use of social media as part of the Trust's activities.

This policy covers personal and professional use of social media and aims to encourage its safe use by the school and its employees.

The policy applies regardless of whether the social media is accessed using the Trust's IT facilities and equipment, or equipment belonging to members of staff.

Personal communications via social media accounts that are likely to have a negative impact on professional standards or the Trust's reputation are within the scope of this policy.

This policy covers all individuals working at all levels and grades, including full-time and part-time employees, fixed-term employees and agency workers.

2. Roles, Responsibilities and Procedure

Employees should:

- be aware of their online reputation and recognise that their online activity can be seen by others including parents, pupils and colleagues on social media;
- ensure that any use of social media is carried out in line with this policy and other relevant Trust policies;
- be aware that any excessive use of social media in school/college may result in disciplinary action;
- be responsible for their words and actions in an online environment. They are therefore advised to consider whether any comment, photograph or video that they are about to post on a social networking site is something that they want pupils, colleagues, other employees of the trust, or even future employers, to read. **If in doubt, don't post it.**

Line Managers and Headteachers are responsible for:

- addressing any concerns and/or questions employees may have on the use of social media; and
- operating within the boundaries of this policy and ensuring that all staff understand the standards of behaviour expected of them.

The Human Resources Team are responsible for:

- giving specialist advice on the use of social media; and
- implementing and reviewing this policy

3. Definition of Social Media

Social media is a broad term for any kind of online platform which enables people to directly interact with each other. It allows people to share information, ideas and views.

Examples of social media include blogs, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Google+, Instagram, TikTok, Flickr and YouTube.

4. Acceptable Use

Employees should be aware that content uploaded to social media is not private. Even if you restrict it to 'friends', there is still capacity for it to be re-posted or distributed beyond the intended recipients. Therefore, employees using social media should conduct themselves with professionalism and respect.

Employees should not upload any content on to social media sites that:

- is confidential to the Trust or its staff;
- amounts to bullying;
- amounts to unlawful discrimination, harassment or victimisation;
- brings the Trust into disrepute;
- contains lewd, sexually explicit, threatening or similarly inappropriate or offensive comments, images or video clips;
- undermines the reputation of the school and/or individuals;
- is defamatory or knowingly false;
- breaches copyright; or
- is in any other way unlawful.

Employees should be aware of both professional and social boundaries and should not therefore accept or invite 'friend' requests from pupils or ex-pupils under the age of 18, or from parents on their personal social media accounts such as Facebook. All communication with parents via social media should be through the Trust's social media accounts.

Employees should note that the use of social media accounts during lesson time is not permitted.

5. Safeguarding

The use of social networking sites introduces a range of potential safeguarding risks to children and young people.

Potential risks can include, but are not limited to:

- online bullying;
- grooming, exploitation or stalking;
- exposure to inappropriate material or hateful language; or
- encouraging violent behaviour, self-harm or risk taking.

In order to mitigate these risks, there are steps you can take to promote safety on line:

- You should not use any information in an attempt to locate or meet a child; and
- Ensure that any messages, photos or information comply with existing policies.

Any content or online activity which raises a safeguarding concern must be reported in line with the Trust's Safeguarding and Child Protection policies. Any online concerns should be reported as soon as identified as urgent steps may need to be taken to support the child.

With regard to personal safeguarding, you should report any harassment or abuse you receive online while using your work accounts to the Headteacher or your Line Manger.

6. Cyberbullying

Staff should never engage with cyberbullying incidents. If in the course of your employment with the Trust, you discover a website containing inaccurate, inappropriate or inflammatory written material relating to you, or images of you which have been taken and/or which are being used without your permission, you should immediately report this to the Headteacher or your Line Manager.

Staff should keep any records of the abuse such as text, emails, voicemail, website or social media. If appropriate, screen prints of messages or web pages could be taken and the time, date and address of site should be recorded.

7. Responsible Use of Social Media

Remember that anything you post online is not really private. Below are some common sense guidelines that staff are should follow to ensure responsible and safe use of social media:

- Do not add pupils as friends or contacts in your social media accounts.
- Always maintain professional boundaries. Do not engage in discussion with pupils online unless through official school accounts.
- Think about the potential risks: professional boundaries of adding parents to your private social media accounts.
- Consider using an alternative name on sites like Facebook to make it harder for pupils to find you.
- Never post anything that is offensive or aggressive, even if you are very angry or upset. It can easily be taken out of context.
- Remember humour is relative. For example, posting images and/or text about a recent stag or hen night may be deemed inappropriate. Likewise, a few 'light-hearted' comments and/or images about colleagues or students may not be perceived as such by either subject(s) of the humour or the Trust. The guiding rule is: **if in doubt, don't post it.**
- Make sure you regularly check and refresh your site page to ensure it is free of any inappropriate comments and/or images.
- If you are tagged in something in Facebook that you consider inappropriate, use the remove tag feature to untag yourself (for details on how to do this, refer to the Facebook help centre).
- Be cautious of accepting 'friend requests' from people you do not really know. Simply being a 'friend' of your own Facebook friend does not mean that they should automatically be given access to your information.
- Review your profile information and settings on Facebook, Twitter and other sites to ensure it is appropriate as it may be accessed by others such as colleagues, pupils, parents and potential employers.

- Check your privacy and security settings regularly, and keep your date of birth and home address to yourself. Identity theft is a growing crime and this kind of information could be used to gain access to your bank or credit card account.
- If you feel dissatisfied and wish to rant about teaching, politics and life in general, consider doing so anonymously, through a networking account or blog which cannot be attributed to you. Check that anything that you post does not identify you, your school, pupils or parents.
- Ensure that any comments and/or images could not be deemed defamatory or in breach of copyright legislation.
- Never post any information which can be used to identify a pupil.
- Do not use social media in any way to attack or abuse colleagues or air any other internal grievances.
- Do not post derogatory, defamatory, offensive, harassing or discriminatory content.
- Do not engage in any conduct (using personal insults, obscenities) which would not be acceptable in the workplace.
- Do not use social media to ‘whistle blow’ – raise concerns through the the Trust’s Whistleblowing Policy.

8. Misuse of Social Media

Any member of staff suspected of committing a breach of this policy (or if complaints are received about unacceptable use of social networking that has potentially breached this policy) will be investigated in accordance with the Trust’s disciplinary or grievance procedure. The member of staff will be expected to co-operate with the Trust’s investigation which may involve:

- handing over relevant passwords and login details;
- printing a copy or obtaining a screenshot of the alleged unacceptable content; and
- determining that the responsibility or source of the content was in fact the member of staff.

The seriousness of the breach will be considered including the nature of the content, how long the content remained visible on the social media site, the potential for recirculation by others and the impact on the school/trust or the individuals concerned.

Staff should be aware that actions online can be in breach of the harassment/IT/equality policies and any online breaches of these policies may also be treated as conduct issues in accordance with the disciplinary procedure.

If the outcome of an investigation leads to disciplinary action, the consequences will be dealt with in accordance with the appropriate procedures. Serious breaches could result in the dismissal of the employee.

Where conduct is considered to be unlawful, the school will report the matter to the police and other external agencies.