



Social Media Policy

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‘Always treat others as you would like them to treat you’.
(Matthew Ch 7 v 12)

Contents

Introduction.....	3
Objectives.....	3
Definitions and Scope	3
Use of social media in practice	4
1. Personal use of social media	4
2. School-sanctioned use of social media.....	5
Staff/governors interacting with each other online	5
Application of this Policy to school governors.....	6
Radicalisation.....	6
Cyberbullying.....	6
Code of Conduct	7
Potential and Actual Breaches of the Policy.....	7

Introduction

The widespread availability and use of social media applications bring opportunities to understand, engage, and communicate in new and exciting ways. It is important that we are able to use these technologies and services effectively and flexibly. However, it is also important to ensure that we balance this with our duties to our school, the community, our legal responsibilities and our reputation.

For example, our use of social networking applications has implications for our duty to safeguard children, young people and vulnerable adults.

The policy requirements in this document aim to provide this balance to support innovation whilst providing a framework of good practice. They apply to all members of staff at the school.

Objectives

The purpose of the policy is to:

- Protect the school from legal risks
- Ensure that the reputation of the school, its staff and governors is protected
- Safeguard all children
- Ensure that any users are able clearly to distinguish where information provided via social media is legitimately representative of the school
- Clarify what the school considers to be appropriate and inappropriate use of social networking and internet sites by staff
- Encourage social networking/internet sites to be used in a beneficial and positive way
- Set out the procedures that will be followed where it is considered that staff have inappropriately or unlawfully used social networking/internet sites.

Definitions and Scope

Social networking applications include for example the School Website, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp and Facebook.

All members of staff / School Governing Body should bear in mind that information they share through social networking applications, even if they are on private spaces, are still subject to copyright, data protection and Freedom of Information legislation, the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 and other legislation. They must also operate in line with the school's Equalities, Child Protection and ICT Acceptable Use Policies.

Within this policy there is a distinction between use of school-sanctioned social media for professional educational purposes, and personal use of social media.

St Brendan's Catholic Primary School is committed to ensuring that all staff members provide confidential services that meet the highest standards. All individuals working on behalf of the school are bound by a legal duty of confidence and other laws to protect the confidential information they have access to during the course of work. Disclosure of confidential information on social media is likely to breach a number of laws and professional codes of conduct, including:

- The Human Rights Act 1998
- Common law duty of confidentiality, and
- The Data Protection Act 2018

Confidential information includes, but is not limited to:

- Person-identifiable information e.g. pupil and employee records protected by the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations.
- Information divulged in the expectation of confidentiality

- School business or corporate records containing organisationally or publicly sensitive information
- Any commercially sensitive information such as information relating to commercial proposals or current negotiations, and
- Politically sensitive information

Staff members should also be aware that other laws relating to libel, defamation, harassment and copyright may apply to information posted on social media, including :

- Libel Act 1843
- Defamation Act 2013
- Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994
- Malicious Communications Act 1988
- Communications Act 2003
- Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988
- Computer Misuse Act 1990
- Electronic Communications Act 2000, and
- The Telecommunications Regulations 2000

St Brendan's Catholic Primary School could be held vicariously responsible for acts of their employees in the course of their employment. For example, staff members who harass co-workers online or who engage in cyberbullying or discrimination on the grounds of race, sex, disability, etc or who defame a third party while at work may render St Brendan's Catholic Primary School liable to the injured party.

Use of social media in practice

1. Personal use of social media

- School staff will not invite, accept or engage in communications with parents or children from the school community in any personal social media whilst in employment at St Brendan's Catholic Primary School.
- Any communication received from children on any personal social media sites must be reported to the designated person for Child Protection
- If any member of staff is aware of any inappropriate communications involving any child in any social media, these must immediately be reported as above
- Members of the school staff are strongly advised to set all privacy settings to the highest possible levels on all personal social media accounts
- All email communication between staff and members of the school community on school business must be made from an official school email account
- Staff are advised to avoid posts or comments that refer to specific, individual matters related to the school and members of its community on any social media accounts

- Staff are also advised to consider the reputation of the school in any posts or comments related to the school on any social media accounts
- Staff must not represent their personal views as those of St Brendan's Catholic Primary School on any social media
- Staff must not use social media and the internet in any way to attack, insult, abuse or defame pupils, their family members, colleagues, other professionals or organisations
- Staff members must not identify themselves as employees of St Brendan's Catholic Primary School or service providers for the school in their personal webspace. This is to prevent information on these sites from being linked with school and to safeguard the privacy of staff members, particularly those involved in providing sensitive frontline services
- Staff should not accept any current pupil of any age or any ex-pupil of the school under the age of 18 as a friend, follower, subscriber or similar on any personal social media account

2. School-sanctioned use of social media

There are many legitimate uses of social media and there are also many possibilities for using social media to enhance and develop the schools' communications.

When using social media for educational purposes, the following practices must be observed:

- The content of any school-sanctioned social media site should be solely professional and should reflect well on the school.
- Staff must not publish photographs of children without the written consent of parents / carers, identify by name any children featured in photographs, or allow personally identifying information to be published on school social media accounts
- Care must be taken that any links to external sites from the account are appropriate and safe
- Any inappropriate comments on or abuse of school-sanctioned social media should immediately be removed and reported to a member of the senior leadership team.
- Staff should not engage with any direct messaging of students through social media
- All social media accounts created for educational purposes should include a link in the About or Info page to the ICT Acceptable Use Policy on the school website. This will indicate that the account is officially sanctioned by St Brendan's Catholic Primary School.
- School Governing Body are able to use their Trust email address or mobile phones to make contact with other members of the Governing Body on school business. Email communication can be used as a source for debate, but any decisions MUST be approved at a Governor Meeting.

Staff/governors interacting with each other online

Governors are advised not to be “friends” with members of staff online. Reasons for this include:

- Potential for a conflict of interest where a governor is on a selection panel/disciplinary panel where a “friend” is involved.
- Due to the role of the governing body and its general responsibility for the conduct of the school, it is sensible to maintain a certain level of separation between governors and staff.
- Teachers and other staff members should also exercise caution when considering inviting work colleagues to be ‘friends’ on social networking sites, as this may create a conflict/difficult situation in the future.

Application of this Policy to school governors

Whilst some aspects of this policy are clearly more targeted at school staff, many have equal application to governors. For example, section use of social media in practice provides guidance for all on what is considered to be inappropriate use of social media/internet sites. All governors should ensure that they comply with the spirit of the policy

Though governors would not be subject to the same disciplinary process as staff, there are still forms of redress available where a governor behaves in an inappropriate manner. The appropriate procedures would be followed in such cases.

Radicalisation

Schools have a vital role to play in protecting pupils from the risks of extremism and radicalisation. Keeping children safe from risks posed by terrorist exploitation of social media should be approached in the same way as safeguarding children from any other online abuse.

Protecting children from the risk of radicalisation should be seen as part of schools’ wider safeguarding duties and is similar in nature to protecting children from other forms of harm and abuse. The internet and the use of social media in particular has become a major factor in the radicalisation of young people. As with managing other safeguarding risks, staff should be alert to changes in children’s behaviour which could indicate that they may be in need of help or protection. School staff should use their professional judgement in identifying children who might be at risk of radicalisation and act proportionately which may include making a referral to the Channel programme.

Cyberbullying

St Brendan's Catholic Primary School's definition of cyberbullying is **'the use of modern communication technologies to embarrass, humiliate, threaten or intimidate an individual in the attempt to gain power and control over them.'**

In order to reduce the potential for cyberbullying, children are not allowed to bring phones into school.

Prevention activities are key to ensuring that staff are protected from the potential threat of cyberbullying. All employees are reminded of the need to protect themselves from the potential threat of cyberbullying. Following the advice contained in this guidance should reduce the risk of personal information falling into the wrong hands.

If cyberbullying does take place, employees should keep records of the abuse, text, e-mails, website or instant message and should not delete texts or e-mails. Employees are advised to take screen prints of messages or web pages and be careful to record the time, date and place of the site.

Staff are encouraged to report all incidents of cyberbullying to their line manager or the Heads of School. All such incidents will be taken seriously and will be dealt with in consideration of the wishes of the person who has reported the incident. It is for the individual who is being bullied to decide whether they wish to report the actions to the police.

All adults working with children have a responsibility to maintain public confidence in their ability to safeguard the welfare and best interests of children. It is therefore expected that they will adopt high standards of personal conduct in order to maintain the confidence and respect of their colleagues, children, public in general and all those with whom they work.

Adults in contact with children should therefore understand and be aware that safe practice also involves using judgement and integrity about behaviours in places other than the work setting.

The guidance contained in this policy is an attempt to identify what behaviours are expected of schools' staff who work with children. Anyone whose practice deviates from this document and/or their professional or employment-related code of conduct may bring into question their suitability to work with children and young people and may result in disciplinary action being taken against them.

School staff should always maintain appropriate professional boundaries and avoid behaviour, during their use of the internet and other communication technologies, which might be misinterpreted by others. They should report and record any incident with this potential.

Code of Conduct

Social Networking- Under no circumstances should staff make reference to any staff member, pupil, parent or school activity/event.

The following are also **not considered acceptable** at St. Brendan's Catholic Primary School:

- The use of the school's name, logo, or any other published material without written prior permission from the Executive Headteacher. This applies to any published material including the internet or written documentation.
- The posting of any communication or images which links the school to any form of illegal conduct, or which may damage the reputation of the school. This includes defamatory comments.
- The disclosure of confidential or business-sensitive information; or the disclosure of information or images that could compromise the security of the school.
- The posting of any images of employees, children, governors or anyone directly connected with the school whilst engaged in school activities.

In addition to the above everyone at St Brendan's Catholic Primary School must ensure that they:

- Communicate with children and parents in an open and transparent way using the school phone number and email address.
- Never 'friend' a pupil at the school where they are working onto their social networking site.
- Do not make any derogatory, defamatory, rude, threatening or inappropriate comments about the school, or anyone at or connected with the school.
- Use social networking sites responsibly and ensure that neither their personal nor professional reputation, nor the school's reputation is compromised by inappropriate postings.
- Are aware of the potential of on-line identity fraud and to be cautious when giving out personal information about themselves which may compromise their personal safety and security

Potential and Actual Breaches of the Policy

All staff are required to adhere to this policy. Staff should note that any breaches of this policy may lead to disciplinary action. Serious breaches of this policy, for example incidents of bullying of colleagues or social media activity causing serious damage to the school, may constitute gross misconduct and lead to summary dismissal.

Similarly, where there is a serious breach of this policy, action may be taken in respect of other members of staff who are not employees which may result in the termination of their appointment.

Staff have a duty to report abuses of this policy in accordance with the school's whistleblowing policy.

In instances where there has been a breach of the above Policy, the following will apply:

- Any breaches of this policy will be fully investigated. Where it is found that there has been a breach of the policy this may result in action being taken under the Disciplinary Procedure. A breach of this policy will be considered to be a serious disciplinary offence which is also contrary to the school's ethos and principles.
- The Governing Body will take appropriate action in order to protect the school's reputation and that of its staff, parents, governors, children and anyone else directly linked to the school.

Whilst every attempt has been made to cover a wide range of situations, it is recognised that this policy cannot cover all eventualities. There may be times when professional judgements are made in situations not covered by this document, or which directly contravene the standards outlined in this document. It is expected that in these circumstances staff will always advise the Heads of School of the justification for any such action already taken or proposed. The Heads of School will in turn seek advice where appropriate. This policy takes account of employment legislation and best practice guidelines in relation to social networking in addition to the legal obligations of governing bodies and the relevant legislation