



Social Networking Policy for Schools

MODEL SOCIAL NETWORKING POLICY FOR SCHOOLS

This document sets out the policy of Marden Bridge Middle School on the use of computer-based social networking communication and aims to set clear expectations of professional behaviour when engaging in such activities.

Introduction

- 101 Social networking and its development has become, in recent years, an increasingly important feature of modern communication between individuals, but also in terms of business and organisational communication. The expansion of such networks on the internet has transformed ways we interact and the school views this as a positive opportunity for closer communication with parents and other stakeholders within the community.
- 102 Though this technology brings with it new and exciting methods of communication, it also brings with it increasing risks relating to appropriate usage. Therefore there are certain responsibilities, standards of behaviour and other organisational considerations which need to be considered. Participation online can result in comments being permanently available and open to being republished in other media.
It is therefore important that as a school we develop systems to safely embrace this technology when engaging with our stakeholders in the community, as part of an effective communication strategy. It is therefore important that we balance activities to take into account legal requirements, the reputation of the school and our partners and ensure that any activities are within agreed principles.
- 103 This policy has therefore been developed to accompany the school's E - Strategy as agreed by the Governing Body. Though this latter strategy concentrates on the development of social media and networking within a Teaching & Learning related environment, this specific policy has been adopted to offer additional clarity in relation to personal usage, both within and outside of school.

Defining social networking

- 201 For the purpose of this policy, social networking can be defined as¹:

“Web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.”

- 202 This definition is commonly used to include websites which allow people to interact with each other in some way – by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests. Examples evidenced by ACAS include:

¹ Boyd and Ellison: Journal of Computer Mediated Communication (2007)

- Facebook – a social networking service where users create personal profiles, add other users as friends and exchange messages.
- Twitter – a micro-blogging service enabling its users to send and read publicly-visible messages called tweets and subscribe to other users’ tweets.
- LinkedIn – a business-related social networking site mainly used for professional networking.
- MySpace – an online community of users’ personal profiles. These typically include photographs, information about personal interests and blogs.

203 This list is not exhaustive and would include other web-based services such as blogs, message boards, photo document- and video-sharing websites and micro-blogging services.

Aims & Objectives

301 The purpose of this Policy is to ensure that personal usage of social networking sites (even if operating on private spaces on such sites) promotes safer working practice, and in doing so, minimise the risk of misplaced or malicious allegations made against workers within school. It will also act as a preventative measure in relation to workers misusing their position of trust and in doing so reduce the potential risk to the school (both legal and to its reputation) and to themselves.

302 In addition it will ensure clarity between information issued on behalf of the school by a worker (covered by the school E-Strategy) and information released through general usage of social networking sites (both public and private spaces).

Scope

301 This document will be made available to all workers (as defined below) engaged in school who will then be expected to familiarise themselves with the principles covered within this policy. Where these principles are not adhered to then the school reserve the right to take appropriate action, in the following manner:

- Where they are an employee - reference may be made to the school disciplinary policy and procedure to determine appropriate action.
- Where they are an agency worker - reference may be made to the agency for their withdrawal and a request made for the agency to consider its own procedures relating to conduct.
- Where they are acting under a “contract for service” - reference may be made to the obligations within the relevant contract with the school.

302 This document does not replace or take priority over advice relating to other policies issued around safeguarding or IT security issues (email, ICT and data protection policies), but is intended to both supplement and complement any such documents.

303 This policy should also be read in conjunction with the schools e- strategy², together with the following school documentation:

- IT Security and Fair Usage Policy
- Equality Policy
- Child Protection Policy
- Disciplinary Policy and Procedures
- Guidance on Cyberbullying
- Guidance for Safer Working Practice for Adults who Work with Children and Young People
- Guidance relating to the School E-strategy
- Staff Code of Conduct

304 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, or which directly contravene the standards outlined in this document. It is expected that in these circumstances workers in school will always advise the Headteacher of the justification for any such action already taken or proposed. Headteachers will in turn seek advice from the School Link HR Advisor where appropriate.

Principles

401 Though use of social networking sites not related to school-based activities does not require approval, it is expected that workers covered by this policy will follow the following principles while engaged in such activities (whether engaged in public or private spaces on such sites) :

- Where it is intended to use social networking sites for an activity on behalf of school, you should ensure you have received written approval from a member of the SMT prior to undertaking such activities.

² Schools have been provided with documentation from the school improvement team relating to resources needed to develop a school based e-strategy. Included in these resources available to school, for a limited period, will be the availability of an external e-strategy audit by the northern grid for learning.

- Communication between adults and pupils by whatever method, should take place within clear and explicit professional boundaries as agreed by the school SMT (e.g. the school based Learning Platform), conforming with the requirements of equalities legislation in such communications. Any digression from such boundaries should be reported to your line manager.
- Non work-related access during work time is not permitted unless prior approval has been granted by a member of the SMT. Usage should not involve any breach of copyright, or promote any financial, commercial, business, or political interests.
- All workers, particularly those new to the school setting, should review their social networking sites when they join the school to ensure that information available publicly about them is accurate and appropriate (e.g. photographs that may cause embarrassment to themselves and the school if they are published outside of the site).
- Confidentiality needs to be considered at all times through ensuring workers do not release any confidential information about themselves, the school or its partners, pupils or other stakeholders within the community.
- Assigning a school pupil as a 'friend' on their social networking page is prohibited, and caution should be taken regarding becoming 'friends' with ex-students especially where siblings continue to attend the school. In addition workers should never use, access, or become a "friend" of the social networking pages of pupils on the roll of the school³.
- Workers who comment upon policies relating to school should highlight their connection to the school, making it clear that comments are their own personal views/opinions and not representative of those of the school unless such comment has received prior written approval by a member of SMT.
- When using social media sites, when not in use for school business, you should refrain from using work based e-mail contact address (such as .northtyneside.gov.uk or ntlp.gov.uk) or the school logo unless prior written approval has been granted by the school SMT.
- When commenting, uploading or posting links within social networking sites, remarks must never be derogatory, offensive, reflect negatively on your professionalism or that of colleagues, or have the potential to bring

³ Note that there may be exceptions where a member of staff is required to access pupil social network pages but written approval must be obtained prior to access from a member of the SMT e.g. investigating pupil to pupil online bullying.

the school into disrepute⁴.

- There will be occasions when there are social contacts between pupils and staff, where for example the parent and teacher are part of the same social circle. These contacts however, will be easily recognised and should be openly acknowledged with the Head Teacher where there may be implications for the adult and their position within the school setting.
- All workers have a responsibility to report any unsuitable material of a safeguarding nature uncovered relating to workers activities both on public and private spaces within a social networking site to the Headteacher, who will determine the appropriate action inclusive of reporting to external agencies.

Breaches of Policy

501 Serious breaches of this policy by school employees will amount to gross misconduct and may result in dismissal. The below list constitutes examples of serious breaches but this list is not exhaustive:

- Breach of confidentiality/copyright
- Behaving in a discriminatory, bullying or harassing way towards others
- Bringing the school or a partner agency into disrepute
- Where a criminal offence has taken place
- Unsuitable material that is of a safeguarding nature

Any member of staff who feels that a serious breach has occurred should inform a member of the SMT.

Review of policy

601 Due to the ever changing nature of information and communication technologies the Governing Body of Marden Bridge Middle school have agreed to review this policy annually and, if necessary, more frequently in response to any significant new developments.

Further Information

701 Information relating to a National Education Network e-safety audit tool for schools can be found at:

- [NEN – The Education Network](#)

additional resources for students, teachers, governors and parents relating to

⁴ To limit risk to inadvertently releasing confidential information workers should give consideration to reviewing privacy settings within social medial networks to limit access and availability of information and comments.

social networking and use of the internet can be found at the national UK safer Internet Centre:

<http://www.saferinternet.org.uk/> and;

<https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/Teachers/>

Copies of the following additional policies referred to in this policy can be found on the schools HR intranet site.

- [Guidance on producing an Equality policy](#)
- [Child protection policy](#)
- [Guidance on Cyberbullying](#)
- [Dealing with allegations of abuse against staff in schools](#)
- [Disciplinary policy and procedures](#)