

The Magna Carta School

Social Media Guidance

Introduction

The school is aware and acknowledges that increasing numbers of adults and children are using social networking sites. The widespread availability and use of social networking application bring opportunities to understand, learn, engage and communicate with audiences in new 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 the school safeguards students, staff and the organisation itself.

This guidance is to protect staff and advise school leadership on how to deal with potential inappropriate use of social networking sites. For example, our use of social networking applications has implications for our duty to safeguard children, young people and vulnerable adults.

This document aims to provide balance to support innovation whilst providing a framework of good practice.

Purpose

- Assist school staff working with children to work safely and responsibly with the Internet and other communication technologies and to monitor their own standards and practice.
- Set clear expectations of behaviour and/or codes of practice relevant to social networking for educational, personal or recreational use.
- Give a clear message that unlawful or unsafe behaviour is unacceptable and that, where appropriate, disciplinary or legal action will be taken.
- Support safer working practice & environments.
- Minimise the risk of misplaced or malicious allegations made against adults who work with students.
- Reduce the incidence of positions of trust being abused or misused.

Whilst every attempt has been made to cover a wide range of situations, it is recognised that this guidance 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 in schools will always advise a member of the Senior Leadership Team of the justification for any such action already taken or proposed.

Scope

This document applies to all staff at The Magna Carta School. This includes teachers, support staff, supply staff, governors, contractors and volunteers. References to staff should be taken to apply to all the above groups of people in schools. Reference to students means all students at the school including those who left the school and are below the age of 18.

Status

This document does not replace or take priority over advice given by Personnel, Learning Support department or the school's codes of conduct, dealing with allegations of abuse, other policies issued around safeguarding or IT issues (email, ICT and data protection policies), but is intended to both supplement and complement any such documents.

Principles

- Adults who work with students are responsible for their own actions and behaviour and should avoid any conduct, which would lead any reasonable person to question their motivation and intentions.
- Staff should work and be seen to work, in an open and transparent way.
- Staff should continually monitor and review their practice in terms of the continually evolving world of social networking and ensure they follow the guidance contained in this document.

Safer Social Media Practice in School

What is social media?

For the purpose of this document, social media is the term commonly used for websites which allow people to interact/communicate with each other in some form - by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests. Social networking websites such as Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest are perhaps the most well-known examples of social media but the term also covers other web based services such as blogs, video and audio podcasts, wikis, message boards, photo document and video sharing websites such as YouTube and micro blogging services such as Twitter. This definition of social media is not exhaustive as technology develops with new ways of communicating every day.

For the purpose of this document the terminology 'social media' is not exhaustive and also applies to the use of communication technologies such as mobile phones, cameras, mobile or handheld devices and any other emerging forms of communications technologies.

Overview and expectations

All adults working with students have a responsibility to maintain public confidence in their ability to safeguard the welfare and best interests of students. It is therefore expected that they will adopt high standards of personal conduct in order to maintain the confidence and respect of their colleagues, students, public in general and all those with whom they work in line with the school's code of conduct. Adults in contact with students should understand and be aware that safe practice also involves using judgement and integrity about behaviours in places other than within the working environment.

The guidance contained in this document is an attempt to identify what behaviours are expected of all staff working with students. 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.

Safer online behaviour

Managing personal information effectively makes it far less likely that information will be misused. In their own interests, staff need to be aware of the dangers of putting personal information onto social networking sites, such as addresses, home and mobile phone numbers. This will avoid the potential for students or their families or friends having access to staff outside of the school environment. It also reduces the potential for identity theft by third parties.

All staff, particularly new staff, should review their social networking sites when they join the school to ensure that information available publicly about them is accurate and appropriate. This includes

any 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. Social networking sites have the potential to discuss inappropriate information and staff need to ensure that they do not put any confidential information on their site about themselves, the school, their colleagues, students or members of the public.

Staff need to ensure that when they are communicating about others, even outside of work, they give due regard to the potential for defamation of character. Making allegations on social networking sites (even in their own time and in their own homes) about other employees, students or other individuals connected with the school, or another school could result in formal action being taken against them. Staff are also reminded that they must comply with the requirements of equalities legislation in their on-line communications.

Staff must never post derogatory remarks or offensive comments on-line or engage in on-line activities which bring the school into disrepute.

Protection of personal information

- Staff should ensure that they do not use school ICT equipment for personal use with personal information, e.g. camera, computers, mobile device or tablets.
- Staff should keep their personal phone numbers private and must not use their own mobile phones/device to contact students or parents.
- Staff must never share their work log-ins or passwords with other staff, students or members of the public.
- Staff should know who is allowed to view the content on their pages of the sites they use and how to restrict access to certain groups of people.

Communication between students, school & staff

Communication between students and staff, by whatever method, should take place within clear and explicit professional boundaries. This includes the wider use of technology such as mobile phones, text messaging, e-mails, digital cameras, videos, web-cams, websites, social media and blogs.

It is the expectation that the school provides a work telephone line and e-mail address for communication between staff and parents. Staff should not give their personal mobile numbers or personal e-mail addresses to pupils or parents.

Staff should not request, or respond to, any personal information from a student, other than that which might be appropriate as part of their professional role.

Staff should ensure that all communications are transparent and open to scrutiny. They should also be careful with their communications with students so as to avoid any possible misinterpretation of their motives or any behaviour, which could be construed as 'grooming' in the context of sexual offending.

E-mail or text communications between an adult and a student outside agreed protocols may lead to disciplinary and/or criminal investigations. This also includes communications through Internet based web sites. Internal e-mail systems should only be used in accordance with the school's email policy.

Social contact

Staff should not establish or seek to establish social contact via social media or other communication technologies with students for the purpose of securing a friendship or to pursue or strengthen a relationship. Staff should never use or access social networking sites of students and should never accept an invitation to 'friend' a student; unless the exception is you are the parent of that student(s).

There will be occasions when there are social contacts between students and staff, where for example the parent and teacher are part of the same social circle. These contacts however, will be easily recognised and openly acknowledged.

There must be awareness on the part of those working with students that some social networking contacts, especially where these are not common knowledge, can be misconstrued as being part of a grooming process. This can also apply to social networking contacts made through outside interests or through the staff member's own family.

Disciplinary action

Any breaches of this guidance may lead to disciplinary action under the school disciplinary policy.

Review of policy

Due to the ever-changing nature of information and communication technologies it is best practice that this guidance is reviewed annually and, if necessary, more frequently in response to any significant new developments in the use of technologies, new threats to e-safety or incidents that have taken place.

Guidance acceptance

This guidance applies to all staff and is accepted by default. Staff using social media tools for school business are recommended to keep up to date with this guidance.