Social Media for School Staff Policy

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SIGNED DEPUTY EXECUTIVE PRINCIPAL	Mary Ellen McCarthy	DATE	15/03/2021
SIGNED CHAIR OF DIRECTORS	Ray Vango	DATE	15/03/2021

Our Vision

Lumen Learning Trust puts the children's needs at the heart of its provision. Our whole school community is committed to enabling the children to become successful lifelong learners and happy, fulfilled adults who can make positive choices about their future.

Aim

The aim of this policy is to enable employees to enjoy the benefits of social networking while understanding the standards of conduct expected by their school as well as Lumen Learning Trust and the actions that may be taken when it is considered a member of staff may have breached this policy. It is intended to minimise the risks that can impact on the wellbeing of staff, pupils and the reputation of the school and Lumen Learning Trust.

1. Introduction

Lumen Learning 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.

2. Purpose of the policy

2.1.   The purpose of this policy is to

2.1.1.   Clarify what the school/Trust considers to be appropriate and inappropriate use of social networking by staff;

2.1.2.   Encourage social networking to be used in a beneficial and positive way;

2.1.3.   Safeguard staff, pupils, parents and members of the public from abuse through social networking;

2.1.4.   Safeguard the reputation of the school/Trust, other schools, other organisations and employers from unwarranted abuse through social networking;

2.1.5.   Set out the procedures that will be followed where it is considered that staff have inappropriately or unlawfully used social networking.

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

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

2.4.   This policy covers all individuals use of social media including:

2.4.1.   On behalf of the school;
2.4.2.   As part of their work directly with pupils;
2.4.3.   In their wider professional lives;
2.4.4.   In their personal lives.

2.5.   In this policy, staff includes:

2.5.1.   Temporary and casual staff;
2.5.2.   Agency staff;
2.5.3.   Volunteers during their time working with the school
2.5.4.   Full and part time staff

2.5.5.   Fixed term staff

2.6.   In this policy, the word parents is used to mean the parents, carers and others with parental responsibility for a pupil at the school.

3. Roles, responsibilities and procedure

3.1.   Employees should:

- ensure that they are familiar with the contents of this policy and its relationship to the school's standards, policies and guidance on the use of ICT and e-safety including the Lumen Social Media for School policy, Staff Code of Conduct and ICT User Agreement;

- raise any queries or areas of concern they have relating to the use of social networking sites and interpretation of this policy with their line manager in the first instance;

- 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;

- be aware that any use of social media, outside of this policy, whilst on school premises 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, it should not be posted.

3.2   Headteachers are responsible for:

- ensuring that all existing and new staff are familiar with this policy and its relationship to the school's standards, policies and guidance on the use of ICT and e-safety;

- providing opportunities to discuss appropriate social networking use by staff on a regular basis and ensure that any queries raised are resolved swiftly;

- ensuring that any allegations raised in respect of access to social networking sites are investigated promptly and appropriately, in accordance with the school's disciplinary procedure, code of conduct and internet safety guidelines;

- ensuring there is a system in place for regular monitoring

3.3   The Central Team is responsible for:

- advising and supporting headteachers and line managers on the application of this policy;

- creating and reviewing this policy.

3.4   School governance teams should:

- Ensure that their own behaviour is in line with that expected as outlined in the governors' code of conduct and in accordance with this policy.

4. Definition of social media

4.1   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, Myspace, Flickr, Tik Tok and YouTube.

5. When using social media at any time

5.1 Staff must not place a child at risk of harm.

- Staff must follow statutory and school safeguarding procedures at all times when using social media.

- Staff must report all situations where any child is at potential risk by using relevant statutory and school child protection procedures.

5.2 Staff must not allow their use of social media to affect their ability to do their job in any way.

- Social media relationships must be declared with other personal relationships or interests whenever necessary or appropriate.

5.3 Staff must maintain the reputation of the school, its staff, its pupils, its parents, its governors, its wider community and their employers.

5.4 Staff must not post any images or videos that feature school/Trust grounds, buildings or materials, regardless of whether featured images and videos can identify the school/Trust.

5.5 Staff must not contribute or access any social media content which is illegal, discriminatory, sexual, or otherwise offensive when linked in any way to the school. This link could be, as examples, by identification with the school, during the working day, on school premises or when using school equipment. Such behaviours may also result in criminal proceedings.

- Staff must recognise that contributing or accessing any social media content which is illegal, discriminatory, sexual or otherwise offensive during personal use could lead to damage to their professional reputation or damage to the reputation of the school. This damage would breach this social media policy. And, again, such behaviours may also result in criminal proceedings.

5.6 Staff must not use social media to criticise or insult their school, its staff, its pupils, its parents, its governors or its wider community.

- Staff should be aware that there are other, more appropriate, methods of raising valid concerns about their school and its staff.

5.7 Staff must not use social media to harass, bully or intimidate any pupil, parent, member of staff, governor or other member of the wider school community.

5.8 Staff must not breach school confidentiality.

- School staff must follow their school data protection responsibilities when using social media.

- Staff must not reveal any other private or confidential school matters when using any social media.

5.9 Staff are responsible for their actions (and its consequences) whenever they use social media.

- Staff are responsible for all their social media content.

- Staff must understand that social media offers no guarantee of privacy and that any content they produce can be shared more widely by others. A member of staff's professional reputation or the reputation of the school could be damaged by content, perhaps which was intended to be private, being shared more widely than intended.

- Staff would still be held responsible for any consequential breach of this policy as they were responsible for producing the original content.

5.10   Staff are responsible for the configuration and use of any personal social media accounts they have. They are responsible for determining the level of security and privacy of all their social media content.

5.11   Staff are responsible for ensuring any material posted does not breach copyright laws or is in any other way unlawful.

5.12   Staff must raise all doubts, questions and concerns related to social media with school leaders. Staff must seek advice if they are not sure if any particular use of social media (or a related action) is appropriate or would potentially breach this policy. Staff cannot rely on their ignorance or lack of knowledge to defend any breach of this policy.

6. When using social media on behalf of the school

All Lumen Learning Trust schools use social media as a communications channel to engage with their school as well as wider community.

6.1.   Staff must be given explicit permission to use social media on behalf of their school by a school leader.

6.2.   These staff must follow all related procedures when acting on behalf of the school i.e. Social Media for Schools Policy.

6.3.   Staff must not use school social media for any personal discussions or for any individual personal matters even if initiated by other members of the school community. Users must be directed to more appropriate communication channels.

7. When using social media as part of working with pupils and students

A school may use social media to engage with their own pupils to support learning.

7.1   Staff must ensure that all social media use when working with pupils is sanctioned by the school; only uses explicitly agreed social media; and, follows agreed policies and procedures.

8. When using social media in staff's wider professional life

Social media is a useful tool for engaging and collaborating with the wider education community.

8.1.   Staff must be clear that their social media content is personal and not endorsed or supported by their school or the Trust.

8.2.   Staff are discouraged from identifying their school and must not use account names, school branding or anything else that could imply that the content is official school content.

- Staff must be particularly careful to not reveal any details of staff, pupils, parents or other members of the school community that make it possible to identify any individuals.

- Staff must use appropriate behaviour and language at all times. As a guide, this should be similar to that which would be used when taking part in a face-to-face meeting with other education professionals.

9. When using social media in staff's personal life

9.1.   The personal use of social media must neither interfere with a member of staff's ability to maintain their professional reputation nor impact on the reputation of the school or the Trust.

- Staff should carefully consider the implications of sharing content originating from other social media accounts. Staff are discouraged from sharing content that is likely to bring them into conflict with their school or the Trust or undermine the principles of their school or the Trust.

9.2.   Staff must take all reasonable steps to ensure the proper separation of their professional and personal lives.

- Staff must not use school social networking accounts for personal content.

- Staff must respect the wishes and privacy of any other members of their school community with whom they have personal social media contact.

9.3.   Staff must not use personal social media with any child with whom they solely have, or have had, a staff/pupil relationship. This includes ex-pupils until they reach the age of 18.

- School staff can have social media contact with pupils or ex-pupils where other appropriate relationships exist. As examples, a pupil who is also a family member or a family friend. These relationships must be open and transparent. The member of staff can report these social media relationships to senior leaders for their own protection.

- Staff must retain any communications to pupils or ex-pupils rejecting any approaches made on social media and ensure that they are professional in tone. Staff must also consider reporting these to senior leaders to ensure transparency.

9.4.   Staff must not use personal social media with anyone with whom they solely have a staff/parent relationship.

- Staff at schools can often have more complex relationships than just being a member of staff or a parent. As examples, staff can also be parents (of pupils at the school), in relationships or have friendships with other staff or parents; or also governors. Any member of staff can report any social media relationships to senior leaders for their own protection.

- Staff who are parents of pupils at the school are advised to strongly consider that their personal social media 'friends' are limited to staff only or parents only, rather than a mix of the two differing social groups.

- Staff who are 'friends' with other staff parents should be aware that this may increase their personal social media online visibility to other parents.

9.5.   Staff must make sure that their personal social media activities take into account who they have social media relationships with – particularly any other members of school community – and moderate their social media behaviour accordingly.

9.6.   Staff should not post comments from a personal social media account to an official school social media account in order to reduce their visibility to pupils and parents.

9.7.   Personal use of social media at school:

- Staff are discouraged from using personal social media accounts during working hours.

- Staff should not use school devices where social media sites can be accessed using school systems to access their personal social media channels.

- There is no obligation on the school to make social media sites available to staff.

10. Safeguarding

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

10.2. Potential risks can include, but are not limited to:

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

6.3 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.
- Ensure that any messages, photos or information comply with existing policies.

11. Reporting safeguarding concerns

11.1. When using social media, you may have a concern about what you are seeing or being told by another user which has safeguarding implications or may cause harm to the reputation of the school and/or its community. If you have any such concerns you should contact the headteacher or lead safeguarding officer in school.

11.2. Any online concerns should be reported as soon as identified as urgent steps may need to be taken to support the child.

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

12. Reporting, responding and recording cyberbullying incidents

12.1. Staff should never engage with cyberbullying incidents. If in the course of your employment with Lumen Learning 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 a senior manager at your school.

12.2. 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.

13. Action by employer: inappropriate use of social media

13.1. 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.

13.2. 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 (volunteers) which may result in the termination of their appointment.

13.3. Following a report of inappropriate use of social media, the senior manager will conduct a prompt investigation.

13.4. If in the course of the investigation, it is found that a pupil submitted the material to the website, that pupil will be disciplined in line with the school's behaviour policy.

13.5. The senior manager, where appropriate, will approach the website hosts to ensure the material is either amended or removed as a matter of urgency, i.e. within 24 hours. If the website requires the individual who is complaining to do so personally, the school will give their full support and assistance.

13.6. Checks will be carried out to ensure that the requested amendments or removals are made. If the website(s) does not co-operate, the senior manager will contact the internet service provider (ISP) as the ISP has the ability to block access to certain sites and, in exceptional circumstances, can close down a website.

13.7. If the material is threatening and/or intimidating, senior management will, with the member of staff's consent, report the matter to the police.

13.8. The member of staff will be offered full support and appropriate signposting to stress counselling services if required.

14. Breaches of this policy

14.1. 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 school/trust's disciplinary procedure. The member of staff will be expected to co-operate with the school's investigation which may involve:

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

14.2. 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.

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

14.4. 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.

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

15. Monitoring and review

15.1. If the manager reasonably believes that an employee has breached this policy, from time to time the school will monitor or record communications that are sent or received from within the school/trust's network.

15.2. This policy will be reviewed on a biannual basis and, in accordance with the following, on an as-and-when-required basis:
- legislative changes;
- good practice guidance;
- case law;
- significant incidents reported.

11.3   This policy does not form part of any employee's contract of employment and may also, after consultation with the trade unions, be amended from time to time by the school/trust.

16.   Legislation

16.1.   Acceptable use of social networking must comply with UK law. In applying this policy, the school/trust will adhere to its rights, responsibilities and duties in accordance with the following:
- Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000
- General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) 2018
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- The Equality Act 2010
- The Defamation Act 2013

17.   Conclusion

17.1.   The internet is a fast moving technology and it is impossible to cover all circumstances or emerging media – the principles set out in this policy must be followed irrespective of the medium.

17.2.   When using social media, staff should be aware of the potential impact on themselves and the employer, whether for work-related or personal use; whether during working hours or otherwise; or whether social media is accessed using the employer's equipment or using the employee's equipment.

17.3.   Staff should use discretion and common sense when engaging in online communication.

17.4.   There are some general rules and best practice in the appendix which staff may find helpful.

Appendix: Responsible Use of Social Media – guidance for staff

Below are some common sense guidelines and recommendations that staff are advised to follow to ensure responsible and safe use of social media:

- Consider using an alternative name on sites such as Facebook to make it harder for pupils and parents to find you. For example, some members use their partner's surname online but their own surname in school.

- Consider changing your profile picture to something unidentifiable, or if not, ensure that the image is professional.

- 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 'lighthearted' comments and/or images about colleagues or students may not be perceived as such by either subject(s) of the humour or the employer. 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.

- Do not associate yourself with your school on your profile (e.g. by setting it as your workplace, or by 'checking in' at a school event).

- Do not link your work email address to your social media accounts. Anyone who has this address (or your personal email address/mobile number) is able to find you using this information.

- Do not use social media to 'whistleblow' – raise concerns through the proper channels using the Lumen Learning Trust's Whistleblowing policy.