

### **AIMS & OBJECTIVES**

The School recognises and accepts that its employees may keep personal blogs on the Internet and that social networking sites are a useful way of interacting socially with colleagues, family and friends. While the School does not wish to discourage employees from accessing these sites, it expects certain standards of conduct to be observed to protect both its legitimate business interests and employees from the dangers of inappropriate use. Social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter are now widely used. This type of media allows people to communicate in ways that were not previously possible. However, such sites can be inappropriately used by some as a means of expressing negative or offensive views about schools and their staff.

This document also sets out this School's approach to parental use of such sites and sets out the procedures we will follow and action we may take when we consider that parents have used such facilities inappropriately. When we have referred to "parent" in this document, we also include carers; relatives; or anyone associated with the School.

The objectives of this policy are to:

- Encourage social networking sites to be used in a beneficial and positive way
- Encourage social networking sites to be used in a beneficial and positive way by parents;
- Safeguard pupils, staff and anyone associated with the school from the negative effects of social networking sites;
- Safeguard the reputation of the School from unwarranted abuse on social networking sites;
- Clarify what the School considers to be appropriate and inappropriate use of social networking sites by parents;

- Set out the procedures the School will follow where it considers parents have inappropriately or unlawfully used social networking sites to the detriment of the School, its staff or its pupils, and anyone else associated with the School; and
- Set out the action the School will consider taking if parents make inappropriate use of social networking sites.

While you may have your membership on such sites set to friends and family, you are reminded that they can forward the content of your blogs on to others and because you have no control over this process, you are reminded that none of your postings are truly private.

### **PROCEDURE**

This policy applies both inside and outside the workplace.

Social networking sites have potential to enhance the learning and achievement of pupils and enable parents to access information about the School and provide feedback efficiently and easily. In addition, the School recognises that many parents and other family members will have personal social networking accounts, which they might use to discuss/share views about school issues with friends and acquaintances. As a guide, individuals should consider the following before posting any information on social networking sites about the School, its staff, its pupils, or anyone else associated with the School:

- Is the social networking site the appropriate channel to raise concerns, give this feedback or express these views?
- Would private and confidential discussions with the School be more appropriate?

Social media/internet sites should not be used to name individuals and make abusive comments about those people. Please contact the school to discuss any concerns you may have.

- Are such comments likely to cause emotional or reputational harm to individuals which would not be justified, particularly if the School has not yet had a chance to investigate a complaint?

**Blog and Social Networking Policy and Procedure**

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- The reputational impact that the posting of such material may have to the School; any detrimental harm that the School may suffer as a result of the posting; and the impact that such a posting may have on pupils' learning.

You must not access blogs or social networking sites during working hours. Access using the School's IT systems is restricted to official breaks, unless specific permission is granted.

You must not post information on a blog or social networking site which is commercially sensitive and/or is confidential to the School, its suppliers or customers.

You must not make reference on a social networking site to the School, its employees, its customers, partners and suppliers. Any of the aforementioned parties must not be identifiable from any comments posted on an employee's personal blog.

You must not post entries on a blog or social networking site which are derogatory, defamatory, discriminatory or offensive in any way, or which could bring the School, its employees, its customers, partners and suppliers into disrepute or is likely to have a negative impact on the reputation of any of these parties.

Where you are a member of social networking sites, you are advised that you must not invite customers to be a friend on such a site or post comments on or interact in any way with their blog. In the case of Overley Hall School this includes: Parents or other family members of a child or adult in our care, foster carers, social workers, trainers or other visiting professionals associated with the school or home.

You should be aware that blogs and social networking posts may create documents which the courts can order to be disclosed for use in litigation. Consequently, you will be assumed to have written any contentious items unless you can prove definitively that you have not done so.

The School will monitor its IT systems as is deemed necessary in order to prevent inappropriate usage. Hard copy of blog entries which could include screen shots will be used in any disciplinary proceedings.

### **DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS FOR STAFF**

Employees whose conduct breaches this policy in any way may be subject to disciplinary action in accordance with the School's disciplinary procedure up to, and including, dismissal.

Any blog entries or comments on social networking sites made inside or outside the workplace that are defamatory, derogatory, or discriminatory about the School, its customers, suppliers or employees will be investigated as gross misconduct. If substantiated, such conduct may lead to summary dismissal after the due process of the School's disciplinary procedure has been followed.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Equal Opportunity Statement, Positive Work Environment Policy and Mobile Telephones – Personal Mobiles Policy.

### **Inappropriate use of social networking sites by parents/carers**

Although social networking sites may appear to be the quickest and easiest way to express frustrations or concerns about the School, it is not appropriate to do so. Other channels, such as a confidential discussion with the School, or using the School's concerns process or formal complaints procedure are much better suited to this.

The School considers the following examples to be inappropriate uses of social networking sites.

- Making allegations about staff or pupils at the School/cyber-bullying;
- Making complaints about the School/staff at the School;

- Making defamatory statements about the School or staff at the School;
- Posting negative/offensive comments about specific pupils/staff at the School;
- Posting racist comments, or any other homophobic comments; threats of violence

Parents and carers should also ensure that their children are not using social networking/internet sites in an inappropriate manner when in their care. It is expected that parents/carers explain to their children what is acceptable to post online. Parents/carers are also expected to monitor their children's online activity, including in relation to their use of social media.

### **Procedure the School will follow if inappropriate use continues**

The School will always try to deal with concerns raised by parents in a professional and appropriate manner and understands that parents may not always realise when they have used social networking sites inappropriately. Therefore, as a first step, the School will usually discuss the matter with the parent to try and resolve the matter and to ask that the relevant information be removed from the social networking site in question. If the parent refuses to do this and continues to use social networking sites in a manner the School considers inappropriate, the School will consider taking the following action:

- Set out the School's concerns in writing, giving you a warning and requesting that the material in question is removed
- Take legal advice and/or legal action where the information posted is defamatory
- Contact the Police where the School feels it necessary