Social Networking Policy

September 2026

Hazlewood
Community Primary School

Limitless Potential **Ignite Passion** **Embrace Difference**

Mr. Stephane Bommel
Headteacher

Social Networking Policy

Hazlewood Community Primary School

Date: September 2026

Date for Governors Review: September 2027

This document sets out the policy of Hazlewood Community Primary School on the use of social networking communication and aims to set clear expectations of professional behaviour when engaging in such activities.

Introduction

Social networking and its development have become in recent years an increasingly important feature of modern communication between individuals, as well as in terms of business and organisational communication. The expansion of such networks on the internet has transformed ways people interact and the school views this as a positive opportunity for closer communication with parents and other stakeholders within the community.

Though this technology brings with it new and exciting methods of communication, it also brings with it increasing risks relating to inappropriate 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 consider legal requirements, the reputation of the school, our partners and ensure that any activities are within agreed principles.

This policy has therefore been developed to accompany the school's E – Learning Strategy as agreed by the Governing Body. As this latter strategy concentrates on the development of social media and networking within a Teaching & Learning related environment, this specific Social Networking Policy has been adopted to offer additional clarity in relation to personal usage both within and outside of school.

In accordance with our duty under the Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023, our school is committed to taking reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment in all forms, including on social media platforms.

Defining social networking

For the purpose of this policy, social networking can be defined as[1]:

> *"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."*

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

- Facebook & Instagram – social networking services where users create personal profiles, add other users as friends and exchange messages and photographs.
- Snapchat – an image messaging app which allows users to share messages, videos and photo chat and messaging.
- X (formerly twitter) – a micro-blogging service where users post and read publicly-visible posts and follow other users' profiles.
- LinkedIn – a business-related social networking site mainly used for professional networking.

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

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that personal usage of social networking sites (even if operated 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 who may consider 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.

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

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

Our school recognizes that social media can be a valuable tool for communication and learning. However, it also acknowledges the potential for misuse, including the risk of sexual harassment. We are dedicated to creating a safe and respectful online environment for all students, staff and community members.

Scope

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.

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). It is intended to both supplement and complement any such documents.

This policy should also be read in conjunction with the schools e- strategy[2], together with the following school documentation:

- IT Security and Fair Usage Policy
- Equality Policy
- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy Guidance
- Disciplinary Policy and Procedures
- Guidance on Cyberbullying
- Keeping Children Safe in Education Statutory Guidance
- Guidance relating to the School E-Learning Strategy
- Teacher Standards issued by the DFE[3]

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

[2] Schools have been provided with documentation from the school improvement team relating to resources needed to develop a school based E-Learning Strategy. Included in these resources available to school, for a limited period, will be the availability of an external E-Learning Strategy audit by the northern grid for learning.
[3] Section 2 of these statutory standards for teachers relates to professional and personal conduct. These standards may apply to communication via social media.

therefore be times when professional judgements are made and in such circumstances, they will advise the Headteacher of the justification for any such actions. Headteachers will in turn seek advice from the School Link HR Business Partner where appropriate.

Responsibilities

Managers/Headteachers should:

- Ensure the document is communicated to workers in school, reminding them annually to familiarise themselves with its contents and links to other policies such as e-safety and child protection.
- Ensure a system is in place for regular monitoring and where necessary investigation of potential breaches of the policy.
- Educating students and staff about what constitutes sexual harassment and the importance of respectful online behaviors.
- Monitoring social media platforms for inappropriate content and taking swift action when necessary.
- Providing clear reporting mechanisms for victims of sexual harassment.
- Ensuring that all reports of sexual harassment are taken seriously and investigated promptly.

402 **Workers should:**

- Ensure they become familiar with its contents and links, together policies such as e-safety and child protection.
- Ensure use of any social media is carried out in line with this and other relevant policies.
- Ensure they raise any queries or concerns they may have over social networking use and/or interpretation of the policy with their line manager at the earliest opportunity.
- All students and staff are responsible for maintaining a respectful and safe online environment. Any form of sexual harassment on social media will not be tolerated.

Principles

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 adhere to 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, workers should ensure they have received written approval from a member of the SMT prior to undertaking such activities.

- Communication between adults and pupils by whatever method should take place within clear and explicit professional boundaries as agreed by the school senior management team (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 the line manager.

- Personal use of the internet, including access to social networking sites, will be permitted on designated school-based equipment (where available) either before or after work or during designated lunch periods. Non-work-related access during work time is not permitted unless prior approval has been granted by a member of the SMT. Usage at all times must 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 the social networking sites they participate in when joining the school, ensuring information available publicly about them is accurate and not inappropriate (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, its employees, pupils, partners, or other stakeholders within the community.

- Assigning any school pupil as a 'friend' on their social networking page, or any former pupil up to the age of 18 is prohibited, and caution should be taken regarding becoming assigned as a 'friend' with children of school age on the roll of another school or ex-students especially where siblings continue to attend the school. In addition, workers should never use, access, or become assigned as a "friend" of the social networking pages of pupils on the roll of the school, or former pupils under the age of 18[4]. If in doubt, please seek advice from your Headteacher.

[4] 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.

- 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 and not engaged in school business, workers 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 the school into disrepute[5]. Where workers become aware of such remarks made by others on social media platforms, they should refer these immediately to the Headteacher.

- There will be occasions when there are social contacts between pupils and staff, for example where the parent and teacher are part of the same social circle. However, these contacts will be easily recognised and should be made known to 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.

- Workers should be aware of the effect their actions may have on their image, as well as that of the school. Information that workers publish/post may be in the public domain for many years.

investigating pupil to pupil online cyberbullying. Where there are legitimate family links with a pupil/ex pupil the worker should inform the Headteacher in writing.

[5] To limit risk to inadvertently releasing confidential information workers should give consideration to reviewing privacy settings within social medial networks and setting them to their highest levels to limit access and availability of information and comments.

Cyber Bullying and Harassment

The Governing Body will not accept any form of bullying or harassment of or by workers engaged by the school, inclusive of that through social media[6], commonly referred to as "cyber bullying". This may include:

- maliciously spreading rumours, lies or gossip
- intimidating or aggressive behaviour
- offensive or threatening comments or content
- posting comments/photos designed to cause offence e.g. deliberately mocking an individual with the intent to harass or humiliate them
- Deliberate exclusion from staff social media groupings e.g. exclusion from a staff WhatsApp group.

Any such action will be considered a breach of this policy and may result in disciplinary action. Workers who are experiencing cyber bullying should report the matter immediately to a member of the SMT or Headteacher[7].

Other Breaches of Policy

Serious breaches of this policy by school employees could 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
- Sexual harassment is defined as unwanted conduct of a sexual nature that has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive environment.

Any member of staff who feels that a serious breach has occurred should inform a member of the Senior Management team (SMT) or the Headteacher.

Any student or staff member who experiences or witnesses sexual harassment on social media should report it immediately to a designated school official. Reports can be made anonymously if preferred.

[6] Cyber bullying may also take place via other means of electronic communication such as email, text or instant messaging.
[7] Workers at any time may seek advice and support from their Trade Union/Professional association.

Review of policy

Due to the ever-changing nature of information and communication technologies the Governing Body of _____ school have agreed to review this policy annually and if necessary, more frequently in response to any significant new developments. The school will also monitor social media activity to identify and address any emerging issues related to sexual harassment.

Further Information

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

- NEN E-safety Audit Tool **-** http://test3.e2bn.org/esafety/13/nen-e-safety-audit-tool.html

additional resources for students, teachers, governors and parents relating to 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 documents referred to in this policy can be found on the SLA Online Portal, inclusive of:

- Guidance on producing an Equality policy
- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy Guidance
- Disciplinary Policy and Procedures
- Keeping Children Safe in Education Statutory Guidance