

# **THE ROYAL SCHOOL, ARMAGH**



## **Social Media Policy & Procedures**

**February 2021**

**Revised January 2024**

## **Ethos & Rationale**

The Royal School, Armagh believes that effective communication with its many stakeholders is key to helping develop a sense of school community. It recognises and embraces the numerous benefits and opportunities that social media offers. Engagement with social media provides enhanced opportunities for rapid communication with stakeholders, facilitating the celebration of achievement and the sharing of important appropriate news. However, whilst staff are encouraged to engage, collaborate and innovate through social media, they should also be aware that there are associated risks, especially around issues of safeguarding, bullying and personal reputation.

The school ethos values the uniqueness of each individual and seeks to encourage mutual respect and collaborative contribution. The policy should be read and interpreted in a manner consistent with the ethos.

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. When using social media, staff should be aware of the potential impact on themselves and their 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. Staff should use discretion and common sense when engaging in online communication.

## **Purpose of the policy**

- The purpose of this policy is to encourage good practice, to protect the school and the school community, and to promote the effective use of social media as part of the school's activities;
- This policy covers personal and professional use of social media and aims to encourage its safe use by the school and the school community;
- 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 or others;
- 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;
- This policy covers all individuals working at all levels and grades, including full-time and part-time employees, fixed-term employees, agency workers and substitute teachers.

## **Roles, responsibilities and procedures**

### **All staff should:**

- Be aware of their online reputation and recognise that their online activity can be seen by others on social media including parents, pupils and colleagues;
- Ensure that any use of social media is carried out in line with this policy and other relevant policies;
- Avoid excessive use of social media in school;
- 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 school, or even future employers, to read. If in doubt, don't post it!

### **The headmaster and his deputies are responsible for:**

- Implementing this policy, interpreting it and determining the suitability of material on the school's social media accounts;
- Addressing any concerns and/or questions staff may have on the use of social media;
- Operating within the boundaries of this policy and ensuring that all staff understand the standards of behaviour expected of them;
- Sourcing and facilitating training as required;
- Obtaining and giving specialist advice on the use of social media.

### **The Board of Governors is responsible for:**

- Adopting and regularly reviewing this policy;
- Providing updated guidance on professional best practice in this area.

## **Definition of social media**

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 (but are not limited to) blogs, Facebook, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, Twitter, Google+, Instagram, Myspace, Flickr and YouTube.

'School social media' relates to any social media platform or account set up with the permission of the School using the School's name, crest or anything else implying identification with the school. Social media accounts administered in the names of departments, extra or co-curricular groups or activities are included in this definition. The social media platforms used by the Old Armachian Society are not included in this definition.

The School reserves the right to determine the suitability of what is posted on any Royal School, Armagh platform.

## **Acceptable use**

School staff should be aware that content uploaded to social media is not private. Even if you restrict it to 'friends', there is still capacity for it to be re-posted or distributed beyond the intended recipients. Therefore, school staff using social media should conduct themselves with professionalism and respect. School employees should be mindful of the content which they 'like' or with which they identify themselves publically on social media.

### **School employees should not upload any content on to social media sites that:**

- Is confidential to the school or its staff;
- Amounts to bullying;
- Amounts to unlawful discrimination, harassment or victimisation;
- Brings the school into disrepute;
- Contains lewd, sexually explicit, threatening or similarly inappropriate or offensive comments, images or video clips;
- Undermines the reputation of the school and/or individuals;
- Is defamatory or knowingly false;
- Breaches copyright;
- Is in any other way unlawful.

School employees should be aware of both professional and social boundaries and should not therefore accept or invite 'friend' requests from pupils or ex-pupils under the age of 18, or from parents on their personal social media accounts such as Facebook if the pupil or parent is known to them only through their connection with school. All communication with stakeholders via social media should be through the school social media accounts.

### **The school social media accounts will be used to:**

- Promote the ethos, aims and values of the Royal School, Armagh;
- Identify with causes or projects in which the school has a particular interest;
- Develop and promote a sense of a supportive school community;
- Communicate school related information to a wide audience;
- Promote a positive image of the school, its staff, pupils and other stakeholders;
- Celebrate achievements of pupils (past and present) and staff;

### **The school social media accounts will not be used to:**

- Advertise services which are not closely related to education;
- Promote educational provision if that provision is also available at the Royal School, Armagh;
- Endorse any cause or organisation which is not in sympathy with the school ethos;
- Facilitate discussion of any issue (comments are likely to be hidden if they could generate controversy);
- Facilitate criticism of school or school staff (concerns should be directed through the existing appropriate channels);
- Promote any party political cause.

### **Procedures for use of school social media:**

- The teacher with responsibility for external communication will be the lead administrator of the social media accounts;
- The headmaster will maintain a register of staff who are permitted to post on school social media;
- Application to be included as someone who may post should be made in writing to the headmaster stipulating the reason for the request;
- Staff may send relevant posts to a colleague who can post the material;
- At all times the accounts should be used in a manner consistent with this policy;
- Comments posted on school social media will not be responded to (unless in exceptional circumstances);
- The school social media platforms will not be permitted to become forums for discussion, to that end comments may be hidden by the platform's administrators;
- Normal etiquette for the use of social media will be observed and people posting offensive material etc. may be reported;
- If a member of staff or the administrator(s) of the accounts are concerned about the content of a post or comment they should refer it as soon as possible to the headmaster or one of his deputies.

### **Use of Social Media chats & groups**

There may be occasions when the legitimate business of school can be progressed efficiently through the use of a group chat e.g. a WhatsApp Group Chat for sports teams, the DofE, subject departments or other school activities. In addition to the other requirements as set out in this policy:

- The headmaster must be advised of the existence of a school related Group Chat;
- Members must not be added to the group without their consent – verbal consent is sufficient;
- The use of a Group Chat must be constantly kept under review by the group administrators who must be the members of staff in charge of the activity;
- A clear remit for the group must be established and shared with all members of the group;

- Only people with a legitimate reason to be in the group should be invited to join it;
- No one may be removed from the group without it being discussed with them first, unless they breach the guidelines for membership of the group and then only by the teacher in charge of the activity;
- The group may only be used to share information related to the school activity for which the group has been established;
- The group shall not be used as a forum for discussion for any matter other than arrangements for the activity;
- Nothing shall be posted in the group which might challenge the actions, beliefs or ability of any individual;
- No personal comments may be made to or about anyone whether they are members of the group or not;
- In the event that the group activity ceases all contacts in the group must be deleted by the administrator.

## **Safeguarding**

The use of social networking sites introduces a range of potential safeguarding risks to children and young people. Any query of a Safeguarding nature about material on school Social Media should be addressed to the Designated Teacher or a Deputy Designated Teacher.

### **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.

### **In order to mitigate these risks, there are steps you can take to promote safety on line:**

- Staff must not use any information in an attempt to locate or meet a child;
- Staff should ensure that any messages, photos or information comply with existing policies.

### **Reporting safeguarding concerns**

- Any content or online activity which raises a safeguarding concern must be reported to the Designated Teacher or a Deputy Designated Teacher as soon as possible;
- Any online concerns should be reported as soon as identified as urgent steps may need to be taken to support the child;
- With regard to personal safeguarding, you should report any harassment or abuse you receive online while using your work accounts.

### **Reporting, responding and recording cyberbullying incidents**

- Staff should never engage with cyberbullying incidents. If in the course of your employment with the Royal School, Armagh 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 the Vice Principal Pastoral;
- Staff should keep any records of abusive material 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.

### **Action by school: inappropriate use of social media by a member of staff**

- Following a report of inappropriate use of social media, the headmaster or his deputy will assign a senior manager to conduct a prompt investigation;
- If in the course of the investigation, it is found that a pupil submitted the material to the platform, that pupil will be sanctioned in line with the relevant policies;
- The school, where appropriate, will approach the website hosts to ensure the material is either amended or removed as a matter of urgency. If the website requires the individual who is complaining to do so personally, the school will give their full support and assistance;
- Checks will be carried out to ensure that the requested amendments or removals are made. If the platform does not co-operate, the school will contact the internet service provider (ISP) as the ISP has the ability to block access to certain sites;
- If the material is threatening and/or intimidating, the school will, with the staff member's consent, report the matter to the police;
- The member of staff will be offered appropriate support and assistance;

### **Breaches of this policy**

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 appropriate 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.

The seriousness of the alleged breach will be considered taking into account 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 or the individuals concerned. Staff should be aware that actions online can be in breach of numerous policies and may potentially constitute a disciplinary offence.

**This policy will be reviewed on a regular basis and updated, in accordance with the following, as and when required:**

- Legislative changes;
- Good practice guidance;
- Case law;
- Significant incidents reported.

**Linked documents:**

- Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Staff Handbook
- Anti Bullying Policy
- Positive Behaviour Policy
- Acceptable Use Policy