

**Social Media Policy**

Social media sites play an important role in the lives of many people. We recognise that social networking can bring many benefits, but there are also potential risks. The aim of this document is to give clarity to the way in which social media sites are to be used by the Ballynure Primary School community by pupils, staff and parents. All members of the school community should bear in mind that information they share through social media and networks, even if it is on private spaces, is still subject to copyright, data protection and Freedom of Information legislation, the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006, and UK libel and defamation laws.

The purpose of the policy is to:

* Protect the school from legal risks;
* Ensure that the reputation of the school, its staff and Governors is protected;
* Safeguard all pupils;
* Ensure that any users are able clearly to distinguish where information provided via social media is legitimately representative of the school.

**DEFINITIONS AND SCOPE**

Social networking applications include any interactive communication tool which encourages participation and exchanges. Common examples include Twitter, Facebook, Windows Live Messenger, YouTube, Flickr, Xbox Live, Blogger, and comment streams on public websites such as a newspaper site. Many of the principles of this policy also apply to other types of online presence such as virtual worlds.

**GUIDANCE/PROTECTION FOR PUPILS ON USING SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES**

• No pupil may access social networking sites during the school working day. Many of the above social media sites are inappropriate for primary-aged pupils.

• All mobile phones must be switched off and left in pupil’s school bag until the end of the school day.

• No pupil should attempt to join a staff member’s areas on networking sites. If pupils attempt to do this, the member of staff is to inform the Principal. Parents will be informed if this happens.

• Any attempts to breach firewalls will result in a ban from using school ICT equipment.

• All reports of any improper contact or cyber bullying should be reported to the class teacher/child protection teachers/Principal as soon as it happens. The Child Protection Policy may be involved when it is deemed inappropriate, evident, persistent and recurrent bullying.

**USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA SITES BY EMPLOYEES IN A PERSONAL CAPACITY**

It is possible that a high proportion of staff will have their own social networking accounts. It is important that they protect their professional reputation, and that of the school, by ensuring that they use their personal sites in an appropriate manner.

Staff will be advised as follows:

* That they familiarise themselves with social network sites’ privacy settings in order to ensure that information is not automatically shared with a wider audience than intended.
* That they do not conduct or portray themselves, or allow friends to portray them, in a manner which may:
  + Bring the school into disrepute;
  + Lead to valid parental complaints;
  + Be deemed as derogatory towards the school and/or its employees;
  + Be deemed as derogatory towards pupils, parents/carers or governors;
  + Bring into question their appropriateness to work with pupils.
* That they do not form online friendships or enter into communication with parents/carers as this could lead to professional relationships being compromised.
* That they do not form online friendships or enter into online communication with pupils as this could lead to professional relationships being compromised, and/or safeguarding allegations being raised.
* That they should not post pictures of or negative comments about school events.
* No reference should be made on social media to pupils, parents/carers or school staff.
* That they do not engage in online discussion on personal matters relating to members of the school community.
* Personal opinions should not be attributed to the school or local authority.
* Security settings on personal social media profiles are regularly checked to minimise risk of loss of personal information.
* Creation of social media accounts by school staff for use in education: All social media services must be approved by the Principal in advance of any educational work being undertaken. Staff are reminded that professional standards apply regardless of the medium being used.

**COMMENTS POSTED BY PARENTS/CARERS ON SOCIAL MEDIA SITES**

Parents/carers are made aware of their responsibilities regarding their use of social media via this policy and parents’ Code of Conduct (in particular when their child joins the school), the school website and school newsletters.

* Parents/carers are asked not to post images (photos and videos) of pupils other than their own children on social media sites unless they have the permission of the parents of other pupils pictured.
* Parents/carers should raise queries, concerns or complaints directly with the Principal rather than posting them on social media.

**CYBER-BULLYING**

Any type of bullying is unacceptable. It is as unacceptable for pupils, parents or colleagues to denigrate or bully school staff via social media as it is face-to-face. Cyber-bullying whether by pupils, parents or colleagues is cowardly and despicable. All cases of online bullying will be dealt with in accordance with the school’s Anti-Bullying policy. The school can take action with reference to any incident that takes place outside school hours if it:

* Could have repercussions for the orderly running of the school;
* Poses a threat to a member of the school community;
* Could adversely affect the reputation of the school, Principal/employees/Governors.

Where appropriate, legal action will be taken by the school’s Governors, PSNI, C2K and/or CPSS.

* Efforts will be made to approach the social networking site to request the removal of inappropriate material.
* If those responsible for offensive and inappropriate online content are known, the school will inform them why the material is unacceptable and request that they remove it.
* If the content is suspected to be illegal, the police should be contacted.
* The school will take action if the material is on the school website, the school email or note form.
* Parents/carers should not post malicious or fictitious comments on social media sites about any member of the school community which may be construed as defamation, or libel. All posts of this nature which are brought to the attention of staff/Principal/Governors will be referred to the Legal Department of the Education Authority. Parents/carers posting malicious or fictitious comments on social media sites will have their licence to enter school premises revoked which means they will be excluded/barred from school premises.

**ONLINE BULLYING/HARASSMENT/ABUSE OF STAFF**

* Members of staff do not come to work to be abused. It is never acceptable to post offensive comments about school and/or school staff online (or in any correspondence or other media).
* Staff will not respond to incidents or correspondence which may be interpreted at bullying or harassment and will report them to the Principal. If the bullying and harassment is directed at the Principal, incidents will be taken to the Governors.
* Screen shots of messages or web pages will be taken along with the date and time when there are legitimate grounds for collecting and when necessary, using the personal data.
* The perpetrator will be invited to a meeting with the Principal and on occasion the Chair of Governors, to address the matter. A member of staff may be present as a note-taker.
* If there are legitimate grounds for complaint, the person should follow the school Complaints Procedure.
* School mediation and disciplinary procedures may be applied if the perpetrator is known to be a current pupil, parent or colleague.
* The person will be asked to remove the offending/unacceptable comments. If the person refuses to remove the offending comments, the matter will be reported to the social networking site if it breaches their terms or guidance and advice will be sought from the Education Authority legal team.
* Online bullying and/or harassment may amount to criminal conduct. If the comments are of a sexual nature, sexist, threatening, constitute a hate crime or are abusive, then the incident will be reported to the PSNI.
* Parents/carers should not post malicious or fictitious comments on social media sites about any member of the school community which may be construed as defamation or libel. All posts of this nature which are brought to the attention of staff/Principal/Governors will be referred to the Legal Department of the Education Authority.
* Parents/carers posting malicious or fictitious comments on social media sites will have their licence to enter school premises revoked which means they will be excluded/barred from school premises for a minimum of four months.

The Education Authority has a duty of care to staff to look after employees’ mental and physical health and no-one should be made to feel victimised in their workplace.

This policy has been written with reference to:

* DE Circular 2011/22 Internet Safety
* DE Circular 2013/25 eSafety Guidance
* DE Circular 2016/26 Effective Educational Uses of Mobile Digital Devices
* DE Circular 2016/27 Online Safety

Model letter inviting a parent to attend a meeting to discuss offensive or threatening comments made online.

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| Dear [parent/carer name (s)],  It has been drawn to my attention that you have recently made comments online on WhatsApp [or other site] relating to an event [events] you believe to have taken place in his school.  I am very concerned about the tone of comments made and their abusive and threatening nature [or other adjectives]. It is important that if you have concerns that you raise them with me [or the class teacher] in the first instance.  To move forward we should meet to discuss this matter informally in an open and constructive manner. I invite you to contact me at your earliest convenience to arrange an appointment. My colleague [name and role] will be present to act as note-taker and you may also b accompanied by a family member or friend. I must emphasise, however, that the conversation must remain confidential.  Yours sincerely,  [Name]  [Role] |

**Points for Parents to Consider:**

It is important to promote Internet Safety in the home and to monitor Internet use.

1. Take an interest in what children are doing. Discuss with the children what they see and why they are using the internet.

2. Monitor online time and be aware of excessive hours spent on the internet.

3. Advise children to take care and to use the internet in a sensible and responsible manner.

4. Discuss the fact that there are websites which are unsuitable.

5. Discuss how children can respond to unsuitable material/requests.

6. Tell children – Never give personal information on the internet.

7. Remind children that people online may not be who they say.

8. Be vigilant. Ensure that children do not arrange to meet someone they meet online.

9. Be aware that children may be using the internet in places other than in their own home or at school.

