

**The Grove School has  
adopted this policy**

**Reference Number: SMP-  
28-V1**



# **HUMAN RESOURCES POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR SCHOOLS**

## **SOCIAL NETWORKING POLICY**

<b>Version</b>	1.0
<b>Joint HR and Trade Union Group &amp; approval date</b>	May 2018
<b>Name of policy author</b>	CLAIRE MARTIN
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<b>Target audience</b>	All those working in schools for or on behalf of Northumberland County Council, including voluntary workers

**This Policy has been Impact Assessed against the Equality Act 2010**

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Version	Date	Description
1	Feb 2018	Policy in revised format

## HUMAN RESOURCES POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

<b>Title: SOCIAL NETWORKING POLICY</b>	<b>Reference Number: SMP-28-V1</b>
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### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Social networking sites are commonly used as a communications channel, both for personal and business purposes. They provide the facility for people to interact socially (e.g. posting comments, instant messaging, emailing, sharing media such as photos and film etc.). They also provide a fast, modern way for organisations to communicate and engage with others. This policy sets out how the school/academy expects social network users to behave when conducting school business and whilst using social networking for personal and business use.

### 2. Scope

- 2.1 For the purposes of this policy, social networking is defined as the use of any technology platform where information can be shared publicly with others. Examples of such sites include, but are not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn and professional body sites.
- 2.2 This policy applies irrespective of how the social networking site is accessed including, but not limited to, access via school computers, personal computers, tablets and smartphones; it covers anything posted which may be viewed by others.
- 2.3 This policy and guidance is recommended for adoption by the governing bodies of all maintained schools and academies. It applies to all employees and volunteers at the school who are under the direction of the governing body.

### 3. Roles and Responsibilities

**Employees and volunteers:** All employees and volunteers are expected to follow this Social Networking Policy and Guidance. Use of social networking sites which is not in accordance with this or other school/academy policies (including the Code of Conduct and the Guidance on Safer Working Practices for Adults who work with Children and Young People) may amount to misconduct or gross misconduct under the Disciplinary Procedure or may put a volunteers continuing role at risk.

**Headteachers:** Headteachers will ensure that all employees are made aware of the policy and guidance eg during induction, at staff meetings, through CPD. It is recommended that written records are maintained of the dissemination of the policy to named employees.

### 4 General Policy for personal or business use of social networking

- 4.1 The expected behaviour of employees is outlined in the school/academy Code of Conduct and the Guidance on Safer Working Practice for Adults who work with Children and Young People. In addition, this policy and the guidance in Appendix 1 also applies, particularly where it may be possible to identify an individual as being employed to work at the school / academy.

- 4.2 Employees using social networking sites should not post any personal information that could jeopardise their own, their colleagues, or their families privacy or identity. They must not post any personal information about pupils, parents or other parties within the school community.
- 4.3 When using professional body message boards/forums or sites such as LinkedIn, comments posted should remain professional and within the boundaries of the topic being discussed.
- 4.4 The reputation or business of the school / academy, service users, partners or others connected with the school/academy must not be brought into disrepute through use of social networking sites.
- 4.5 Confidentiality of matters relating to the school / academy or others connected to the school must be preserved, so that the school/academy is not exposed to legal risks covered by copyright, data protection and libel laws.
- 4.6 Use of social networking sites must at all times be consistent with school's duty to safeguard children and young people.
- 4.7 It is unacceptable to use sites to make comments that could be deemed to constitute bullying or harassment or for uploading information which may be interpreted as discriminatory or of an otherwise offensive, derogatory or defamatory nature.

## **5. Specific policy regarding personal use of social networking**

- 5.1 Personal use of social networking sites must not be undertaken during working time.
- 5.2 Personal use of social networking sites must be in accordance with the principles outlined above. The general expected behaviour of staff is outlined in the Code of Conduct. In addition, the Social Networking Policy Guidance Appendix 1 also applies, particularly where it may be possible to identify an individual as an employee of the school / academy.
- 5.3 Employees must not initiate or agree to contact with pupils via social networking. This may be viewed as a form of secret social contact which is in breach of the guidance for Safer Working for Adults who work with Children and young people.
- 5.4 It is an individual's responsibility to read the Terms of Service of any social networking site accessed and to ensure that any confidentiality and privacy settings outlining to whom information posted will be available to are understood.
- 5.5 The individuals work email addresses must not be used when registering for, or posting on, any websites (not just social networking sites). The same applies to the use of any logo owned by, or associated with the school / academy on a personal site.
- 5.6 Where it may be possible to identify an individual as an employee of the school / academy it should be clear that information contained is the individual's personal opinion. Even where this is the case, the principles of this Policy apply. The school / academy's reputation must not be brought into disrepute and the Code of Conduct

remains applicable. Reference to the school, staff, governors, pupils, parents, suppliers / contractors or partner organisations must be avoided.

- 5.7 When using social networking sites, the right of freedom of expression applies only to lawful conduct. The school / academy expects that staff will exercise consideration for the rights of others and for the reputation of the school / academy.

## **6. Political Views**

6.1 There are certain posts within Northumberland County Council that are politically restricted and any employee occupying one of those positions should not make any statement regarding their political views.

6.2 Employees in other posts are free to have their own political standpoint and views, and, as long as any comments they make are within the guidelines of this policy, can post them on social networking.

6.3 Employees though must always be mindful that the Council is a political organisation and should be cautious when making comments regarding sitting administrations.

## **7. General**

- 7.1 Use of social networking sites which is not in accordance with this policy or other policies may amount to misconduct or gross misconduct under the Disciplinary Procedure.
- 7.2 Where the school/academy has its own official social networking site (eg Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn) posting can only be undertaken by those employees who are authorised to do so and in accordance with this policy.
- 7.3 Business use of social networking sites must be in accordance with the general policy outlined above.

## **8. Monitoring / Review**

- 8.1 This Policy will be reviewed every 3 years or as and when required to reflect changes in legislation or good practice.
- 8.2 The policy should be read in conjunction with the Code of Conduct policy.

## **Associated Documentation and References**

Reference	Title
SMP-09-V1	Code of Conduct Policy
	Disciplinary Policy

	Guidance on Safer working practices for Adults who work with children and young people

## **Appendix 1 - Social Networking Guidelines**

- 1 The use of Social Media and Social Networking has become an increasingly important tool for organisations, including Northumberland County Council and schools/academies. The Council is an award winning body in its use of platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube and has a strong and

trusted presence on those sites. Schools/Academies within Northumberland also use similar platforms and therefore these guidelines also apply.

- 2 School / Academy employees are encouraged to use sites such as LinkedIn and to access the forums on professional body sites to share best practice, gather information and network with other professionals to foster mutually beneficial relationships.
- 3 The Council and its Schools / Academies also have a duty of care to its residents so some parts of the Council may use Social Networking and other internet sites to ensure that no residents are being put at risk.
- 4 Privately, and in their own time, school / academy employees may also be using Social Media for their own use to keep in touch with friends, relatives and to discover what is going on in the wider world.
- 6 However, employees of schools / academies must remember that there are standards expected of them when using Social Networking sites and that it is important to be aware that anything that is posted should not damage the school / academy or place themselves or others at risk of harm.
- 7 These guidelines should be read in accordance with the Northumberland HR for Schools Social Networking Policy.

### **Conduct, Safety and Security**

- 8 The recommended approach to Social Networking is to use it cautiously. Both when making personal comments or anything related to work, you should be guarded about what you post.
- 9 If you are about to post a comment on a site about a friend, associate, colleague, manager, the School or its service users, or anyone or anything else that you think would get you into trouble if you voiced out loud, then the chances are that it is not a good idea to put it online.
- 10 Similarly if someone asks you for corporate, personal or professional information which you would be wary of giving them on a one to one basis then it would be unwise to share it with them online.

### **Corporate Use of Social Networking**

- 11 The Council already has corporate Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Google+, LinkedIn and Pinterest pages and these should be handled as just another information sharing channel to enable the Council to engage with the public. Schools and Academies across Northumberland also have their own social

networking sites for sharing information with parents and other members of the public.

- 12 The Council also has separate, dedicated alerts pages for publishing urgent information in times of severe weather or other civil emergencies. This includes alerts on school closures.
- 13 All of these sites can only be populated and updated by the communications team at Northumberland County Council
- 14 These are the official communications channel for the Council and in the same way that Service Managers would not issue a press release or appear on television without going through the communications team, they should not attempt to post any information on the internet without using the official Council sites or without asking the communications team to post the information on their behalf. The same applies to Schools and Academies across the county, however all communications must be approved by the head teacher or chair of governors.
- 15 Sites such as Facebook and Twitter carry exactly the same legal penalties as traditional media once something has been published about or on behalf of the school, hence the decision to have only one corporate presence.

### **What to do if you come across something online that mentions the School / Academy**

- 16 Due to the nature of Social Media, anyone can comment on anything they want. As such, you may come across postings on the internet that mention or discuss the school / academy in one way or another. These could be positive or negative.
- 17 If you come across an entry on a social media site that portrays the school / academy in a negative manner then it is important to let the head teacher know so that they can assess it and draft an appropriate response.
- 18 Conversely, if you come across something that is praising the school / academy then you should also let the communications team know so that they can decide if they want to publicise it further.
- 19 In either scenario, there is nothing to stop you commenting on the information and supporting or defending the School / academy. However, your comments need to be within the conditions as set out in this document and if you are unsure as to the accuracy of the information then refer to the head teacher or Chair of governors.



## **Other Council uses of Social Networking**

- 20 The Council has a duty to keep its residents safe and to that end it may be necessary to monitor Social Networking and other internet sites to ensure that there is nothing illegal happening within the County.
- 21 Those who deal with this type of work should remember that they need to do everything that they can to protect the Council's and their own information and not post anything that may compromise their safety or that of their colleagues, family and friends.

## **Personal use of Social Networking**

- 22 The best stance to adopt with personal use of Social Networking is to think carefully before posting.

From the school's point of view it is important that you do not:

- . Post photos which could reveal any sensitive information
  - . Post photos of yourself or colleagues doing anything during working hours which is not related to work and could identify you as an employee of the school
  - . Reveal school information on any site if you have not been authorised to do so.
  - . Mention the school in any way which could be deemed to negative, damaging or libellous. If you are going to mention work, make sure it is something that you would be happy for colleagues and managers to see.
- 23 When using Social Networking on a personal level you should be aware that you can be subject to the school's disciplinary procedures if you post comments/pictures/videos that are deemed to breach the Code of Conduct. The timing of any comments posted is irrelevant, if they are deemed to be in breach of any policies or the Code of Conduct then you can still be subject to disciplinary procedures.
- 24 There have been numerous examples of individuals who have been disciplined by their employers for what they probably thought was a harmless/private/never going to be found out comment. Do not put yourself into this situation.
- 25 The nature of Social Networking and the internet as a whole is that you only need to make one misjudged comment and it could be national or even global news.

26 So, when using Social Networking personally you should bear the following in mind:

- Just because no-one from work “follows” or “friends” you that does not mean that they will not find out if you post something about them or about the school. All it takes is one ‘re-tweet’ and the likelihood of it being seen increases hugely.
- There is a difference between saying “had a bad day at work” and “The school / academy/Northumberland County Council is a bad employer”. Everyone has a bad day at work from time to time, but anything that identifies the school / Academy / Council as your employer and undermines its position has the potential to damage its reputation.
- The same laws apply to anything written online that apply to the written and spoken word. There are many examples of individuals falling foul of the law through either “joke” comments like threatening to blow up an airport because their flight was delayed, to tweeting racist abuse to a footballer. In short, someone is always watching.
- NEVER give out personal information on public forums.

### **Accessing Social Networking**

27 All of the County Council’s computers are configured to disable access to Social Networking sites. However, given the ease of access via smartphones, it is accepted that access can be gained during the day. Of course, personal use of social networking sites should not be undertaken in working time and must be limited to official break periods. Remember, everything posted is time stamped and if there was ever cause to check your activity on a site, it is easy to see if you have been doing it whilst at work.

### **Glossary of Terms**

**Facebook** - a social networking service where users have personal profiles, add other users as friends and exchange messages, including automatic notifications when they update their own profile. Additionally, users may join common-interest user groups, organised by common characteristics (eg workplace). Users can choose their own privacy settings, such as allowing open access to their profile or limiting it to friends

**Twitter** - a micro-blogging service enabling its users to send and read publicly visible messages called tweets. Users may subscribe to other users’ tweets. Unregistered users can also read tweets

**Tweet** – Tweets are text-based posts of up to 280 characters displayed on the user’s profile page so that Followers can view it.

**Re-Tweet** – for a user to take someone else's 'Tweet' and upload it to their own profile page so their Followers can see it.

**Follow/Followers** – Other users who can see what a user posts on Twitter by 'following' them.

**LinkedIn** - a business-related social networking site mainly used for professional networking. Users maintain a list of contact details of people with whom they have some level of relationship, called connections. This list of connections can then be used to build up a contact network, follow different companies and find jobs, people and business opportunities

**YouTube** - a video-sharing website on which users can upload, share, and view videos. A wide variety of user-generated video content is displayed, including film and TV clips as well as amateur content such as video blogging. Most videos enable users to leave and exchange comments

**Google+** - a social networking service similar to Facebook.

**Pinterest** – a photo sharing website that allows users to upload their photos and put them into categories that already exist or create new ones.

**Friends** – Those people on Facebook who the user has agreed can see their Facebook page.