

# The Family of Learning Trust

## Social Media Policy



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## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 Social media can be defined as any interaction between people which involves the creation, sharing, and exchange of information and ideas by means of electronic technology, which may include virtual communities and networks.
- 1.2 Social media is largely dependent on mobile and web-based technologies to create interactive platforms through which individuals (and/or communities) are enabled to share, discuss and/or modify user-generated content.
- 1.3 Social media technology can constitute multiple forms including (but not limited to) internet forums and discussion rooms, weblogs, social blogs, microblogs, podcasts, photographic imagery and bookmarking in addition to social networks. Relevant technologies may include blogging, picture sharing, music-sharing, crowdsourcing and instant messaging (but are not confined to these examples) and social networks may involve the coordinated use of more than one (or even several) of these activities in concert.
- 1.4 It is vital that students, parents and the public at large have confidence in the academy's activities and services, and the principles set out in this policy are designed to ensure that staff members, including contractors and volunteers, are encouraged to use social media responsibly and professionally in order that the confidentiality of students and staff, as well as the broader reputation of the academy, is safeguarded.

## **2. Purpose and scope**

- 2.1 This policy is applicable to all staff, trainees, external contractors, agency workers, volunteers and other individuals who work for, or may provide services on behalf of, the academy. These individuals are collectively referred to hereinafter as staff members.
- 2.2 Staff members must always be conscious of the requirement to keep their personal and professional lives separate.
- 2.3 It is recognised that staff members may be required to use social media for the purposes of teaching and learning and that this may constitute a significant part of their professional duties. Nonetheless, such use of social media should in every circumstance be compliant with the guidelines set out in this policy.
- 2.4 This policy covers use of social media for personal purposes, as well as for official school purposes. The definition of official school purposes includes all internet facilities (such as websites, forums, blogs etc) hosted by, and/or maintained on behalf of, the academy.
- 2.5 This policy is applicable to all social networking sites (such as Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, etc) and also includes chatrooms, forums, podcasts, blogs, texting, online encyclopaedias with open access (such as Wikipedia) and content sharing sites such as YouTube etc. It is simply not possible to provide a definitive list of such sites and the assumption should always be that any social media site (whether or not specifically named in the policy) falls within the scope of this policy.
- 2.6 Equally, it is freely acknowledged that information technology advances at a rate which is liable to outstrip the ability of policies such as this to keep pace with developments. Accordingly, it is therefore impossible to ensure that adequate reference is made to such future technologies and/or circumstances (whether such developments be electronic or otherwise) as may emerge in the future due to the evolution of social media. For the

avoidance of doubt, the general principles set out in this policy must at all times be followed irrespective of the precise nature of the relevant technology or media involved.

### **3. Legal framework**

- 3.1 The governing body is committed to ensuring that all staff members provide confidential services that meet the highest standards.
- 3.2 All staff members working on behalf of the academy are bound by relevant legislation, including a legal duty of confidence, and must at all times observe their responsibility to both other members of staff and to students by protecting, and keeping confidential, any knowledge to which they may gain privileged access during the course of their work.
- 3.3 Disclosure of confidential information on, or via, social media is likely to be a breach of various laws and professional codes of conduct, including the following:
- the Human Rights Act 1998
  - the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
  - the Data Protection Act 2018
  - the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)
  - the common law duty of confidentiality.
- 3.4 Confidential information includes, but is not limited to, person-identifiable information, such as student and employee records which are afforded full protection under GDPR and the Data Protection Act.
- 3.5 Staff members should also be aware that other laws relating to libel, defamation, harassment and copyright may be applicable to information posted on social media. Such laws include (but may not be limited to) the following:
- the Libel Act 1843
  - the Defamation Acts 1952 and 1996
  - the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988
  - the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994
  - the Protection from Harassment Act 1997
  - the Malicious Communications Act 1998
  - the Communications Act 2003.
- 3.6 In certain circumstances the academy could be held vicariously responsible for acts committed by their employees in the course of their employment. For example, staff members who harass co-workers online or who engage in cyber-bullying or discrimination on the grounds of protected characteristics such as race, sex, disability, etc or who defame a third party while at work may render the academy (as well as themselves personally) liable to civil (legal) action from the injured party.

### **4. Using social media on behalf of the school**

- 4.1 Staff members can only use officially approved channels or sites for either communicating with students or in order to enable students to communicate with one another.

- 4.2 There must be a strong pedagogical or business reason for creating an official school site through which students or others may communicate. Staff must not create sites for trivial reasons as this could potentially expose the academy to unwelcome publicity or reputational damage and accordingly appropriate authorisation should be sought in all cases.
- 4.3 Any sites thus created must not breach the terms and conditions of social media service providers, particularly in respect of minimum age requirements. Careful consideration must be given to the level of engagement of contributors – for example whether users will be able to upload images or add their own text or comments.
- 4.4 Any sites created for, and/or contributed to by, students must have the strongest privacy settings to prevent breaches of confidentiality. It must not be possible to identify students and other participants using such sites. Staff members must at all times act in the best interests of the academy’s students when creating, participating in, or contributing content to, social media sites.

## **5. Personal use of social media**

- 5.1 The academy recognises that staff members are fully entitled to make use of social media in a personal capacity away from the school. Staff members must, however, be aware that they can potentially cause damage to the reputation of the organisation if they are identified as being employees of, or as having professional links to, the academy.
- 5.2 Staff members must therefore ensure that if they engage with social media they must do so sensibly and responsibly. They must be confident that any content, comment or opinion expressed through their personal use of social media will not adversely affect, nor be found damaging to, the reputation or credibility of the academy, nor otherwise violate any of the academy’s policies.
- 5.3 Staff should be made aware, in the event that they access any personal web-based email accounts via their school network, that these may be subject to the academy’s internet protocol which could include monitoring and surveillance (in which context the following section on monitoring internet use requires to be noted).
- 5.4 With the rise in identity theft and fraud, staff members may wish to consider the amount of personal information that they feel appropriate to display or reveal on their personal profile. Staff should always keep their passwords secret and take all necessary measures to protect access to accounts.
- 5.5 If staff members make any reference (whether this be on a personal internet site or a social networking site, including any form of interactive media) to their employment by, or other relationship with, the academy they should inform the headteacher accordingly.
- 5.6 Staff members must avoid bringing the academy or its staff into disrepute and must not use any online (or equivalent) facility to attack or abuse colleagues or students. If staff members discuss their work on social media in relation to their personal life, they must take care to include on their profile appropriate text to the effect that *“the views I express here are mine alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of my employer”*.
- 5.7 Staff members must keep their professional and personal lives separate and should never put themselves in a position where there is a conflict between their personal interests and their relationship with the academy. Individuals should remember that by making use of social media they are effectively placing information within the public domain and cannot be

reliant on the belief that supposedly 'private' comments or viewpoints will not gain a wider currency or exposure.

5.8 When using social media, staff members must not:

- engage in activities which might bring the academy into disrepute
- represent their own personal views as being those of the academy
- divulge or discuss any personal information about our students or staff or any other persons with whom they interact as part of their job
- use the internet in any way to attack, insult, abuse or defame students (or their family members), colleagues, other professionals/organisations or the academy itself
- do anything that could be considered discriminatory against, or be interpreted as bullying or harassment of, any individual, for instance by making offensive or derogatory comments in relation to any protected characteristic (as defined within the academy's bullying and harassment policy), neither should they promote links to any such content elsewhere
- be inaccurate, unfair or less than transparent when creating or altering online sources of information on behalf of, or in any way relating to, the academy.

5.9 Staff members are allowed limited access to social media websites (from their own mobile devices or from the academy's computers and/or devices) for personal use. Access to social media sites for personal reasons is only permitted during lunch breaks and outside contracted working hours. Staff members are expected to devote their contracted hours of work exclusively to their professional duties.

5.10 Staff members must not:

- identify themselves online and/or on social media as employees of the academy – this is in order to safeguard the privacy of colleagues and students and to prevent information on these sites from being linked with the academy
- use a school email address when registering on such websites
- have contact through any personal social medium with any student, whether from our academy or any other school (unless the student is a family member)
- use information obtained in the course of their employment for personal gain nor pass any such information on to others who may use it in such a way
- have any contact with students' family members through personal social media if that contact is likely to constitute a conflict of interest or call into question their own professional objectivity or integrity.

5.11 Teachers' Standards 2012 Part 2 – Personal and Professional Conduct, reads as follows:

*"A teacher is expected to demonstrate consistently high standards of personal and professional conduct. Teachers uphold public trust in the profession and maintain high standards of ethics and behaviour, within and outside school."*

The academy expects that all members of staff (not just teachers) will adhere consistently to this particular standard.

5.12 Staff members must decline any 'friend requests' that they may receive from students (other than family members) in relation to their personal social media sites or accounts. Equally, they must not suggest that students should become 'friends' on their own personal social media accounts. Should they receive any such requests from students who are not family members, they should advise students why these requests are inappropriate.

- 5.13 On leaving the academy's service, staff members must not contact present or past pupils of the academy by means of personal social media sites. Similarly, staff members must not contact pupils from schools where they have previously worked by means of personal social media.
- 5.14 Staff members who have access to information as part of their employment by, or relationship with, the academy, including personal information about pupils and their family members, colleagues and/or other parties, must not discuss such information on their personal social media sites or accounts.
- 5.15 No photographs, videos or any other images of the school premises, or of students or their families, or depictions of staff members wearing school uniform or school logos may be placed online on any form of personal social media site.
- 5.16 School email addresses and other official contact details must not be used either for setting up personal social media accounts or for the facilitation of communication through such media.
- 5.17 Staff members must not edit open access online encyclopaedias (such as Wikipedia etc) in a personal capacity at work, since the source of the correction will be recorded as the employer's IP address and the intervention will, therefore, appear as if it comes from the academy itself.
- 5.18 Staff members are strongly advised to ensure that they set the privacy levels of their personal sites as strictly as they can and to opt out of public listings on social networking sites in order to safeguard their own privacy.
- 5.19 Staff members should always keep their passwords confidential, should change them often and should at all times be vigilant about what may or may not legitimately be posted online, and should be aware that it is not safe to reveal home addresses, telephone numbers or other personal information.

## **6. Monitoring use of the internet**

- 6.1 The academy reserves the right to monitor staff members' internet usage. Access to particular social media websites may be withdrawn in any case of misuse.
- 6.2 Users of email and internet services should have no expectation of privacy in anything they create, store, send or receive using the academy's ICT system.

## **7. Disciplinary action for breach of policy**

- 7.1 Any breach of this policy may lead to disciplinary action being taken against the staff member involved in line with the academy's disciplinary policy. Examples of such breaches include (but are not limited to) the following:
- misuse of the internet
  - usage which is outside the limits of personal use during the working day
  - having students as 'friends'
  - breach of confidentiality
  - any behaviour which is considered to constitute bullying or harassment

- any behaviour which is considered to be:
  - ♦ defamatory; or
  - ♦ discriminatory; or
  - ♦ intimidatory
- any behaviour which is considered to cause damage to the reputation of the academy
- any illegal acts
- any acts which render the academy liable to action from third parties

7.2 Disciplinary action can be instigated if any employee is using social media inappropriately, irrespective of whether this is at work or in the employee's own time at home. Disciplinary action will be taken against any employee who is responsible for posting an inappropriate social media entry (for instance on Twitter or Facebook) if it impacts negatively upon the academy (for example by causing likely reputational damage) regardless of whether it was posted at work or at home.

7.3 Staff members must immediately notify the headteacher of any apparent breaches of this policy in order that appropriate action can be taken to protect confidential information and limit any potential damage to the reputation of the academy.

7.4 Serious breaches of this policy may constitute gross misconduct which may potentially lead to summary dismissal.

## **8. Other policies and procedures**

8.1 This policy will be supported by the following policies:

- Bullying and Harassment Policy
- Disciplinary Policy
- E–safety Policy
- School ICT Policy