

## Vanguard Learning Trust



*As a group of local primary and secondary schools, Vanguard Learning Trust's mission is to serve its local community by providing outstanding, inclusive education. We have a collective purpose and responsibility to provide effective teaching, through a curriculum based on equality of opportunity and entitlement that allows our students to shine both in and out of the classroom. Each school in the Trust has its own ethos, which also complements the Trust's vision and values, and the common aspiration that all students can achieve their potential.*

# Social Media Policy

## February 2023

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## **1. Intent and introduction**

- 1.1 Hermitage Primary School understands that social media is a growing part of life outside of school. We have a responsibility to safeguard our pupils against potential dangers when accessing the internet at school, and to educate our pupils about how to protect themselves online when outside of school.
- 1.2 For the purposes of this policy, Social Media is any type of interactive online media that allows parties to communicate instantly with each other or to share data in a public forum.
- 1.3 This includes online social forums such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Snap Chat and LinkedIn etc. Social media also covers blogs and video and image sharing websites such as YouTube and Flickr.
- 1.4 Staff should be aware that there are many more examples of social media than can be listed here and this is a constantly changing area.
- 1.5 Whilst recognising the benefits of social media and the opportunities for communication this provides, this Policy sets out the principles which staff and contractors are expected to follow when using social media to ensure the school upholds the highest possible standard of confidentiality and accountability and to ensure that its reputation and that of its pupils is safeguarded at all times.
- 1.6 All staff working within the school are in a position of trust, they are therefore required to familiarise themselves with this Policy and raise any concerns where they may arise to safeguard our children and protect our staff.
- 1.7 Caution is advised when inviting work colleagues to be 'friends' in personal social networking sites; Social networking sites blur the line between work and personal lives and it may be difficult to maintain professional relationships or it might be embarrassing if too much personal information is known in the work place.
- 1.8 Staff should follow these guidelines in relation to any social media that they use both in work and in their private lives. The recognised Trade Unions have been consulted.

## **2. Scope**

- 2.1 This document applies to all staff, including agency/supply staff, volunteers, governors or anyone working within the school and using the school's systems and equipment whether on or off the premises. The policy may also apply to former employees in certain circumstances. The use of the word 'individuals' in this document includes this range of people.
- 2.2 The policy and principles should be read in conjunction with the school's policies on Online Safety, Acceptable Use of ICT and the Staff Code of Conduct.
- 2.3 The aim is to advise staff and others of the expectation of working in a school environment when using social media, and highlighting:
  - 2.3.1 The importance of ensuring that relevant privacy settings are activated and regularly reviewed.
  - 2.3.2 The restrictions of maintaining a professional relationship and professional conduct are adhered to.
  - 2.3.3 Guidance on what is acceptable and what is unacceptable when using social media.

## **3. The golden principles**

- 3.1 An individual is under a duty to:
  - 3.1.1 Maintain proper professional boundaries with students, parents and carers even when students, parents or carers initiate electronic interaction
  - 3.1.2 Before posting items or communicating on social media to consider seriously whether the item would be said in public or shown in public or written for the public to read. If not, or if there is some doubt then it should not be posted because you may not be able to control who sees the information and how they interpret it
  - 3.1.3 Be particularly aware of the guidelines when staff have external friendships with parents/carers.
- 3.2 An individual is under a duty not to:
  - 3.2.1 Disclose confidential information without express authority especially about students, parents or carers, staff, voluntary or other workers at the school nor breach their right to privacy

- 3.2.2 Engage in posts or activities which are detrimental to maintaining effective working relationships between individuals 'working' at the school
- 3.2.3 Bring the reputation of the school into disrepute
- 3.2.4 Engage in activities which compromise, or might be seen to compromise, the professional standards of teaching or the professional standards applicable to support staff
- 3.2.5 Share information with students or parents/carers in any environment that they would not willingly and appropriately share in a school or school related setting or in the community
- 3.2.6 Post comments which incite others to make discriminatory or other professionally unacceptable comments
- 3.2.7 Post school logos or similar images that may lead readers of posts etc. to believe the individual is speaking on behalf of the school.

3.3 Items placed on social networking sites will be regarded as having been posted in the public domain. Thus, it is very important to be careful when using social media personally.

#### **4. Effective practices when using social media sites:**

- 4.1 Bullying and harassment – such conduct against any colleagues via social media sites is taken as seriously as workplace bullying and harassment. Any allegations will be dealt with under the schools' normal bullying and harassment and/or disciplinary policies and may be treated as a criminal offence in certain circumstances
- 4.2 Incitement of racial or religious hatred or similar activities – these may lead to criminal investigations and penalties
- 4.3 Posting libellous statements – an individual may be legally liable for any damage to the reputation of the individual concerned. As a representative of the school, any statement made by an employee could mean the school is vicariously liable for defamatory statements if carried out in the normal course of employment, even if performed without the consent or approval of the school. Similarly, making such statements on your own initiative and not at work could mean you face legal action
- 4.4 Grooming students or similar activities to develop an inappropriate relationship(s)
- 4.5 Bring the school's reputation into disrepute
- 4.6 Compromising the security of the school's systems
- 4.7 Breaching confidential information about the school or any of its students, staff, governors, volunteers or other individuals associated with the school. Do not publish anything that might allow inferences to be drawn which could embarrass or damage a student, employee, governor, volunteer or supplier.
- 4.8 Breaches of copyright or other similar infringements – passing on text, photos etc; may infringe the owner's copyright. Always ensure that you have the permission of the owner
- 4.9 The school takes the matters above seriously and disciplinary action will be taken. If substantiated, the normal outcome will be dismissal.
- 4.10 A very serious view will also be taken of any individual, who ignores or wilfully or carelessly carries out actions or omits to act which results in breaches of the instructions and advice contained in this policy and the result is for example, undermining effective working relationships, professional boundaries between individuals and student similar examples in this policy.

#### **5. Using Social Media on behalf of the School**

- 5.1 Website photographs that include pupils will be selected carefully.
- 5.2 Only first names of children will be used online.
- 5.3 Photograph permission will be sought from parents/carers via a consent form.
- 5.4 Teachers will be made aware of those who have not consented to photos.
- 5.5 The Head of School or nominee will take overall editorial responsibility and ensure that content is accurate and appropriate.

## **6. Organisation disrepute**

Social Media should not bring the organisation into disrepute by:

- 6.1 Maintaining any relationship with pupils on social media e.g. staff should decline 'Friend' requests, unless the pupil(s) are immediate family members. If requests are received from pupils who are not family members, this must be raised with the Head of School or another member of the Senior Management Team. Measures will then be taken to communicate to students that such connections should be with the School's official site where appropriate
- 6.2 Having any contact with pupils' family members through social media if that contact is likely to constitute a conflict of interest or call into question their objectivity;
- 6.3 Criticising or arguing with parents, colleagues etc;
- 6.4 Making defamatory comments about individuals or other organisations or groups; Posting images that are inappropriate or links to inappropriate content;
- 6.5 Giving personal contact details to children or young people, including their mobile telephone number or personal email address;
- 6.6 Using personal equipment (e.g. mobile phone device) to communicate with children or young people;
- 6.7 Not having the relevant written permission from parents for communication, using the school's equipment. Permission must detail the specific reasons why this communication is required;
- 6.8 Making contact for personal reasons;
- 6.9 Using the internet or other communication channels to send personal messages to children/young persons;
- 6.10 Responding to/ request personal information from a child or young person, other than that which might be appropriate as part of your professional role;
- 6.11 Mentioning in a negative manner, the school, its pupils, parents or colleagues; Commenting on any incidents that occur or have occurred within the school; Posting photographs, videos or any other types of image of pupils and their families.

## **7. Confidentiality**

Confidentially will be breached by:

- 7.1 Discussing confidential or personal information about an individual (such as a colleague or pupil) or organisation (such as a supplier of services)
- 7.2 Discussing the school's internal workings (such as ongoing personnel issues, or its future business plans that have not been communicated to the wider public)
- 7.3 The school does not expect staff members to discontinue contact with their family members via personal social media once the school starts providing services for them. However, any information staff members obtain in the course of their employment must not be used for personal gain nor be passed on to others who may use it in such a way
- 7.4 School or email addresses and other official contact details must not be used for setting up personal social media accounts or to communicate through such media.

## **8. Aggrievences and concerns**

8.1 If you feel that an unfair decision has been made or that malpractice is occurring you should not post your feelings on-line, which are likely to be impulsive, inappropriate or heated. Those may lead you into being part of the problem. Instead you can use several routes:

8.1.1 Whistle blowing procedure - for allegations of organisational malpractice or corruption – See Whistle Blowing policy on the school website. Following this procedure provides protection against dismissal and other sanctions if you disclose matters in the ways set out in the procedure. Posting comments first will mean you forfeit your legal protection.

8.1.2 Grievance procedure - if you feel aggrieved by a decision at the school that affects you personally.

8.2 Do not do anything that could be considered discriminatory against, or bullying or harassment of, any individual, for example by:

8.2.1 Making offensive or derogatory comments relating to age, disability, gender reassignment, race (including nationality), religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation;

8.2.2 Using social media to bully another individual (such as a staff member of the school); or Posting

images that are or are likely to be considered discriminatory or offensive;

8.2.3 Using social media and the internet in any way to attack, insult, abuse or defame pupils, their family members, colleagues, other professionals, other organisations.

8.3 Be mindful of breach of copyright, for example by:

8.3.1 Using someone else's images or written content without permission;

8.3.2 Failing to give acknowledgement where permission has been given to reproduce something.

## 9 Privacy Settings

9.1 Manage the privacy and security settings of your social media accounts. Privacy settings can shift and change without notice. Check the settings frequently.

- a. Ensure that privacy settings for content/photos are set appropriately and monitor who can post to your social media locations and view what you post. You should not allow students to view or post on those locations.
- b. Protect yourself from identity theft by restricting the amount of personal information that you give out.
- c. Be cautious about posting detailed personal information such as date of birth, place of birth and mother's maiden name, which can form the basis of security questions and passwords and enable personal details to be cloned for fraudulent acts etc.

## 10 Disciplinary action

10.1 All staff within the school are required to adhere to this policy.

10.2 Staff should note that any breaches of this policy may lead to disciplinary action. Serious breaches of this policy, for example incidents of bullying of colleagues or social media activity causing serious damage to the school, may constitute gross misconduct and lead to summary dismissal.

10.3 Where a contractor becomes aware that one of their employees has breached this policy they will need to notify the school, and ensure that appropriate action is taken against the employee.

## 11 Monitoring

11.1 All school ICT systems may be monitored in accordance with the school's ICT Usage Policy, so personal privacy cannot be assumed when using school hardware.

11.2 Schools can monitor the usage of its own internet and email services without prior notification or authorisation from users (staff, contractors and pupils) when justifiable concerns have been raised regarding electronic communication.

11.3 All staff are required to complete, sign and return to the school, the "Statement of Acceptance of the Terms and Conditions of the Social Media Policy" (Appendix 1).

11.4 All Data will be handled in accordance with Data Protection Legislation and our own internal procedures, further information can be found in our Data Protection Policy and Privacy Notices

## Approval / Revision History

Revision date	By	Summary of Changes Made
February 2023	Siobhan Rowland	Policy reviewed to new VLT template, wording for Acting Head teacher changed to Head of School. No specific new content updates

