

Social Media Parents Code of Conduct Policy

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Governor Responsibility:	Learning & Community Committee
Policy Originator:	Headteacher
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Status:	Non-statutory
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1. Statement of Intent

Social networking sites such as WhatsApp and Instagram are now widely used. Tetherdown Primary School understands the benefits of using social media and appreciates the simplicity and ease of instant messaging online. This type of media allows people to communicate in ways that were not previously possible. However, such sites can be inappropriately used by some as a means of expressing negative or offensive views about parents, the school and their staff. The school community can be negatively affected, such as by damaging the school's reputation.

Our school already has a code of conduct for our children and our employees, but this code is aimed at the wider school community so that all can see and understand the expectations around the social media conduct of all parents and carers connected to our school.

This policy sets out clear procedures for how we expect parents and carers to conduct themselves on social media and when using messenger apps, such as WhatsApp. In addition, it sets out the procedures we will follow and action we may take when we consider that parents and carers have used such facilities inappropriately. When we have referred to "parent" in this document, we also include carers, relatives, or any adult associated with the school.

2. Legal framework

This document has due regard to all relevant legislation and statutory guidance including, but not limited to, the following:

- a) Data Protection Act 2018
- b) UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)
- c) Defamation Act 2013
- d) Protection of Freedoms Act 2012 (as amended)

This document operates in conjunction with the following school policies:

- e) Complaints Procedure
- f) Online Safety Policy and Social Media
- g) Data Protection Suite of Policies (GDPR)
- h) Photography Policy
- i) Codes of Conduct (Pupil, Staff, Governor)

3. Objectives of Policy

- 3.1 Encourage social networking sites to be used in a beneficial and positive way by parents;
- 3.2 Safeguard children, staff and anyone associated with the school from the negative effects of social networking sites;
- 3.3 Safeguard the reputation of the school from unwarranted abuse on social networking sites;
- 3.4 Clarify what the school considers to be appropriate and inappropriate use of social networking sites by parents;
- 3.5 Set out the procedures the school will follow where it considers parents have inappropriately or unlawfully used social networking sites to the detriment of the school, its staff or its children and anyone else associated with the school; and
- 3.6 Set out the action the school will consider taking if parents make inappropriate use of social networking sites.

4. Posting Messages - Social Media Conduct

Social media should not be used as a medium to voice concerns/grievances, or to fuel campaigns and voice complaints against the school, school staff, parents, or pupils. We take very seriously inappropriate use of social media by a parent to publicly humiliate or criticise another parent, child or member of staff. If parents have any concerns about their child in relation to the school they should:

- a) Initially contact the class teacher.
- b) If the concern remains, they should contact the phase leader.
- c) Only after the routes (a) and (b) have been followed contact the headteacher.
- d) If still unresolved, raise a complaint via the school governors through the complaints procedure.

5. Appropriate Use of Social Media - Considerations

Social networking sites and apps have potential to enhance the learning and achievement of children and enable parents to access information about the school and provide feedback efficiently and easily. In addition, the school recognises that many parents and other family members will have personal social networking accounts, which they might use to discuss/share views about school issues with friends and acquaintances.

As a guide, individuals should consider the following prior to posting any information on social networking sites about the school, its staff, its children, or anyone else associated with the school:

- Is the social networking site the appropriate channel to raise concerns, give this feedback or express these views?
- Would private and confidential discussions with the school be more appropriate? E.g. if there are serious allegations being made/concerns being raised, social media/internet sites should not be used to name individuals. Please contact the school to discuss any concerns you may have.
- Are such comments likely to cause emotional or reputational harm to individuals which would not be justified, particularly if the school has not yet had a chance to investigate a complaint?
- The reputational impact that the posting of such material may have to the school; any detrimental harm that the school may suffer because of the posting; and the impact that such a posting may have on pupils' learning.

6. Inappropriate Use of Social Media

Tetherdown Primary School expects parents to use messaging apps, such as WhatsApp, for purposes beneficial to themselves and the school and expects parents to behave in a civilised manner online. The school will not tolerate any of the following behaviour on social media or other sites online and considers the following examples to be inappropriate uses of social networking sites (this list is non-exhaustive and intended to provide examples only):

- 6.1 Posting defamatory, offensive or derogatory content about parents, children, the school or its employees or governors;
- 6.2 Posting racist comments;
- 6.3 Posting comments which threaten violence;
- 6.4 Making allegations about staff or pupils at the school/cyber-bullying;
- 6.5 Making complaints about the school/staff at the school;
- 6.6 Complaining about the school's values and methods on social media;
- 6.7 Posting content containing confidential information regarding the school or any members of its community, e.g. a complaint outcome;
- 6.8 Contacting school employees through social media, including requesting to 'follow' or 'friend' them, or sending them private messages;

- 6.9 Creating or joining private groups or chats that victimise or harass a member of staff or the school in general;
- 6.10 Posting images of any staff members or children without their prior consent

7. Procedure for Breaches of Parents and Carers Code of Conduct for using Social Media

Parents' social media usage will be in accordance with the school's Online Safety Policy and Social Media Parents Code of Conduct Policy.

The school will always try to deal with concerns raised by parents in a professional and appropriate manner and understands that parents may not always realise when they have used social networking sites inappropriately.

Breaches of this code of conduct will be taken seriously by the school. If any misconduct, such as sending abusive messages or posting defamatory information occurs online the Headteacher can:

- 7.1 Request a meeting to discuss the matter with the parent to try and resolve the matter.
- 7.2 With the permission of the parent, view messages sent between members of the parent body to deal with problems quickly and effectively.
- 7.3 Request that 'group chats' are closed should any problems continue between parents

The school retains the right to request that any damaging material is removed from social media websites.

If the parent refuses to do this and continues to use social networking sites in a manner the school considers inappropriate, the school will consider taking the following action:

- 7.4 Take legal advice and/or legal action where the information posted is defamatory in any way or if the circumstances warrant this;
- 7.5 Set out the school's concerns to the parent in writing, giving the parent a warning and requesting that the material in question is removed;
- 7.6 Contact the police where the school feels it appropriate – for example, if it considers a crime (such as harassment) has been committed; or in cases where the posting has a prejudicial element, is grossly obscene or is threatening violence;
- 7.7 If the inappropriate comments have been made on a school website or online forum, the school may take action to block or restrict that individual's access to that website or forum;
- 7.8 Contact the host/provider of the social networking site to complain about the content of the site and ask for removal of the information;
- 7.9 Take other legal action against the individual.
- 7.10 In the event of illegal, defamatory, or discriminatory content, breaches could lead to prosecution.

8 Responsibility

Parents are responsible for supporting the school by monitoring their own use of social media and online messaging. Parents must always adhere to the Social Media Parents Code of Conduct Policy. Parents are expected to model responsible behaviour on social media and online messaging, have open conversations with their children about their online activity, and help them adhere to the Pupil Code of Conduct. Parents must not post anonymously or under an alias to evade the guidance given. If parents wish to raise a complaint, the school has a Complaints Procedures Policy in place to avoid parents broadcasting grievances online. Parents will be made aware of their responsibilities regarding their use of social networking and their conduct online. This policy will be shared with parents each Autumn Term.

9 Monitoring and review

The Headteacher will review this code of conduct on a regular basis and will communicate any changes to key stakeholders.

All parents are required to read this code of conduct.