

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Review Body:	Personnel Committee
Leadership Group Responsibility:	Deputy Headteacher
Type of Policy:	Non Statutory
Reviewed:	May 2021

ASCL has produced a useful guidance paper (ASCL Guidance Paper 117: Social Networking and Social media www.ascl.org.uk/help-and-advice/guidance-papers).

Background

As far as schools are concerned, the term social media refers to any interactive Web 2.0 platform, including social networks, internet forums and blogs. Given the rapid expansion of social media, it is impossible to list all possible types of media. While acknowledging the benefits of social media and the internet it is also important to recognise that risk to the safety and well-being of users is ever-changing and that the misuse/abuse of these facilities can range from inappropriate to criminal and schools need to have mechanisms in place to deal with misuse of social media. Misuse can be summarised as:

Contact

- Commercial (tracking, harvesting personal information).
- Aggressive (being bullied, harassed or stalked).
- Sexual (meeting strangers, being groomed).
- Values (self-harm, unwelcome persuasions).

Conduct

- Commercial (illegal downloading, hacking, gambling, financial scams).
- Aggressive (bullying or harassing another).
- Sexual (creating and uploading inappropriate material).
- Values (providing misleading info or advice).

Content

- Commercial (adverts, spam, sponsorship, personal information).
- Aggressive (violent/hateful content).
- Sexual (pornographic or unwelcome sexual content).
- Values (bias, racism, misleading info or advice).

Introduction

The DFE document 'Teachers' Standards', published in July 2011, expects teachers, in their personal and professional conduct, to 'uphold public trust in the profession and maintain high standards of ethics and behaviour, within and outside school'. At RMET we understand that this statement covers their use of social media.

For the purposes of this policy, social media refers to any interactive Web 2.0 platform, including social networks, internet forums and blogs. Given the rapid expansion of social media, it is impossible to list all possible types of media. Staff should assume that all online activity is covered by this policy and should follow these guidelines in relation to any social media that they use, both at work and in their personal situation.

While acknowledging the benefits of social media and the internet it is also important to recognise that risk to the safety and well-being of users is ever-changing and that the misuse/abuse of these facilities can range from inappropriate to criminal and RMET has this policy in place to deal with any misuse of social media.

Objectives and targets

This policy applies to teachers, support staff, governors, volunteers and all who work on the school site.

This policy takes account of all the appropriate legislation and sets out to:

- Assist those who work with pupils to work safely and responsibly, to monitor their own standards of behaviour and to prevent the abuse of their position of trust with pupils.
- Offer a code of practice relevant to social media for educational, personal and recreational use.
- Advise that, in the event of unsafe and/or unacceptable behaviour, disciplinary or legal action (including gross misconduct leading to dismissal) will be taken if necessary in order to support safer working practice and minimise the risk of malicious allegations against staff and others who have contact with pupils.

Action plan

Use of social media within school

Staff are not permitted to access social media websites from RMET's computers or other devices at any time unless authorised to do so by a member of the senior management team. However, staff may use their own devices to access social media websites while they are in school, outside of session times. Excessive use of social media, which could be considered to interfere with productivity, will be considered a disciplinary matter.

Staff should assume that anything they write (regardless of their privacy settings) could become public so should ensure that they are professional, maintaining a clear distinction between their personal and professional lives.

Any use of social media made in a professional capacity must not:

- Bring RMET into disrepute.
- Breach confidentiality.
- Breach copyrights of any kind.
- Bully, harass or be discriminatory in any way.
- Be defamatory or derogatory.

Use of social media outside of RMET

RMET appreciates that staff may make use of social media in a personal capacity. However, staff must be aware that if they are recognised from their profile as being associated with the school, opinions they express could be considered to reflect RMET's opinions and so could damage the reputation of the school. For this reason, staff should avoid mentioning RMET by name, or any member of staff by name or position. Opinions offered should not bring RMET into disrepute, breach confidentiality or copyright, or bully, harass or discriminate in any way.

General considerations

Those working with children have a duty of care and a statutory duty to report signs of potential radicalisation (the prevent duty) but also need to be on the lookout for cyber bullying and other activities on social media which might affect the mental health of pupils. Staff will receive regular training on safeguarding matters, including online safety.

Staff are expected to adopt high standards of behaviour to retain the confidence and respect of colleagues and pupils both within and outside of school. They should maintain appropriate boundaries and manage personal information effectively so that it cannot be misused by third parties eg for 'cyber-bullying' or identity theft.

When using social media staff and others should:

- Never share work login details or passwords.
- Keep personal phone numbers private.

- Never give personal email addresses to pupils or parents.
- Restrict access to certain groups of people on their social media sites and pages.
- Not make 'friends' of pupils at RMET because this could potentially be construed as 'grooming', nor should they accept invitations to become a 'friend' of any pupils.
- Carefully consider contact with a pupil's family members because this may give rise to concerns over objectivity and/or impartiality.
- Keep any communications with pupils transparent and professional and should only use RMET's systems for communications. (If there is any doubt about whether communication between a pupil/parent and member of staff is acceptable and appropriate a member of the senior management team should be informed so that they can decide how to deal with the situation.)

Before joining RMET, new employees should check any information they have posted on social media sites and remove any post that could cause embarrassment or offence.

Training will be given to all staff that covers issues such as privacy settings, appropriate contact between teachers, pupils and parents and the need to ensure a clear distinction between their professional and private lives.

Misuse of social media

While acknowledging the benefits of social media and the internet it is also important to recognise that risk to the safety and well-being of users is ever-changing and that the misuse/abuse of these facilities can range from inappropriate to criminal. Misuse can be summarised as follows:

Contact

- Commercial (tracking, harvesting personal information).
- Aggressive (being bullied, harassed or stalked).
- Sexual (meeting strangers, being groomed).
- Values (self-harm, unwelcome persuasions).

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Disciplinary action

Any breach of this policy may lead to disciplinary action under RMET's disciplinary policy. Serious breaches of this policy, such as incidents of bullying or of social media activity causing damage to the organisation, may constitute gross misconduct and lead to dismissal.

Pupils, staff and volunteers must be aware of what is considered to be 'criminal' when using social media or the internet and electronic communication in general.

While the list below is not exhaustive, it provides some guidance in assessing the seriousness of incidents as well as determining appropriate actions.

All incident types below are considered criminal in nature but incidents would be subject to a full investigation in order to determine whether a crime has been committed or not.

- Copyright infringement through copying diagrams, texts and photos without acknowledging the source.

- Misuse of logins (using someone else's login).
- Distributing, printing or viewing information on the following:
 - Soft-core pornography.
 - Hate material.
 - Drugs.
 - Weapons.
 - Violence.
 - Racism.
- Distributing viruses.
- Hacking sites.
- Gambling.
- Accessing age restricted material.
- Bullying of anyone.
- Viewing, production, distribution and possession of indecent images of children.
- Grooming and harassment of a child or young person.
- Viewing, production, distribution and possession of extreme pornographic images.
- Buying or selling stolen goods.
- Inciting religious hatred and acts of terrorism.
- Downloading multimedia (music and films) that has copyright attached. (Although this is illegal most police forces would treat this as a lower priority than the cases above).

Responding to misuse/incidents

The RMET policies and protocols on child protection, safeguarding and online safety *must* be followed if any apparent, suspected or actual misuse appears to involve illegal or inappropriate activity:

- Child sexual abuse images.
- Adult material which potentially breaches the Obscene Publications Act.
- Criminally racist material.
- Other criminal conduct, activity or materials.
- Potential radicalisation or extremism.

Any actions online that impact on the school and can potentially lower the school's (or someone in the school's) reputation in some way or are deemed as being inappropriate will *always* be responded to.

In the event that any member of staff, student or parent/carer is found to be posting libellous or inflammatory comments on social networking sites, this will be addressed by RMET in the first instance. If appropriate, disciplinary action will result. However, where necessary, the police will be involved and/or legal action pursued.

The current Criminal Prosecution Service (CPS) guidance '*Guidelines on prosecuting cases involving communications sent via social media*' came into effect on 20 June 2013 and set out the approach that prosecutors should take when making decisions in relation to cases where it is alleged that criminal offences have been committed by the sending of a communication via social media. These guidelines are helpful when used alongside RMET employment and disciplinary policies in cases where staff misuse may be the issue.

Facebook (for incidents of cyberbullying or inappropriate behaviour)

- If you know the identity of the perpetrator, contact their parents or, in the case of older children, the young person themselves, to ask that the offending content be removed.
- Failing that, having kept a copy of the page or message in question, delete the content and take action as appropriate.
- For messages, the 'delete and report/block user facilities' are found in the 'Actions' dropdown on the page on which the message appears.
- For whole pages, the 'unfriend and report/block user facilities' are at the bottom of the left hand column.

- Always try to cite which of the Facebook terms and conditions have been violated (see note 10 for the most likely ones) at www.facebook.com/terms.php or community standards at www.facebook.com/communitystandards.
- Note that Facebook are more alert to US law than UK. The process should be anonymous.
- To remove a post from a profile, hover over it and on the right there will be a cross to delete it.
- To report abuse or harassment, email abuse@facebook.com. Facebook will acknowledge receipt of your email and start looking into your complaint within 24 hours. They will get back to you within 72 hours of receiving your complaint.
- If all else fails, support the victim, if they wish, to click the 'Click CEOP' button www.thinkuknow.co.uk.
- If the victim is determined to continue using Facebook, they might want to delete their account and start again under a different name. Deletion can be undertaken via https://ssl.facebook.com/help/contact.php?show_form=delete_account.
- They should be made aware of the privacy issues that might have given rise to their problem in the first place:
 - You will not bully, intimidate, or harass any user (1.3.6).
 - You will not provide any false personal information on Facebook, or create an account for anyone other than yourself without permission (4.1).
 - You will not post content or take any action on Facebook that infringes or violates someone else's rights or otherwise violates the law (5.1).

Concerns about potential radicalisation

Staff need to be aware that those attempting to groom youngsters for radicalisation are known to work through social media such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Ask.fm, Instagram, Tumblr and closed peer-to-peer networks such as WhatsApp, Kik, SureSpot and Viber.

Monitoring and reviewing

RMET will monitor the impact of the policy using logs of reported incidents e.g. using CPOMS and it will be reviewed by the governors annually, or more regularly, in the light of any incidents that have taken place, significant new developments in the use of the technologies, or perceived new threats as advised by the E-safety committee or others).

Guidance for social media use

Think twice before posting: The internet is permanent and word spreads fast. If you would not publish it on the school website or publish it in the traditional media then do not post it. If in doubt, ask a member of the Leadership Group who is responsible for the school's accounts.

Make it accurate: Get the facts straight and review content before posting – check for grammatical and spelling errors and avoid the use of 'text speak' where possible.

Be transparent: State that you work at RMET if posting in an official capacity as yourself, or in relation to your work at RMET. Your honesty will be noted in a social media environment.

Protect RMET'S voice: Posts on social media sites should be professional and respectful in tone. If you are posting on behalf of RMET, or as an individual member of the RMET community, what you say will reflect RMET's reputation.

If posting on an official RMET social media presence you are representing RMET and as a representative have a responsibility that your communications are appropriate (for the audience and in keeping with RMET's values). They should be accurate and respectful of others.

Know the rules: Become familiar with the terms of service and policies of sites and networks in which you participate.

Made a mistake? If so admit it, correct it, modify it, and be honest about it and your correction.

Let us know: If you are thinking about undertaking social media communications or already have, then let ICT Support know. Knowing what is out there will enable us to leverage it to our full advantage. If you wish to establish an official RMET presence in social media you must speak with the IT Manager in the first instance.

Be a scout and let us know about anything you think is particularly significant – either positive or negative.

Misuse: Where evidence of misuse is found (such as posting damaging or libellous comments) we may undertake a more detailed investigation in accordance with our Disciplinary Policy, involving the examination and disclosure of monitoring records to those nominated to undertake the investigation. If necessary such information may be handed to the police in connection with a criminal investigation.

Optimising social media communications

It's all about the audience and having a conversation. Social media communication is about sharing, discussing and responding. Audiences on social media will vary according to the type of communication or the site. Journalists use social media as a means to identify news stories, so bear this in mind as well.

Have a plan: Consider your message, audience and goal and have a plan for maintaining your social media communications. Where do your social media communications fit within the broader communications plan?

Content is king: What would motivate your audience to respond positively and share your content with others? Monitor and evaluate which content, or posts, receive the most interactions – enabling you to identify great content for future use. If you create multimedia (e.g., videos) to post have it reviewed by someone else first.

Tone of voice: Bearing in mind the guidance above about protecting RMET's voice, social media communications are on the whole more informal than traditional forms of communication. Write in the first and second person, in an active voice. Encourage conversation and be approachable in tone. When using Twitter, Hashtags are a great way to allow followers to view filter tweets relating to a subject or topic e.g., #RMGSEnglish or #RMGSSportsDay).

Link back to the RMET website if posting in an official RMET capacity. Ideally posts should be brief and full information should be kept to the RMET website.

Responding to negativity: If in any doubt, please seek advice about how to respond, particularly if there is a potential significant impact on RMET's reputation. Please contact the relevant person (for example, the DSL or senior leadership team/online-safety co-ordinator). Remember that the social media world is all about debate and discussion. We enter into it with that in mind, so think carefully about responding and even whether to respond at all. Be constructive and polite, and do not be defensive.

Personal use vs writing in the capacity of a member of RMET

The advice above is aimed at those writing either on behalf of RMET in an official capacity (made explicit above) and those writing in the capacity of a member of RMET, where their status as such is made clear to the online community.

If you identify yourself as an RMET member of staff online, it should be clear that the views expressed are not necessarily those of the school.

These guidelines are not intended for members of staff using social media for their own personal use where their link to RMET is not explicit. Users may however wish to make themselves aware of the various social media privacy policies to protect personal privacy:

Twitter: <https://www.facebook.com/about/privacy/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/about/privacy/>