



## Use of Social Media by Staff Policy

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## **1.0 Introduction**

This document sets out the QEGSMAT (the Trust) Social Media policy for staff. New technologies are an integral part of our lives and are powerful tools that open up teaching and learning opportunities for staff in many ways. This document aims to:

- Provide guidance to QEGSMAT staff in order for there to be clarity and greater protection around the use of the internet, social media and other forms of digital communications.
- Assist staff working with children to work safely and responsibly in using the internet, social media and other methods of communication.
- Set clear expectations of behaviour and/or codes of practice relevant to social networking for educational, personal or recreational use.
- Make it clear that unlawful or unsafe behaviour is unacceptable and that, where appropriate, disciplinary or legal action will be taken.
- Support safer working practice.
- Minimise the risk of misplaced or malicious allegations made against adults who work with students/pupils.
- Reduce the incidences of positions of trust being abused or misused.
- Ensure that the reputation of the QEGSMAT and its academies is protected.

Whilst every attempt has been made to cover a wide range of situations, it is recognised that this policy cannot cover all eventualities. There may be times when professional judgements are made in situations not covered by this document. It is expected that in these circumstances staff in school will seek guidance from their headteacher in relation to any such action already taken or proposed. The headteacher may seek advice from the Trust's HR team or others where appropriate.

This document applies to all staff who work in the Trust. This includes teachers, support staff, supply staff, contractors, casual/agency staff, governors and other volunteers. It should be followed by any other adults who come into contact with pupils or students. Third parties who have access to our electronic communication systems and equipment are also required to comply with this policy. References in this document to staff should be taken to apply to all the above people.

This policy does not form part of any employee's contract of employment and it may be amended at any time.

## **2.0 Principles:**

- Adults who work with pupils and students are responsible for their own actions and behaviour and should avoid any conduct which would lead any reasonable person to question their motivation and intentions.
- Staff should work and be seen to work, in an open and transparent way.
- Staff should continually monitor and review their practice in terms of the continually evolving world of social networking and ensure they follow the guidance contained in this document.
- Employees using social media are also potentially at risk of others misunderstanding the intent behind online communications or blurring of professional boundaries between children and young people and their parents or carers. This policy therefore sets out the Trust's expectations regarding the use of social media.

## **3.0 What is Social Media?**

For the purpose of this policy 'social media' is the term commonly used for websites or "Apps" which allow people to interact with each other in some way – by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests. Social networking websites such as Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, YouTube and LinkedIn are perhaps the most well-known examples of social media but the term also covers other web-based services where people interact such as blogs, video and audio podcasts, wikis, message boards, photo document and video sharing websites such as YouTube and micro blogging services such as Twitter. This definition of social media is not exhaustive as technology develops, with new ways of communicating advancing every day. For the purpose of this document, the term social media is not exhaustive and applies to the use of communication technologies including mobile devices and any other emerging forms of communications technologies.

This policy applies to the use of social media for both business and personal purposes, whether during working hours or otherwise.

The policy applies regardless of whether the social media is accessed using QEGSMAT IT facilities and equipment or equipment belonging to members of staff.

## **4.0 Rationale**

All adults working with pupils or students have a responsibility to maintain public confidence in their ability to safeguard the welfare and best interests of pupils and students. It is therefore expected that they will adopt high standards of personal conduct in order to maintain the confidence and respect of their colleagues, pupils, students, and public in general and all those with whom they come into contact. Adults in contact with pupils or students should therefore understand and be aware

that safe practice also involves using judgement and integrity about behaviours in places other than the work setting.

The guidance contained in this policy identifies what behaviours are expected of staff who work with pupils or students.

Anyone whose practice deviates from this document and/or their professional or employment-related code of conduct may bring into question their suitability to work with children and young people and may result in disciplinary action being taken against them.

Staff should always maintain appropriate professional boundaries and avoid behaviour, during their use of the internet and other communication technologies, which might be misinterpreted by others or bring the QEGSMAT or its academies into disrepute.

They should report and record any incident with this potential to their Online Safety Coordinator.

## **5.0 Business use of Social Media**

The academy community is encouraged to consider if a social media account will help them in their work, e.g. a history department Twitter account, or a “Friends of the school” Facebook page. Anyone wishing to create such an account must present a business case to their academy Leadership Team which covers the following points:-

- The aim of the account.
- The intended audience.
- How the account will be promoted.
- Who will run the account (at least two staff members should be named).
- Will the account be open or private/closed.

Following consideration by the Leadership Team an application will be approved or rejected. In all cases, the Leadership Team must be satisfied that anyone running a social media account on behalf of the academy has read and understood this policy and received appropriate training. This also applies to anyone who is not directly employed by the Trust, including volunteers or parents.

Anyone whose duties require them to speak on behalf of the academy in a social media environment must seek approval for such communication from the headteacher, who may require them to undergo training before they do so and impose certain requirements and restrictions with regard to their activities.

Likewise, if a member of staff is contacted for comments about the academy for publication anywhere on or offline, including in any social media outlet, they should direct the inquiry to the headteacher and not respond without written approval.

## **6.0 Personnel responsible for implementing and monitoring compliance**

The Trust has overall responsibility for the effective operation of this policy and has delegated day-to-day responsibility for its operation to its headteachers. Responsibility for monitoring and reviewing the operation of this policy and making recommendations for change to minimise risks also lies with the headteacher.

All leaders have a specific responsibility for operating within the boundaries of this policy, ensuring that all staff understand the standards of behaviour expected of them and taking action when behaviour falls below its requirements.

All staff are responsible for the implementation of this policy and should ensure that they take the time to read and understand it. Any misuse of social media should be reported to the headteacher. Staff should not discuss this with any other person to ensure that any possible investigation is not compromised.

Breach of this policy may result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal. Disciplinary action may be taken regardless of whether the breach is committed during working hours, and regardless of whether QEGSMAT equipment or facilities are used for the purpose of committing the breach. Any member of staff suspected of committing a breach of this policy will be required to co-operate with any investigation.

Staff may be required to remove internet postings which are deemed to constitute a breach of this policy. Failure to comply with such a request may in itself result in disciplinary action.

## **7.0 Help and Support**

Any member of staff who feels that they have been harassed or bullied or are offended by material posted or uploaded onto a social media website should inform their headteacher. The headteacher may seek advice from the Trust's Central Team or others where appropriate. Records of any abuse, such as texts, e-mails, website content or instant message should be kept and not deleted. Staff are advised to take screen prints of messages or web pages and be careful to record the time, date and place (web address) it was taken.

Staff are encouraged to report all incidents to their line manager or the headteacher. All such incidents will be taken seriously and will be dealt with in consideration of the wishes of the person who has reported the incident. It is for the individual to decide whether they also wish to report the incident to the police.

Any member of staff requiring further information regarding social media is advised to speak to their School Online Safety Coordinator or headteacher.

## APPENDIX A

### Safer Online Behaviour

Managing personal information effectively makes it far less likely that information will be misused. In their own interests, staff need to be aware of the dangers of putting personal information onto social networking sites, such as addresses or home and mobile phone numbers. This will avoid the potential for pupils, students or their families or friends having access to staff outside of the school environment. It also reduces the potential for identity theft by third parties.

All staff, particularly new staff, should review their social networking sites regularly to ensure that information available publicly is appropriate. This includes any photographs that may cause embarrassment to themselves and the Trust or academy in which they work if they are published outside of the site.

Staff should never 'friend' a pupil or student of the academy in which they work on a social networking site. Likewise, they should never accept an invitation to 'friend' a pupil or student. This applies not only to social networking sites, but other areas such as game centres and online chat facilities. Staff should also not have former pupils or students as 'friends' as some of their contacts may still be at the academy and be able to access staff profiles via them. Staff members will not post any information which could identify a pupil, class or the school – this includes any images, videos and personal information.

Confidentiality and professionalism need to be considered at all times. Social networking sites offer the possibility of sharing inappropriate information and staff need to ensure that they do not put any confidential information on their site about themselves, their employer, their colleagues, pupils, students or members of the public. Privacy does not exist in the world of social media. Consider what could happen if a post becomes widely known and how that may reflect both on the poster and the Trust and academy. Search engines can turn up posts years after they are created, and comments can be forwarded or copied. If you wouldn't say it at a conference or to a member of the media, consider whether you should post it online. As a general rule, if you are unsure whether a comment is suitable to post, it is probably not. You are personally responsible for content you publish on social media – be aware that what you publish will be public for many years.

Staff should make it clear in social media postings that they are speaking on their own behalf. Write in the first person and use a personal e-mail address when communicating via social media. Avoid posting comments about sensitive school related topics, such as our performance. Even if you make it clear that your views on such topics do not represent those of the Trust or its academies, your comments could still damage our reputation.

If you see content in social media that disparages or reflects poorly on our Trust, academies or our stakeholders, you should print out the content and contact your headteacher. All staff are responsible for protecting our Trust and our academies' reputation.

**APPENDIX B****Protection of personal information**

Staff should keep their personal phone numbers private and not use their own mobile or home phones to contact pupils, students or parents. For trips out, a school mobile phone is available and should be used to contact pupils, students or parents if needed.

Staff should not give their personal contact details to pupils or students including e-mail, home or mobile telephone numbers. Where there is a need for email contact with pupils, students, parents or outside agencies school e-mail accounts should be used. School e-mail systems should only be used in accordance with the school's acceptable use policy.

Staff should keep a record of their phone's unique international mobile equipment identity (IMEI) number and keep their phone secure whilst on school premises. Personal calls should not be taken around pupils or students.