



OWLS Academy Trust

Social Media Policy

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Next Review Due	

Policy developed by



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This policy applies to all staff employed by The OWLS Academy Trust (within this policy referenced as employee(s) or school staff).

The policy also applies to members of Local Governing Bodies and Members of the Board of the Academy Trust as follows:

- Whilst some aspects of this policy are clearly more targeted at employees, many have equal application to governors and trustees. For example, the policy provides guidance for all on what is considered to be inappropriate use of social media / internet sites. All governors should therefore ensure that they comply with the spirit of this policy;
- Though Governors would not be subject to the same disciplinary process as staff, there are still forms of redress available should a governor / trustee behave in an inappropriate manner. The appropriate procedures would be followed in such cases

Throughout this policy, unless indicated otherwise, all references to 'Head Teacher' include the Executive Head Teacher.



Purpose

The primary purpose of this policy is to clarify how employees should conduct themselves when using all forms of social networking websites and blogs, whether conducted through their school's media, personal media and in work time or in one's own time.

Employees wanting to create a work-related social media site must discuss this with, and obtain the relevant approval from, the Head teacher / Head of School.

If followed, this policy will guide employees on how to minimise the risk they may place themselves and pupils in when they choose to write about their work or matters relating to the school/trust and their personal lives. This in turn will minimise situations where safeguarding concerns could arise, employee's integrity or professional standing could be undermined, or the school, the Academy Trust and/or the Local Authority brought into disrepute and professional relationships with colleagues and pupils compromised.

Additionally, adhering to this policy reduces the risk of employees inadvertently contravening sections of the Data Protection Act or falling foul of any breaches of confidentiality, privacy, libel, defamation, harassment and copyright laws.

This policy is not intended to prevent employees from using social media sites, but to make them aware of the risks they could face when sharing information about their professional and/or personal life. Employees should be encouraged to report any concerns that they have regarding content placed on social media sites by colleagues to the Head teacher / Head of School.



Definition of Social Media

Social media can be defined as websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking, resulting in a number of different activities. These activities can include, but are not limited to:

- Maintaining a profile page on social / business networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn;

- Writing or commenting on a blog, whether it is your own or the blog of another person / information site;
- Taking part in discussions on web forums or message boards;
- Leaving product or service reviews on business websites or customer review websites;
- Taking part in online polls;
- Uploading multi-media on networking sites such as Instagram and Tumblr;
- Liking, re-tweeting and commenting on posts of your own, another person or other social media account.



Use of Social Media

As with all personal internet use, employees using social media sites must observe the specific requirements of their school's E-safety Policy.

Misuse of social media websites can, in certain circumstances, constitute a criminal offence or otherwise give rise to legal liability against employees and the school. It may also cause embarrassment to the school and other parties connected to the school, or bring such parties into disrepute.

Any such action would likely be addressed under the Disciplinary Policy and could result in summary dismissal.

Where evidence of misuse is found, a more detailed investigation in accordance with the Disciplinary Policy may be necessary, involving the examination and disclosure of monitoring records to those nominated to undertake the investigation and any witnesses or managers involved in the investigation. If necessary such information may be handed to the police.

Any employee who becomes aware of any use of social media by other member of staff which is in breach of this policy should report the matter to the Head Teacher / Head of School.



Employee Responsibility

When using any form of social media, whether for work or personal use, employees must ensure that they behave responsibly, taking account of the following requirements:

- Employees are personally responsible for the content they publish on social media sites, including likes, re-tweets, etc. Employees should assume that everything that is written is permanent and can be viewed by anyone at any time.
- Employees should assume that everything can be traced back to them personally, as well as to their colleagues, school and parents.
- To avoid any conflict of interest, employees should ensure that personal social networking sites are set at private and pupils are never listed as approved contacts. An exception to this may be if the child is the employee's own child or relative.
- Information must not be posted that would disclose the identity of pupils.
- Employees must ensure content or links to other content does not interfere with their work commitments.
- Pupils must not be discussed on social media sites.
- Employees should not post information on sites (including photographs and videos) that could bring the school, the Academy Trust or the Local Authority into disrepute).

- Employees must not represent their own views / opinions as being those of the school, the Academy Trust or the Local Authority.
- Potentially false or defamatory remarks towards the School, the Academy Trust, the Local Authority, employees, pupils, pupils' relatives, suppliers and partner organisations should not be posted on social media sites.
- Employees must not either endorse or criticise service providers used by the School, the Academy Trust or the Local Authority or develop on-line relationships which create a conflict of interest.
- When posting on social media sites employees must observe the requirements of the Equality Act and the Human Rights Act and must not use any offensive, obscene, derogatory, discriminatory language which may cause embarrassment to School, the Academy Trust, the Local Authority, employees, pupils, pupils' relatives, suppliers and partner organisations.
- Employees must not divulge any information that is confidential to the School, the Academy Trust, the Local Authority or a partner organisation.
- Employees must not upload, post, forward or post a link to any pornographic material (that is, writing, pictures, films and video clips of a sexually explicit or arousing nature);
- Employees must not upload, post, forward or post a link with regards to any other statement which is likely to create any liability (whether criminal or civil, and whether for you or us); or material in breach of copyright or other intellectual property rights, or which invades the privacy of any person.

This list is not exhaustive.



Disciplinary Action

Employees should be aware that the use of social media sites in a manner contrary to this policy, including if others implicate you in a breach of any of the terms listed above, may result in disciplinary action and in serious cases may be treated as gross misconduct, which itself could lead to summary dismissal.

Any instances of “cyber bullying” will initially be addressed under the Dignity at Work Policy and Procedure and may result in disciplinary action.



Social Media Security

Employees should be mindful when placing information on social media sites that this information is visible to a large audience and could identify where they work and with whom, thereby increasing the opportunity for false allegations and threats. In addition it may be possible, through social media sites, for children or vulnerable adults to be identified, which could have implications for their security.

Furthermore there is the scope for causing offence or unintentionally causing embarrassment, for example if pupils find photographs of their teacher which may cause embarrassment and/or damage to their professional reputation and that of the School. In addition, it may be possible for other social media site users to identify where employees live, which could have implications for individual security.

Therefore, first and foremost consideration should be given to the information posted on social media sites and employees are advised to use appropriately the security settings on such sites in order to assist in limiting the concerns above.



Monitoring the Use of Social Media Websites

Employees should be aware that any use of social media websites (whether or not accessed for work purposes) may be monitored and, where breaches of this policy are found, action may be taken under the Disciplinary Policy.

The Academy Trust considers that valid reasons for checking an employee's internet usage include suspicions that the employee has:

- Been using social media websites when he/she should be working; or
- Acted in a way that is in breach of the rules set out in this policy.



Employee Groups / Networks

Employee groups can be created on social media sites such as Facebook. Creators of these groups are responsible for monitoring the content of the site and ensuring that it is appropriate and not in breach of any of the terms in this policy.