POLICY

For

Parental Use of Social Networking and Internet Sites

New policy Feb 2017	Jun 2020	Sep 2022	Sep 2024
Sep 2018	Sep 2021	Sep 2023	May 2025
Sep 2019	Apr 2022	Apr 2024	Sep 2025

Striving for excellence, caring for all
Within a loving and caring Christian environment.

Our Academy Vision

We are a community in which everyone is offered the opportunity to fulfil their full potential, to understand themselves and be valued for who they are. Through a stimulating and challenging learning environment, we pursue academic excellence and seek the flourishing of all. This is because we know we are all God's children.

"Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as you ever can."

John Wesley

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Article 13: You have the right to find out things and share what you think with others, by talking, drawing, and writing or in any other way unless it harms or offends people.
Article 17 - Children have the right to get information. Adults should make sure that the information children are getting is not harmful and help them find and understand the information they need.
Article 36 - Children have the right to protection from any kind of exploitation.

Overview

Social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Tik Tok are now widely used. The widespread availability and use of social networking applications bring opportunities to understand, engage and communicate with audiences in new ways. It is important that we are able to use these technologies and services effectively and flexibly. However, such sites can be inappropriately used by some as a means of expressing negative or offensive views about schools and their staff. There are some risks associated with social media use, especially around the issues of safeguarding, bullying and personal reputation. Social media websites are being used increasingly to fuel campaigns and complaints against schools, school staff, and, in some cases, other parents/carers/pupils. The Governors and Trustees consider the use of social media websites to complain or to make abusive comments about the school or individual members of staff or to make personal comments about anyone in the school community, unacceptable and not in the best interests of the children or the whole school community.

This document sets out Abbey Academies Trust's approach to parental use of such sites and sets out the procedures we will follow and action we may take when we consider that parents have used such facilities inappropriately. When we have referred to "parent" in this document, we also include carers; relatives; or anyone associated with the school.

The school seeks to teach pupils the importance of appropriate and responsible use of social media, and it is, therefore, vital that everyone in the school community, including parents, lead by example.

Objectives

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Encourage social networking sites to be used in a beneficial and positive way by parents
- Safeguard pupils, staff and anyone associated with the school from the negative effects of social networking sites
- Safeguard the reputation of the school from unwarranted abuse on social networking sites
- Clarify what the school considers to be appropriate and inappropriate use of social networking sites by parents
- 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 pupils, and anyone else associated with the school
- Set out the action the school will consider taking if parents make inappropriate use of social networking sites
- Define the monitoring of public social media activity pertaining to the school.

Tone

The tone of content published on social media should be suitable for the audience, whilst retaining appropriate levels of professional standards. Key words to consider when composing messages are:

- Engaging
- Conversational
- Informative
- Friendly (on certain platforms – e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram).

Use of images

School use of images can be assumed to be acceptable, providing the following guidelines are strictly adhered to:

- Permission to use any photos or video recordings should be sought in line with the parental consent form
- Staff should exercise their professional judgement about whether an image is appropriate to share on school social media accounts. Pupils should be appropriately dressed, not be subject to ridicule and must not be on any school list of children whose images must not be published

Monitoring

School accounts will be monitored regularly. Regular monitoring and intervention are essential in case a situation arises where bullying or any other inappropriate behaviour arises on a school social media account. All comments, queries or complaints will be responded to in line with the Trust's Complaints Policy, even if the response is only to acknowledge receipt.

Appropriate use of social networking sites by parents

Abbey Academies Trust 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 pupils, 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 staff, pupils or parents and make abusive comments about those people. 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 as a result of the posting; and the impact that such a posting may have on pupils' learning

Inappropriate use of social networking sites by parents

All social network sites have clear rules about the content which can be posted on the site and they provide robust mechanisms to report contact or activity which breaches this. Although social networking sites may appear to be the quickest and easiest way to express frustrations or concerns about the school (and those associated with it), it is rarely appropriate to do so. Other channels, such as a private and confidential discussion with the school or using the school's complaints process are much better suited to this.

The school considers the following examples to be inappropriate uses of social networking sites. (This list is non-exhaustive and intended to provide examples only):

- Making allegations about staff or pupils at the school/cyber-bullying
- Making complaints about the school/staff
- Making defamatory statements about the school or staff
- Posting negative/offensive comments about specific pupils/staff at the school

- Posting racist comments
- Posting comments which threaten violence
- Posting any comments about children
- Contacting members of staff through social networking sites or messenger about your child (positive or negative)

Any concerns you may have must be made through the appropriate channels following the Trust's Complaints Policy, so that they can be dealt with fairly, appropriately and effectively for all concerned in line with that policy.

Parents should also ensure that their children are not using social networking/internet sites in an inappropriate manner. It is expected that parents explain to their children what is acceptable to post online. Parents are also expected to monitor their children's online activity, including in relation to their use of social media. Please note that most social networking sites require the user to be **at least 13 years old** e.g. Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, Tik Tok, Twitter, WhatsApp.

Procedure the school will follow if inappropriate use continues

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. Therefore, as a first step, the school will usually discuss the matter with the parent to try and resolve the matter and to ask that the relevant information be removed from the social networking site in question. If the information has been posted on a school social media page, it will be deleted by the school's administrators. If the parent refuses to remove information from a social media site where the school cannot remove it and continues to use social networking sites in a manner the school considers inappropriate, the school will consider taking the following action:

- In the event that any student or parent of a child/ren being educated in the school is found to be posting libellous or defamatory comments on Facebook or other social network sites, they will be reported to the appropriate 'report abuse' section of the network site
- Take legal advice and/or legal action where the information posted is defamatory in any way, if the circumstances warrant this or if there has been misuse of social networking and other sites
- Set out the school's concerns to you in writing, giving you a warning and requesting that the material in question is removed
- 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 racial element, is considered to be grossly obscene or is threatening violence
- Contact the host/provider of the social networking site to complain about the content of the site and ask for removal of the information
- Take other legal action against the individual

Additionally, and perhaps, more importantly, is the issue of cyber bullying and the use by one child or a parent to publicly humiliate another by inappropriate social network entry. Thankfully, such incidents are extremely rare, but, where there is an implication for school, actions or a response may be made.

Please note that the inappropriate use of a communications network can give rise to offences under the Malicious Communications Act 1988 or the Communications Act 2003 and, if persistent, could be deemed to constitute the offence of harassment.

Policy Reviewed: September 2025

Next Review: Spring 2026