

# *Stepgates Community School*



## Social Media Policy

## Mission Statement

At Stepgates Community School everyone has the opportunity to learn and grow together, as independent, enthusiastic and confident learners, in a creative, healthy and safe environment.

This policy is based on our Mission Statement and Aims for our school.

## Aims of this Policy

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 is considered that persons have inappropriately or unlawfully used social networking sites to the detriment of the school, staff, pupils or anyone else associated with the school;
- Set out the action the school will consider taking if people make inappropriate use of social networking sites.

## Links with other documents & policies

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following documents and policies:

- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Child Protection Policy
- Code of conduct
- Complaints Procedure
- Computing Policy
- Data Protection Privacy Notice
- Disciplinary Policy
- Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Policy
- Health, Safety & Welfare Policy
- Online Safety policy (including Acceptable use of ICT)
- PSHE Policy
- Safeguarding Policy
- Security in School Policy
- Staff Disciplinary Procedure

## Introduction

Social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and other similar online forums including Private groups or channels (such as class Facebook pages or WhatsApp groups) are now widely used and these types of media allow people to communicate in ways that were not previously possible. Unfortunately, such sites can be used inappropriately by some as a means of expressing negative or offensive views about schools and their staff. This document sets out this school's approach towards the use of such sites and sets out the procedures that will be followed and action that may be taken when it is considered that parents, staff or children have used such facilities inappropriately. Where there is reference to "parent" in this document this also includes carers and other relatives of a child in school.

## Roles and Responsibilities

Any members of staff with posting access will be responsible for moderating content and interactions on the accounts to ensure they are in line with the Social Media Policy. Class teachers using the accounts with pupils will be responsible for posting appropriate content. The passwords for the accounts will be stored in a private folder on the internal network and access will be restricted.

## Use on Behalf of the School

Staff with access to the school social media accounts (referred to as staff with access) must ensure that content posted on the accounts reflects the respectful and inclusive ethos prescribed by the school. Staff using the accounts on behalf of the school may not comment on or reply to any statement that could bring the school's reputation into disrepute. Furthermore, staff recognise that content posted is a permanent representation of the school and content/interactions with community members will be monitored.

Photos of pupils may not be stored on personal devices and must be checked against the photo permission list before posting photos of the children online to ensure privacy is respected at all times. Photos of pupils will not be posted with names attached. The work posted to the accounts reflects the learning inside the school and must uphold the high standards set within the school. Use of the school social media accounts must adhere to Child Protection and Data Protection Policy at all times.

Staff with access will only post content during non-teaching time and must not use personal electronic devices while pupils are present (see Code of Conduct).

Access to accounts must never be shared with anyone other than those designated and each member of staff with access is accountable for their use of the school social media as per the disciplinary policy.

## Use of Social Media / Recording Devices in School

During performances or other events where parents or visitors are invited into the school, they are permitted only to use personal devices to record/photograph their children individually. To adhere to Child Protection Policies, any photos or videos taken on personal devices are not to be shared on social media. Only photos of own children taken on personal devices may be shared on social media. This policy will be enforced by all members of staff

and violations will be forwarded to the Head teacher as appropriate. At no time are visitors to record a member of staff.

### School Facebook

Facebook will be used to share examples of children's work, updates and accomplishments in school. Anyone may 'like' the school Facebook page, comment and interact with the content in a respectful manner expected for any interaction that would happen on school property. Failure to comply with the community standards will result in the user being blocked from the page. Due to the nature and policies of Facebook, interactions will be moderated after they have been posted by blocking the infringing party. The school Facebook account will not be used to 'like', follow, or comment on individual profiles.

### School website

The school website ([www.stepgatesschool.co.uk](http://www.stepgatesschool.co.uk)) will serve as the main communication tool where all policies and statutory documents are shared. The social media accounts may refer users to the website for additional information. All significant events in the school community and examples of pupil's work may be shared on the school website.

### Social Media Use by Staff for Personal Reasons

The school recognises that members of staff may choose to engage in social media to interact with their community. It is important for all staff to protect their professional reputation by using their personal accounts in an appropriate manner. All staff members have a responsibility to ensure that they protect the reputation of the school and treat colleagues and members of the school community with professionalism and respect.

The following guidelines are issued for staff:

- Staff must never add pupils as 'friends' on any personal account and if a pupil attempts to contact a member of staff it must be reported to the Designated Safeguarding Lead immediately.
- Staff are strongly advised not to add parents as 'friends' into their personal accounts.
- Staff must not use any form of social media during school hours (for personal use) if they are on the school site.
- Staff should review and adjust their privacy settings (and limit all content to 'friends only') every three months as privacy options are updated regularly on social media sites and a profile may no longer be protected after a period of time, providing public access to parents and pupils.
- Staff should refrain from discussing matters related to the school in public forums.

**A breach in policy could result in disciplinary action in accordance with misconduct or gross misconduct procedures to which the school and Local Authority Dismissal and Disciplinary Policies apply.**

## Social Media Use within the Curriculum

It is a requirement of the National Curriculum that Pupils "are responsible, competent, confident and creative users of information and communication technology."

In Key Stage 1, pupils should be taught to: "Use technology safely and respectfully, keeping personal information private; identify where to go for help and support when they have concerns about content or contact on the internet or other online technologies."

In Key Stage 2, pupils should be taught to: "Use technology safely, respectfully and responsibly; recognise acceptable behaviour; identify a range of ways to report concerns about content and contact."

## Teaching of Social Networking

Children have access to Social networking platforms such as email, or blogging websites as a means of safe social networking. Appropriate and respectful behaviour on these platforms is explicitly taught and concerns of misuse are to be forwarded to the Computing Lead and/or Headteacher for investigation and action where necessary. Parents will be made aware of more serious or repetitive cases.

The computing curriculum provides opportunities for children to be reminded of their 'digital footprints' as well as their responsibilities online and where to report concerns.

Depending on the privacy policy of the company, it is a violation for users under the age of 13 to have or use social media accounts. Therefore, at no times will children have direct access to school or personal social media accounts. The school accounts may only be used by a member of staff with access.

If staff become aware that a child from Stepgates Community School has a personal account on any form of social media then parents will be contacted and alerted.

## Social networking applications

Must not:

- Be used to publish any content which may result in actions for defamation, discrimination, breaches of copyright, data protection or other claim for damages. This includes but is not limited to material of an illegal, sexual or offensive nature that may bring the school into disrepute.
- Be used for the promotion of personal financial interests, commercial ventures or personal campaigns
- Be used in an abusive or hateful manner
- Be used for actions that would put school representatives in breach of school codes of conduct or policies relating to staff.
- Breach the school's misconduct, equalities or bullying policies
- Be used to discuss or advise any matters relating to school matters, staff, pupils or parents

References should not be made to any staff member, pupil, parent or school activity / event unless prior permission had been obtained and agreed with the Head Teacher

## Guidance / Protection for Staff on Using Social Networking

- It is illegal for an adult to network, giving their age and status as a child.
- Personal mobile phones are not to be used in presence of children. If so a ban in working hours will be put into action
- Staff should:
  - Be aware that if their out-of-work activity causes potential embarrassment for their employer or detrimentally effects the employer's reputation, then the employer is entitled to take disciplinary action
  - Be aware that, even with the highest privacy settings, profile picture and cover photos are still visible to member of the public; these should be carefully selected to reflect the guidance outlined in this policy.
  - Only use social networking in a way that does not conflict with the current National Teacher Standards
- No member of staff should:
  - Interact with any pupil in the school on social networking sites.
  - Interact with any ex-pupil from the school on social networking sites who is under the age of 18
- Staff must not post detrimental comments about the school, pupils, parents or colleagues including members of the Governing Body
- Staff have a duty to inform the DSL and class teacher if there is any evidence of pupils using social networking sites.
- Staff are strongly advised not to add parents as 'friends' to their personal accounts.
- Where family and friends have pupils in school and there are legitimate family links, please inform the head teacher in writing.
- Any attempts to breach firewall will result in a ban from using the school ICT equipment other than with close supervision
- Employees should not identify themselves as a representative of the school (even if listed within employment history)
- Staff may directly share 'original posts' from the school Facebook page to advertise fund-raising and community events.

Representatives of the school must adhere to the Terms of Use. These terms apply to all uses of social networking applications by all school representatives. This includes, but is not limited to, public facing applications such as open discussion forums and internally- facing uses such as project blogs regardless of whether they are hosted on the school network or not. Where applications allow the posting of messages online, users must be mindful that the right to freedom of expression attaches only to lawful conduct. Stepgates Community School expects that users of social networking applications will always exercise the right of freedom of expression with due consideration for the rights of others and strictly in accordance with these Terms of Use



**Violation of this policy will be considered as gross misconduct and can result in disciplinary action being taken against the employee up to and including termination of employment**

## **Personal use of social media by parents and carers**

The school encourages all members of the community in the same responsible and respectful use of social media that is taught to pupils. All matters regarding the school are to be communicated via appropriate channels so that they may be dealt with fairly and effectively for all concerned. Parents/carers are reminded to use existing structures when making any complaint about the school or a member of staff. If at any time during the child's time at Stepgates Community school, a parent wish to make a complaint, then they are advised to follow the school's Complaint Policy and Procedure which can be found on the school website. We recommend that all parents and carers refrain from using social networking sites to discuss sensitive issues about the school.

Abusive, libellous or defamatory comments on social media regarding the school, staff or pupils will be reported to the site's 'report abuse' section for immediate removal. Procedures on how the school will deal with such issues are outlined in Appendix A: What to do if a complaint is made on Social Networking by a Parent or Carer.

## **Guidance for Parents / Carers on Using Social Networking**

- Anyone may 'like' the school Facebook page, comment and interact with the content in a respectful manner. This interaction will follow the same guidance for any interaction on school property.
- In the event of any offensive or inappropriate comments being made, the school will request that or remove the post and invite parents in to discuss the issues in person.
- Complaints should be made via the school's complaints procedures (see Complaints Policy and Procedure) and should not be voiced or shared publically on social media
- Parents and carers:
  - Should engage in positive and respectful use of social media
  - Are encouraged to comment or post appropriately about the school
  - Should not post malicious or fictitious comments on social networking sites about any member of the school community.

**Parents and carers who are not following these terms of use will be permanently removed from all forms of the school's social media including other similar online forums including Private groups or channels (such as class Facebook pages or WhatsApp groups)**

## **Complaints procedure**

If a parent / carer or member of staff has any concerns or complaints with regard to social media, an appointment can be made by them to speak to a member of the school leadership team, who will investigate the complaint and, if necessary, will be able to advise on formal procedures for the complaint.

## **Monitoring and Evaluation**

Adherence to this policy by all stakeholders will be monitored. Abusive, libellous or defamatory comments on social media regarding the school, staff or pupils will be acknowledged and dealt with following the appropriate legal channels.

**Review due:** Summer 2026

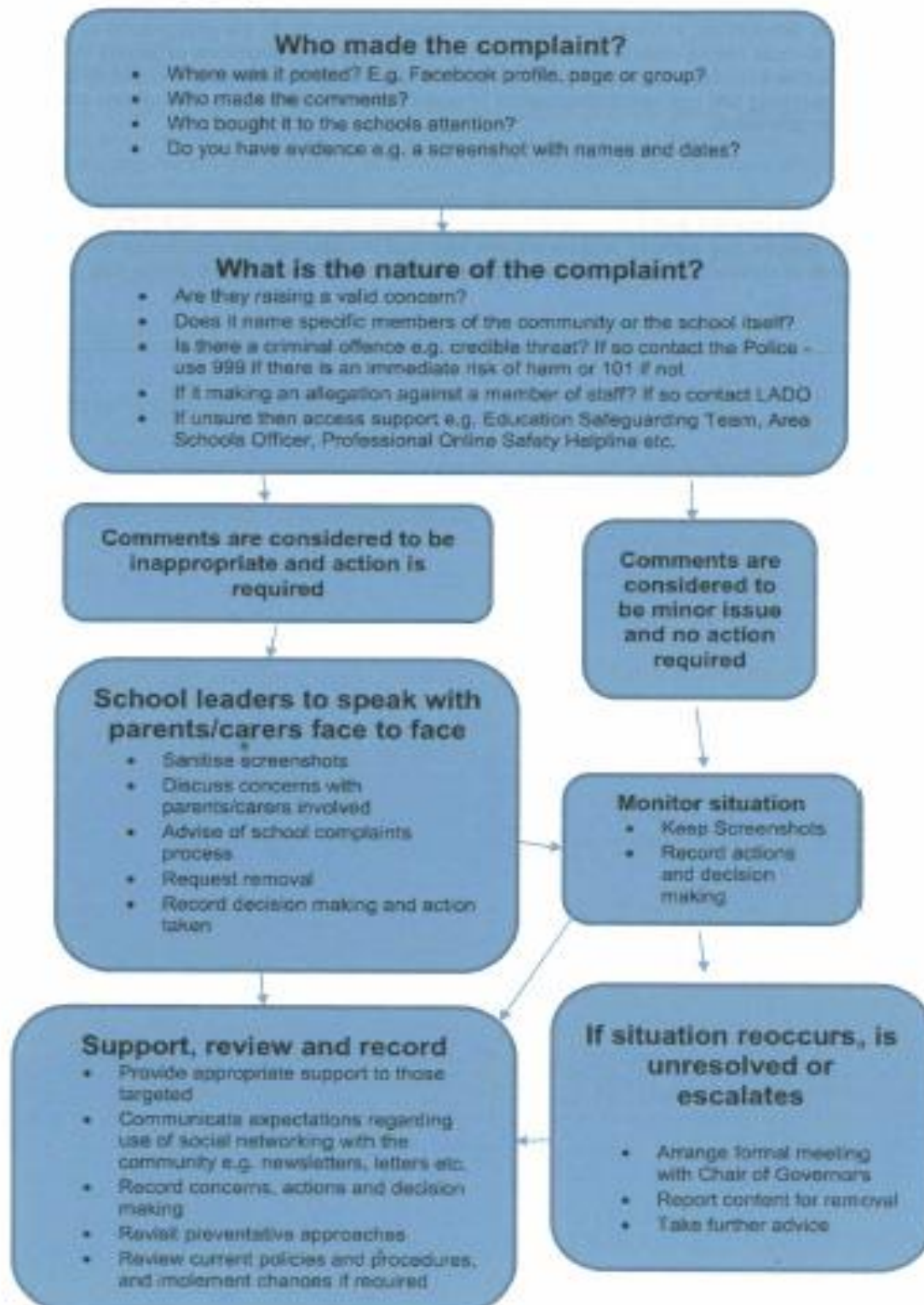
**Appendices:**

Appendix A: What to do if a complaint is made on Social Networking by a Parent or Carer

Appendix B: The Legal Framework surrounding Social Media



## Appendix A: What to do if a complaint is made on Social Networking by a Parent or Carer



## Appendix B: The Legal Framework surrounding Social Media

This section is designed to inform users of legal issues relevant to the use of electronic communications. For older students, discussion of current legislation could be incorporated into the curriculum as part of ICT, PSHE or Citizenship. It might also be useful to make reference to this when dealing with Social Media infringements to reinforce the seriousness of issues arising.

### **Communications Act 2003 (section 127)**

Sending by means of the Internet a message or other matter that is grossly offensive or of an indecent, obscene or menacing character; or sending a false message by means of or persistently making use of the internet for the purpose of causing annoyance, inconvenience or needless anxiety is guilty of an offence liable, on conviction, to imprisonment.

This wording is important because an offence is committed as soon as the message has been sent: there is no need to prove any intent or purpose.

### **Data Protection Act 1998**

The Act requires anyone who handles personal information to notify the Information Commissioner's Office of the type of processing it administers, and must comply with important data protection principles when treating personal data relating to any living individual. The Act also grants individuals rights of access to their personal data, compensation and prevention of processing.

### **Education Act 2011, sections 2 to 4,**

This provides further clarification on statutory staff powers to discipline children for inappropriate behaviour or not for following instructions, both on and off school premises. Further details for Free schools can be found in section 36 and for Academies in Part 6, sections 55 to 65.

### **Education and Inspections Act 2006, sections 90 and 91**

This provides statutory powers for staff to discipline children for inappropriate behaviour or for not following instructions, both on and off school premises. **Section 94** also gives schools the power to confiscate items from children as a disciplinary penalty. These powers may be particularly important when dealing with Social Media issues: online bullying may take place both inside and outside school, and this legislation gives schools the legal power to intervene should incidents occur. It also gives teachers the power to confiscate mobile phones, and other personal devices, if they suspect that they are being used to compromise the well-being and safety of others.

### **Malicious Communications Act 1988 (section 1)**

This legislation makes it a criminal offence to send an electronic message (e-mail) that conveys indecent, grossly offensive, threatening material or information that is false; or is of an indecent or grossly offensive nature if the purpose was to cause a recipient to suffer distress or anxiety.

**Obscene Publications Act 1959 and 1964**

Publishing an "obscene" article is a criminal offence. Publishing includes electronic transmission.

**Public Order Act 1986 (sections 17 – 29)**

This Act makes it a criminal offence to stir up racial hatred by displaying, publishing or distributing written material which is threatening. Like the Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006 it also makes the possession of inflammatory material with a view of releasing it a criminal offence.

**Protection of Children Act 1978 (Section 1)**

It is an offence to take, permit to be taken, make, possess, show, distribute or advertise indecent images of children in the United Kingdom. A child for these purposes is anyone under the age of 18. Viewing an indecent image of a child on your computer means that you have made a digital image. An image of a child also covers pseudo-photographs (digitally collated or otherwise). A person convicted of such an offence may face up to 10 years in prison.

**Protection from Harassment Act 1997**

A person must not pursue a course of conduct, which amounts to harassment of another, and which he knows or ought to know amounts to harassment of the other.

A person whose course of conduct causes another to fear, on at least two occasions, that violence will be used against him is guilty of an offence if he knows or ought to know that his course of conduct will cause the other so to fear on each of those occasions.

**The Equality Act 2010**

The Equality Act 2010 provides a single, consolidated source of discrimination law, covering all the types of discrimination that are unlawful. It defines that schools cannot unlawfully discriminate against children because of their sex, race, disability, religion or belief and sexual orientation. Protection is now extended to children who are pregnant or undergoing gender reassignment. However, schools that are already complying with the law should not find major differences in what they need to do.

This Act makes it a criminal offence to threaten people because of their faith, or to stir up religious hatred by displaying, publishing or distributing written material which is threatening. Other laws already protect people from abuse based on their race, nationality or ethnic background.

**Sexual Offences Act 2003**

A new grooming offence is committed if you are over 18 and have communicated with a child under 16 at least twice (including by phone or using the internet) and then intentionally meet them or travel with intent to meet them anywhere in the world with the intention of committing a sexual offence.

Causing a child under 16 to watch a sexual act is illegal, including looking at images such as videos, photos or webcams, for your own gratification.

It is also an offence for a person in a position of trust to engage in sexual activity with any person under 18, with whom they are in a position of trust. (*Typically, teachers, social workers, health professionals, connexions staff fall in this category of trust*).

Any sexual intercourse with a child under the age of 13 commits the offence of rape. Schools should already have a copy of "Children & Families: Safer from Sexual Crime" document, which is available from the Home Office website ([www.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/children-safer-fr-sex-crime?view=Binary](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/children-safer-fr-sex-crime?view=Binary)).

More information about the 2003 Act can be found at [www.teachernet.gov.uk](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk)