

Northwick Park Academy Trust

Parental Use of Social Media Policy

Introduction and aims

Social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and other similar online forums 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 The Northwick Park Trust's approach to parental 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 have used such facilities inappropriately.

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 is considered that parents 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 parents make inappropriate use of social networking sites.

Inappropriate uses of Social Media Sites

Although social networking sites may appear to be the quickest and easiest way to express frustrations or concerns about the Trust (and those associated with it), it is **never** appropriate to do so. Other channels, such as a private and confidential discussion with school staff – class teacher, Head of School etc, or by emailing the year group email, are much better suited to this.

The Trust 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 or Trust/cyber-bullying;
- Making complaints about the school, Trust or staff at the School;
- Making defamatory statements about the school, Trust or staff at the school;
- Posting negative/offensive comments about specific pupils/staff at the school;
- Posting racist comments;
- Posting comments which threaten staff/children.
- Naming children or posting any comments about children who attend any of the schools within the Trust;
- Posting comments or engaging in online discussions with children other than their own.

Parents should also ensure that their children are not using social networking/internet sites in an inappropriate manner. It is expected that parents and carers will explain to their children what is acceptable to post online. Parents and carers 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.

Procedure for addressing inappropriate use of social networks

The schools within the Trust 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 schools 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 parent refuses to do this and continues to use social networking sites in a manner the school or Trust considers inappropriate, the school will consider taking the following action:

- Set out the school's concerns to you in writing, giving you a warning and requesting that the material in question is removed;
- If the inappropriate comments have been made on a social media accounts, the school may take action to block or restrict that individual's access to that website or forum;
- Take legal advice and/or legal action where the information posted is defamatory in any way or if the circumstances warrant this;
- 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 prejudicial 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 following appropriate advice.

If any comments are deemed to be defamatory, i.e. which are untrue, inaccurate and may damage the reputation of the person, the individual may be advised to take legal proceedings against the author of those comments. This may result not only in the comments being taken off the social media sites, but also a financial cost to the author to reimburse the individual for any injury to feelings and reputation.

Any comments which include racist, sexist, homophobic remarks, harassment or intimidation and threats of violence will be reported to the police for their investigation. Authors of such comments may find that criminal proceedings will then commence against them.

We would like to remind you that you are legally responsible for what you do or say online and what you say openly can be accessed around the world in minutes and can be republished elsewhere. You must be willing to take personal responsibility for anything that you say online.

A school should be a safe place where relationships between staff, parents and visitors demonstrate a mutual respect and recognition of shared responsibility for pupils' welfare and educational progress.

Our aim is to work with our parents, carers and all stakeholders to ensure that the school is a safe place for all. If you do feel strongly enough about an incident at the school involving a member of staff, then we encourage you to resolve this by meeting the individual member of staff at the school, the Head of School or Trust CEO, for an open and constructive discussion to ensure the best resolution for all concerned.

Monitoring

Trust school's social media accounts will be monitored regularly. Any comments, queries or complaints made through these accounts must be responded to within 24 hours (or on the next working day if received at the weekend) even if only to acknowledge receipt. Regular monitoring and intervention is essential in case a situation arises where bullying or any other inappropriate behaviour arises on a Trust school's social media account.