Parental Use of Social Networking and Internet Sites Policy

Overview

Social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter 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 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. Where there is reference to 'parent' in this document, this also includes carers, relatives or anyone associated with the school.

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

Appropriate use of social networking sites by parents

The school recognises that many parents and other family members will have personal social networking accounts, which they might use to discuss and 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, staff, 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 a private and confidential discussion with someone in the school be more appropriate? If there are serious allegations being made or concerns being raised, social media or internet sites should not be used to name individuals and make abusive comments. Please contact the school to discuss any concerns you may have.
- Are such comments likely to cause emotional or reputational harm, 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

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 Head teacher, or using the school's formal 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 not exhaustive and is intended to provide examples only:

- Naming children or posting any comments about children who attend Springfield Primary Academy
- Making allegations about staff or anyone else connected with the school
- Making any posts that could be deemed to be cyber-bullying
- Making complaints about the school or staff at the school
- Making defamatory statements about the school or staff at the school
- Posting negative or offensive comments about staff or any other individual connected to the school
- Posting racist comments
- Posting comments which threaten violence

Parents should also ensure that their children are not using social networking and other internet sites in an inappropriate manner. It is expected that parents/carers explain to their children what is acceptable to post online. Parents/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 14 years old.

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 it 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 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
- 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 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 racial element, is considered to be grossly obscene, grossly offensive or is threatening violence