

DROMARA PRIMARY SCHOOL
Social Media/Mobile Phone Policy

Rationale

Social media policies have a number of purposes, but their overriding function is to protect staff, students and parents from the many issues that can arise as a result of posting on social networking sites.

Staff¹ may be vulnerable to malicious and defamatory comments (and potentially even threats and abuse) from parents or pupils, and to allegations of grooming and other forms of online abuse.

Parents may become involved in online disputes with other parents through social media. They may also potentially put their child and others within the school at risk by sharing photos, videos or other information that could make the children identifiable to others.

Pupils are at risk of cyber bullying, and may also become involved in cyber bullying themselves. They are also vulnerable to other serious crimes such as grooming and abduction if they share too much personal information on social media.

The internet provides a range of social media tools that allow users to interact with one another using Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and many other social network services.

While recognising the benefits of social networks for new and exciting forms of communication, this policy sets out the principles that pupils are expected to follow when using social media. The School's Internet Policy also informs this Policy.²

This Policy applies to personal web space such as social networking sites on, for example, Facebook, MySpace, Instagram, SnapChat, Blogs, Twitter, chatrooms, forums, podcasts, social bookmarking sites and content sharing sites such as flickr and YouTube.

The internet is a fast moving technology and it is impossible to cover all circumstances or be aware of all the latest forms of emerging media and platforms. This Policy covers the use of existing and any future social networking platforms.

Guidelines for pupils

“Respect for yourself and consideration for others” is our guiding principle.

- Pupils must not use social media and the internet in any way to attack, insult, abuse or defame other pupils or any member of staff.
- Pupils must not use social media in a way that brings disrespect to our school.
- Photographs, videos or any image of pupils, staff or any member of our school community must not be published on a personal or public web space without prior permission from the school.
- Pupils and the wider school community should not post images or videos from school trips on any social media site.
- Social network sites should never be accessed within school.

Failure to follow these guidelines may result in disciplinary action, suspension and possible exclusion from our school.

¹ Staff should also include students and volunteers, who would be expected to work within all other school guidelines

² The Anti-Cyberbullying should be read in conjunction this policy.

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Guidelines for staff

It is possible that many staff will have their own social networking site accounts. It is important for them to protect their professional reputation by ensuring that they use their personal accounts in an appropriate manner:

- Staff must never add pupils as friends into their personal accounts.
- Staff must not use social networking sites within lesson times.
- Staff need to use social networking in a way that does not conflict with the current GTCNI standards.
- Staff should review and adjust their privacy settings to give them the appropriate level of privacy and confidentiality.
- Posting derogatory comments about pupils, parents or colleagues is never acceptable. Staff are required to uphold the reputation of the school, to maintain reasonable standards in their own behaviour, and to uphold public trust in their profession.
- Staff may have legitimate reasons to use social network accounts or content sharing sites to support learning in the classroom or, for example, to communicate with other educational organisations. All social media uses must be approved by the Principal in advance.

Inappropriate use by staff should be referred to the Principal.

The School will also take social media infringements by staff seriously. The possibility of internal disciplinary action and in extreme cases police involvement may be warranted.

Comments posted by Parents/Carers

Parents and carers should be aware of their responsibilities regarding the use of social networking:

- Parents should not post pictures of pupils other than their own children on social networking sites.
- Parents should make complaints through official school channels rather than posting them on social networking sites.
- Parents should address queries regarding their child's work/behaviour or any queries about school policies etc. directly to the school rather than on social media.
- Parents should not post malicious or fictitious comments on social networking sites about any member of the school community, either directly by name or inferred.

It is essential that the school upholds its policies through whatever means possible and as such, posting of photos of a child who is the subject of safeguarding could put them at risk.

If a parent is accused of making malicious comments about the school or a teacher on social media, the school will request that the offensive comments are removed. If necessary the school can escalate the matter by reporting it to the social networking site or the Education Authority, or can seek legal advice. Comments that are threatening, abusive, racist, sexist or that could be seen as a hate crime can be reported to the police as online harassment.

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Mobile Phones

Pupils

Pupils are discouraged from bringing mobile phones to school. However, given the numbers of pupils who now own a mobile phone, we do not wish to place a blanket ban on phones. To that end, any pupil who brings a phone to school must ensure that it is switched off during the school day and kept safely in their school bag.

Mobile phones are not permitted on school trips. This includes trips to swimming pools, sports tournaments and other educational visits.

Staff

Staff are expected to conduct their use of mobile phones in a professional manner. Unless in an emergency or other circumstances and in agreement with the Principal, phones should be off or on silent mode during class.

Review

This policy will be reviewed every 3 years or as necessary.