

Supply Desk's Guidelines on the use of Social Media and Electronic Communication

Navigating social media is hard enough as it is – but if you're a teacher or teaching assistant, or other member of school staff, it becomes even more difficult. The Teachers' Standards require that you uphold public trust in the profession and maintain high standards of ethics and behaviour, both within and outside school. Remember, conduct in your private life and online may be relevant to your fitness to teach; bringing your school or your profession into disrepute may cost you your career. As such, we suggest that you exercise discretion where necessary, and follow this Guidance.

Do not accept friend requests from pupils

By making, or accepting friend requests, or requests to follow you from pupils, or even parents, you could be making yourself vulnerable by sharing personal information or by having access to personal information about your pupils. Remember, whilst you might think that a photo or post is innocent enough, parents and the senior leadership team might have a different view. You may be leaving yourself open to allegations of inappropriate contact or conduct, or even find yourself exposed to claims of unwanted contact. So, firmly decline friend requests from pupils, and do not instigate any yourself. We would suggest that you also decline requests from parents, and remind them of more formal channels through which they can discuss their child's education.

Check your privacy settings

Make sure your privacy settings are set accordingly. It is important that, when using social networking services (SNS), you are in control of who can see your account details and content, including photos, posts and any personal information. Be aware that pupils will be naturally curious about your personal life outside school and may try and find out more about you. Similarly, schools and parents may try and view your online social media profiles. So, we recommend that you think about the following:

- Make sure that you operate online in a way which would not call into question your position as a professional, or your compliance with the Teachers' Standards.
- Remember that privacy mechanisms in SNS are not 100% guaranteed.
- It may be worth checking the information that is available about you on SNS, and checking who has access to it.
- Ensure that your settings prohibit others from tagging you in any photos or updates without your permission. Never be shy about asking others to take down or make private content that identifies you that you are not comfortable with.

Protecting your Professional Reputation

Managing your online reputation is an essential part of being a teacher. Always think carefully before making any posts or status updates, or adding photos. Ask yourself:

- Might this reflect poorly on you, the school or the teaching profession?
- Is your intention to post this material driven by personal reasons or professional reasons?
- Are you confident that the comment or photo in question, if accessed by others (staff, pupils, parents etc) would be considered reasonable and appropriate?

Remember, anything that is put online is potentially public and permanent. Comments made public could be taken out of context and could be very damaging.

You should not discuss the school, its staff, pupils or parents in an online environment, even if your account is private. Posting derogatory comments about them is never acceptable. Always respect pupil and parent privacy and confidentiality.

Make sure that you use strong passwords for your SNS and keep these confidential. Do not access your personal SNS whilst you are at school, and never using school devices. Make sure that your personal mobile phone is kept secure and hidden when you are in a school, and that it is locked with PIN to protect access to its content and potential misuse. Do not use your mobile phone during lessons.

Do not exchange private text, phone numbers, personal e-email address or photos of a personal nature with pupils. Use only official channels of communication i.e. a school's email addresses.

Using Social Media for educational purposes with pupils

Some schools do use Facebook or other SNS to communicate with pupils, parents and governors, but they do so using professional or organisational accounts or pages, with the prior approval from their senior leadership team (and recognising that many SNS have a minimum age requirement of 13). If your school supports the positive use of SNS, always check the school's policy or seek guidance from a senior member of staff if you wish to use these with your pupils.

Cyberbullying

If you are the victim or cyberbullying or are uncomfortable with comments, photos or posts made by pupils of or about you, bring the matter to the attention of the school, or Supply Desk. Do not respond or retaliate, and save or print all available evidence.

Inappropriate use of social media by pupils

If you become aware of inappropriate use of social networking sites by your pupils, you should report these to the appropriate person within the school.

If you have any questions about this Guidance, or the use of SNS, please contact your Supply Desk consultant.