

The Mercian Trust

Social Networking Policy

Policy Owner	The Mercian Trust
Date Ratified by Trust Board	January 2021
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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Social media is the term used for internet-based tools used on computer, tablets, and smart phones to help people keep in touch, enabling them to interact in order to share information, ideas and views. Whilst recognising the benefits that these media provide in facilitating communication, it is crucial that pupils/students, parents/carers and the public at large have confidence in The Mercian Trust (TMT) by ensuring that social media is used responsibly. All staff (including Trustees and volunteers) must be conscious at all times of the need to keep their personal and professional lives separate, ensuring that the confidentiality of pupils/students, parents/carers and other staff are safeguarded. In addition, it is imperative that all staff take responsibility to ensure that the reputation of TMT is also safeguarded.
- 1.2 Websites and applications dedicated to forums, microblogging, social networking, social bookmarking, social curation and wikis are among the different types of social media. This policy applies to the use of all forms of social media, including but not limited to: Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Google+, Wikipedia, Whisper, Instagram, Tumblr and all other social networking sites, internet postings and blogs including WhatsApp. It applies to use of social media for professional purposes as well as personal use that may affect TMT in any way.
- 1.3 TMT already utilises a number of communication channels, e.g. school websites, twitter feeds, text messaging systems, notice boards, newsletter etc. and recognises the importance that these play in ensuring effective communication.
- 1.4 As technology advances and social media continues to evolve, it is impossible to cover all circumstances of emerging media, but the principles set out in this policy must be followed irrespective of the medium/platform used.
- 1.5 It is recognised that people may have their own personal social media accounts, but these should not be used as a means of communication, including comments such as “likes” between staff and pupils/students and/or parents/carers.
- 1.6 TMT is committed to protecting people who come into contact with the Trust from harm and has a number of policies outlining its approach to keeping people safe. These policies include Data Protection, Health and Safety, Child Protection and Safeguarding, and E-Safety Policies. There are also policies outlining expected standards of behaviour and home school agreements.
- 1.7 Those working with children have a duty of care and are therefore expected to adopt high standards of behaviour to retain the confidence and respect of colleagues, pupils/students both within and outside school. They should maintain appropriate boundaries and manage personal information effectively so that it cannot be misused by third parties for example cyber-bullying or identity theft.
- 1.8 The Mercian Trust is committed to:**
 - Using social media in a responsible way to promote engagement and effective communication.
 - Ensuring that there is nothing on it's sites that could compromise safeguarding of people.

- Ensuring that appropriate privacy settings are in place for safeguarding purposes, using the most stringent privacy settings possible.
- Protecting the reputation of TMT in the use of social media and in the content that is displayed.

2. Purpose

2.1 The overriding purpose of this policy is to protect staff, pupils/students and parents/carers from the many issues that can arise as a result of posting on social networking sites and to minimise the risk of harm to individuals. For example:

- **Staff** may be vulnerable to malicious and defamatory comments and potentially even threats and abuse.
- **Parents/carers** could become involved in online disputes with other parents/carers through social media. They may also potentially put their child and others at risk by sharing information such as images that could make the children identifiable to others.
- **Pupils/students** could be at risk of cyber bullying and are also vulnerable to other risks if too much sensitive personal information is shared on social media.

3. Governance

- 3.1 The TMT Board of Trustees (BoT) has overall responsibility for the effective operation of this policy and has delegated day-to-day responsibility for its operation to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO).
- 3.2 The Local Governing Bodies (LGBs) should scrutinise the arrangements in academies and monitor compliance as part of an ongoing assurance process.
- 3.3 Headteachers and all members of the leadership teams have a specific responsibility for operating within the boundaries of this policy, ensuring that standards of behaviour expected are understood and being complied with, taking action when behaviour falls below requirements.
- 3.4 Headteachers should also ensure that staff, pupils/students and parents/carers are informed about the inappropriate use of social media such as sharing of images without consent and of posting offensive material that could damage individuals and/or the reputation of TMT.
- 3.5 All staff are responsible for the implementation of this policy and should take the time to read and understand it. Any misuse of social media should be reported to a member of the Executive/Leadership Teams and may be subject to disciplinary action under TMT's Disciplinary Policy.

4. Compliance with Legislation

- 4.1 TMT is committed to ensuring that all staff provide confidential services that meet the highest standards. All individuals working for or on behalf of TMT are bound by a legal duty of confidence and other laws to protect the confidential information they have access to during the course of their work. Disclosure of confidential information on social media is likely to be a breach of a number of laws and professional codes of conduct. Employees should also be aware that

other laws relating to libel, defamation, harassment and copyright may also apply to information posted on social media.

5. Compliance with related policies and agreements

5.1 Social media should never be used in a way that breaches any of TMT's policies. If an internet post would breach any of these policies in another forum, it will also breach them in an online forum. When using social media staff should also have regard to policies relating to:

- Health and Safety
- Child Protection and Safeguarding
- E Safety
- Data Protection (including acceptable use of IT) and TMT Privacy Notices
- Disciplinary
- Behaviour (Code of Conduct)
- Equality Legislation
- Obligations with respect to the rules of relevant regulatory bodies
- Requirements to comply with laws and regulatory requirements

6. Social media must not be used to:

- Damage the professional interests or reputation of TMT, even indirectly.
- Defame or disparage TMT, this includes staff, pupils/students, parents/carers or any third party; to harass, bully or unlawfully discriminate: to make false or misleading statements; or to impersonate colleagues or third parties.
- Upload, post, forward or post a link to any abusive, obscene, discriminatory, harassing, derogatory or defamatory content.
- Express opinions on TMT's behalf, unless expressly authorised by a senior manager following all TMT protocols (which include having the text proof read before publication). Staff may be required to undergo training in order to obtain such authorisation.
- Post comments about sensitive TMT, academy/school-related topics, such as performance, or do anything to jeopardise or compromise confidentiality and intellectual property.

6.1 For parents/carers this would include:

- Not posting images or comments that include other children within TMT.
- Not using social media on own devices whilst on TMT premises or on an educational trip.
- Raising queries/concerns directly with the academy rather than posting on social media.
- Not posting anything malicious about the academy or the TMT wider community.

6.2 For pupils/students this would include:

- Not joining any social networking sites if they are below the permitted age (13 for most sites including Facebook and Instagram).
- Letting their parents/carers know if they are using the sites, and when they are on line.
- Being aware of how to report abuse and inappropriate content.
- Not accessing social media on school devices, or on their own devices whilst at school.
- Not make inappropriate comments (including in private messages) about the Academy, TMT, teachers, other pupils/students and/or their parents/carers.
- Not posting images of themselves in school uniform or using any of the TMT logos.

6.3 This should be read in conjunction with the information also contained in TMT's E-Safety Policy

7. Staff

7.1 Staff must keep their personal and professional lives separate and never put themselves in a position where there is a conflict between work for TMT and personal interests. Personal use of social media is never permitted during working hours or by means of TMT computers, networks and other IT resources and communications systems.

7.2 With the exception of LinkedIn, staff are advised not to identify themselves as an employee of TMT on any personal social media pages. If staff are identified, it is particularly important that a professional image is presented. To ensure that staff are in control of what appears on their personal profiles, staff should ensure that all possible privacy settings are activated.

7.3 Guiding principles - staff should not:

- Engage in activities involving social media which might bring TMT into disrepute.
- Represent their personal views as those of TMT on any social medium.
- Breach confidentiality for example by discussing personal information about pupils/students, staff, school or other professionals that staff interact with as part of their job, on social media.
- Be defamatory, bully, harass or be discriminatory in any way by using social media and the Internet to attack, insult, abuse or defame pupils/students, their family members/carers, colleagues, other professionals, other organisations, or TMT.
- Breach copyrights of any kind.
- Have contact through any personal social medium with any pupil/student,

whether from the academy or any other school, unless the pupils/students are family members.

- Accept 'friend requests' from pupils/students and/or their parents/carers they receive in their personal social media accounts.
- Discuss on their personal account information staff have access to as part of their employment, including personal information about pupils/students and their family members/carers, colleagues, and other parties.
- Publish on personal web spaces/accounts photographs, videos or any other types of image of pupils/students and their families or images depicting staff members wearing school uniforms or clothing with TMT /academy logos.
- Use TMT email addresses and other official contact details for setting up personal social media accounts or to communicate through such media.
- Edit open access online encyclopaedias such as Wikipedia in a personal capacity at work. This is because the source of the correction will be recorded as the School's IP address and the intervention will, therefore, appear as if it comes from the School itself.
- Use TMT/academy logos or brands on personal web space/accounts.

7.4 Staff should carefully consider:

- Having contact with family members/carers of pupils/students through personal social media unless prior approval has been obtained from a senior member of staff because this may give rise to concerns over objectivity and/or impartiality.
- Having contact with pupils/students and/or their parents /carers by means of personal social media sites on leaving TMT. Similarly, staff members should not contact pupils/students from their former schools by means of personal social media.

7.5 Caution is advised when inviting work colleagues to be 'friends' on personal social networking sites. Social networking sites blur the line between work and personal lives and it may be difficult to maintain professional relationships.

7.6 Caution is also advised when accepting friend requests from former pupils/students particularly if the pupil/student is still in full time education and/or there are other members of the family still in the school.

7.7 If there is any doubt about whether communication between current and former pupils/students and/or parents/carers and a member of staff is acceptable, a member of the senior leadership team should be informed so that they can decide on the appropriateness of the contact following the principles set out in this policy in conjunction with policies and guidelines relating to child protection and safeguarding.

7.8 Staff are strongly advised to ensure that they set the privacy levels of their personal sites as strictly as they can and to opt out of public listings on social networking sites to protect their own privacy.

7.9 Staff should keep their passwords confidential, change them often and be careful about what is posted online; it may not be safe to reveal home addresses,

telephone numbers and other personal information. It is a good idea to use a separate email address just for social networking so that any other contact details are not given away.

- 7.10 Staff should not provide references for other individuals on social or professional networking sites, as such references, positive and negative, can be attributed to the organisation and create legal liability for both the author of the reference and the organisation.

8. Social Media use on behalf of TMT

- 8.1 Official TMT accounts must be created only with the prior approval of the TMT Executive Team/Senior Management Team. Accounts created must not breach the terms and conditions of the social media service providers, particularly with regard to minimum age requirements.
- 8.2 Before utilising social media as a communication or marketing tool, a clear rationale for doing so must be documented along with an assessment of the risks and controls. Use of any forms of social media not already authorised, must be approved by a member of the senior leadership team.

8.3 Staff should:

- Only communicate with pupils/students and other parties on social media using official TMT accounts/sites.
- Have a strong pedagogical or business reason for creating official sites to communicate with pupils/students and or others parties.
- Not create sites for trivial reasons which could expose TMT to unwelcome publicity or cause reputational damage.
- At all times act in the best interests of children and young people when creating, participating in or contributing content to social media.

9. Monitoring

- 9.1 TMT reserves the right to monitor, intercept and review, without further notice, staff activities using TMT IT resources and communications systems, including but not limited to social media postings and activities, to ensure that all policies are being complied with and for professional/educational purposes.

10. Breach of this Policy

- 10.1 Any misuse of social media should be reported to a senior member of staff.
- 10.2 A breach of this policy (either deliberate or inadvertent) may result in disciplinary action in accordance with the TMT Disciplinary Policy up to and including dismissal. Any member of staff suspected of committing a breach of this policy will be required to co-operate with an investigation, which may involve handing over relevant passwords and login details.
- 10.3 Staff will be required to remove any social media content that is considered to constitute a breach of this policy. Failure to comply with such a request may in itself result in disciplinary action.

11. Communication

- 11.1 This policy must be brought to the attention of all staff, pupils/students and their parents/carers.

12. Policy Review

- 12.1 This policy will be reviewed regularly and as a minimum, every two years.