



## Social Networking Sites and Social Media Policy

### 1. PURPOSE

This Policy sets out the school's position regarding the use of social networking sites and other forms of social media. The aim of the document is to ensure that all employees are fully aware of the risks associated with using such sites and their responsibilities with regards to the safeguarding and protection of both children and themselves.

### 2. APPLICATION

This Policy applies to all staff employed at the school.

### 3. BACKGROUND

The use of social networking sites such as Facebook, Bebo, Twitter, Instagram and MySpace has over recent years become the primary form of communication between friends and family. In addition there are many other sites which allow people to publish their own pictures, text and videos such as YouTube and Instagram.

It would not be reasonable to expect or instruct employees not to use these sites which, if used with caution, should have no impact whatsoever on their role in school. Indeed, appropriate use of some sites may also have professional benefits. For example, many schools now use sites such as Facebook and Twitter as a means to enhance parental engagement. St Andrew's is one of those schools.

It is now widely acknowledged that use of such sites does not provide a completely private platform for personal communications. Even when utilised sensibly and with caution employees are vulnerable to their personal details being exposed to a wider audience than they might otherwise have intended. One example of this is when photographs and comments are published by others without the employees consent or knowledge which may portray the employee in a manner which is not conducive to their role in school.

Difficulties arise when staff utilise these sites and they do not have the relevant knowledge or skills to ensure adequate security and privacy settings. In addition there are some cases when employees deliberately use these sites to communicate with and/or form inappropriate relationships with children and young people.

### 4. GUIDANCE AND ADVICE

Employees who choose to make use of social networking site/media should be advised as follows:-

- (i) That they should not access these sites for personal use during working hours;
- (ii) That they familiarise themselves with the site's 'privacy settings' in order to ensure that they do not conduct or portray themselves in a manner which may have a detrimental impact on the school
- (iii) That information is not automatically shared with a wider audience than intended;

- bring the school into disrepute;

- lead to valid parental complaints;
- be deemed as derogatory towards the school and/or its employees;
- be deemed as derogatory towards pupils and/or parents and carers
- bring into question their appropriateness to work with children and young people.

(iv) That they do not form on-line 'friendships' or enter into communication with parents/carers and pupils as this could lead to professional relationships being compromised;

(v) On-line friendships and communication with former pupils should be strongly discouraged particularly if the pupils are under the age of 18 years.

(\*In some cases employees in schools/services are related to parents/carers and/or pupils or may have formed on-line friendships with them prior to them becoming parents/carers and/or pupils of the school/service. In these cases employees should be advised that the nature of such relationships has changed and that they need to be aware of the risks of continuing with this method of contact. They should be advised that such contact is contradictory to this Policy and as such they are potentially placing themselves at risk of formal action being taken under the school's Disciplinary Procedure.)

Schools should not access social networking sites in order to 'vet' prospective employees. Such practice could potentially create an un-level playing field and lead to claims of discrimination if for example the selection panel were to discover a candidate held a protective characteristic as defined by the Equality Act.

## 5. SAFEGUARDING ISSUES

Communicating with both current and former pupils via social networking sites or via other non-school related mechanisms such as personal e-mails and text messaging can lead to employees being vulnerable to serious allegations concerning the safeguarding of children and young people.

The Department for Education document 'Guidance for Safer Working Practices for Adults Working with Children and Young People in Educational Settings (March 2009)' states:

“In order to make best use of the many educational and social benefits of new technologies, pupils need opportunities to use and explore the digital world, using multiple devices from multiple locations. It is now recognised that e-safety risks are posed more by behaviours and values than the technology itself. Adults working in this area must therefore ensure that they establish safe and responsible online behaviours. This means working to local and national guidelines on acceptable user policies. These detail the way in which new and emerging technologies may and may not be used and identify the sanctions for misuse. Learning Platforms are now widely established and clear agreement by all parties about acceptable and responsible use is essential.”

Communication between pupils and adults, by whatever method, should take place within clear and explicit professional boundaries. This includes the wider use of technology such as mobile phones text messaging, e-mails, digital cameras, videos, web-cams, websites and blogs. Adults should not share any personal information with a child or young person. They should not request, or respond to, any personal information from the child/young person, other than that which might be appropriate as part of their learning/role in school.

As a result, St Andrew's:

- Have an Acceptable Use Policy (AUP)
- Continually review e-safety policies in the light of new and emerging technologies
- Have a communication policy which specifies acceptable and permissible modes of communication

Adults at St Andrew's should:

- Ensure that personal social networking sites are set at private and pupils are never listed as approved contacts
- Never use or access social networking sites of pupils
- never give their personal contact details to pupils, including their mobile telephone number

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- That this policy document is shared with all staff who come into contact with children and young people, that it is retained in Staff Handbooks and that it is specifically referred to when inducting new members of staff into your school/service.
- That appropriate links are made to this document with our school Acceptable Use Policy.
- That employees are encouraged to consider any guidance issued by their professional association/trade union concerning the use of social networking sites.
- That employees are informed that disciplinary action may be taken in relation to those members of staff who choose not to follow the advice and guidance outlined in this Policy.