



Milverton Primary School

Policy on Parental use of Social Networking and Internet Sites 2019/2020

Agreed by: Finance and Personnel Committee

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Overview

Social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, Musically and Twitter are widely used. This type of media allows people to communicate in ways that were not previously possible. However, such sites can be inappropriately used by some people as a means of expressing negative or offensive views about schools and their staff. This document sets out the Milverton Primary School (MPS) approach to parental use of such sites and sets out the procedures MPS will follow and action MPS may take if parents have used such facilities inappropriately. When reference is made to "parent" in this document, this also includes carers; relatives; or anyone guardian associated with MPS.

Objectives

The purposes of this policy are to:

- Encourage social networking sites to be used in a beneficial and positive way by parents;
- Safeguard pupils and staff from any negative effects from the use of social networking sites;
- Safeguard the reputation of MPS from abuse on social networking sites;
- Clarify what MPS considers to be appropriate and inappropriate use of social networking sites by parents;
- Set out the procedures MPS will follow where it considers parents have inappropriately or unlawfully used social networking sites to the detriment of MPS, its staff or its pupils, and
- Set out the action MPS will consider taking if parents make inappropriate use of social networking sites.

Appropriate use of social networking sites by parents

Social networking sites have potential to enhance the learning and achievement of pupils and enable parents to access information about MPS and provide feedback efficiently and easily. In addition, MPS recognises that many parents and other family members will have personal social networking accounts, which they might use to discuss or 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 MPS, its staff or its pupils:

- Whether the social networking site is the appropriate place to raise concerns, give feedback or express views.
- Whether private and confidential discussions with MPS would be more appropriate, e.g. if there are serious allegations being made or concerns being raised. Social media/internet sites should not be used to name individuals and make abusive comments about those people. Parents should contact the school to discuss any concerns they may have.
- Whether such comments likely to cause emotional or reputational harm to staff or pupils, particularly if a complaint that has been made and MPS has not yet had a chance to investigate that complaint.
- The reputational impact that the posting of such material may have on MPS; any detrimental harm that MPS 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 MPS (and those associated with it), it is rarely appropriate to do so. Other channels are much better suited to this. Examples of appropriate actions are:

- Approaching any individual concerned;
- Requesting a discussion at the Parent's Forum;
- Having a confidential discussion with a teacher or the headteacher; or
- Using MPS's formal complaints process.

MPS considers the following examples to be inappropriate uses of social networking sites. (This list is non-exhaustive and intended to provide examples only):

- Making allegations about staff or pupils at MPS or cyber-bullying;
- Making complaints about MPS or staff at MPS;
- Making defamatory statements about MPS or staff at MPS;
- Posting negative or offensive comments about specific pupils or staff at MPS;
- Posting comments denigrating someone because of their gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, religion or beliefs, age, because they have had gender reassignment, because they are married or in a civil partnership or because they are pregnant or a mother; (i.e. they have a 'protected characteristic');
- Posting comments that threaten violence.

Parents should also ensure that their children are not using social networking/internet sites in an inappropriate manner. It is expected that parents explain to their children what is acceptable to post online. Parents are also expected to monitor their children's online activity, including in relation to their use of social media.

Procedure MPS will follow if inappropriate use continues

MPS 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, MPS will usually discuss the matter with the parent to try and resolve the matter 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 MPS considers inappropriate, MPS will consider taking the following action:

- Set out MPS's concerns to the parents concerned in writing, giving a warning and requesting that the material in question is removed;
- 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 MPS feels it appropriate – for example, if it considers a crime (such as harassment) has been committed; or in cases where the posting denigrates someone because they have a protected characteristic (see above for the definition of these); or is considered to be grossly obscene; or is threatening violence;
- If the inappropriate comments have been made on a school website or online forum, MPS may take action to block or restrict that individual's access to that website or forum;
- Contact the host/provider of the Social Networking site to complain about the content of the site and ask for removal of the information.