



*Aim High, Be Resilient; Take Care of Each Other*

# **The Carey Federation**

## **Staff and Adults Associated with the Federation Schools**

### **Social Media Policy**

**Reviewed September 2023**

**Date of next review: September 2024**

*To be read in conjunction with the school safeguarding policies and code of conduct.*

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## A. INTRODUCTION

Social media is the term commonly given to web-based tools which allow users to interact with each other in some way – by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests online. As the name implies, social media involves the building of online communities or networks to encourage participation and engagement.

This includes blogs, message boards, social networking websites (such as facebook, google+, WhatsApp, Instagram, X (formally known as Twitter), bebo, MySpace), content sharing websites (such as flickr, YouTube) and many other similar online channels.

This policy applies to all employees and those who work within schools where this policy has been adopted.

It also applies to all governors and volunteers undertaking work on behalf of the organisation. Schools should ensure contractors and agency workers are also aware of this policy. These groups will be collectively referred to as ‘individuals’ within this policy. All individuals’ should be aware of their own conduct and behave in a manner which ensures and promotes acceptable behaviour in relation to their individual use of social media sites.

## B. PRINCIPLES AND EXPECTATIONS

### B.1. Other related policies

There are other policies, including those listed below which govern employee behaviour in schools with respect to the disclosure of information online, including personal activities. All individuals within schools should make sure that they are familiar with these policies:

- Data Protection Policy
- Staff Code of Conduct Policy for Schools
- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Safer Working Practice For The Protection Of Children And Staff In Education Settings
- Equality Policy

### B.2. Individuals are responsible for their own actions

School employees are encouraged to use the ICT systems they have at their disposal to enhance their work and learning opportunities for students' learning. The school, in turn, will expect its staff and volunteers to agree to be responsible users, exercising sound judgement and common sense.

Individuals should bear in mind that anything they post online, at work and at home, can potentially affect the reputation of the school and is ultimately the responsibility of the employee.

Individuals should ensure that privacy and security settings are set and used on all devices.

### **B.3. Be aware of working and personal lives overlapping**

Online, an employee's personal and working lives are likely to overlap. Whilst the school understands that many individuals use social media sites, it is important to remember that information/comments/images posted online originally intended just for friends and family can be forwarded on and might be viewed by students, parents and colleagues as well as members of the wider community. Be aware of your language and conduct while on these sites, the rules governing staff conduct such as the Staff Code of Conduct still apply.

**Individuals should not accept pupils/students as 'friends' or 'followers' on social media sites.**

If individuals have specific reasons for needing to communicate with students via a social media site they should first discuss this, with their reasons, with their line manager. Individuals must use their professional determination to set appropriate boundaries and if s/he is uncertain, to seek advice from the line manager before communicating with pupils/students.

Class Dojo is a communication platform used for sharing home-learning and information with parents and children. Strictly professional dialogue should be used and all aspects of the Staff Code of Conduct and Safeguarding policies apply.. Private messaging is only permitted with the parent and

not the child. Children are not given access to private messaging but should they message a member of staff, the conversation should be stopped and reported to the headteacher.

**Your conduct must not adversely affect the school's public image nor bring the school into disrepute.** This requirement extends to when individuals use social media sites outside normal working hours. It is important that individuals should ensure that their security settings are set appropriately, including those on personal social media sites, so that individual's own sites can only be accessed and used by those approved by that individual. Any information displayed on individual's accounts are deemed to be their responsibility.

**Naked or semi-naked pictures of yourself should not be posted on social media.**

**Naked or semi-naked pictures of children (including your own) must not be posted on social media.**

#### B.4. Participation in a public forum

Participation in a public forum must be professional. Individuals should make sure they always act in an honest, accurate, fair and responsible way at all times. Be aware of language and conduct while on these sites, the rules governing staff conduct such as the **Staff Code of Conduct** still apply.

When an employee participates in a public forum as part of their job they should specify their job title and ensure his/her line manager is aware of the discussion.

When an employee participates in a public forum as a private individual they must make that clear and only use their private e-mail address.

#### B.5. Consider carefully anything said/posted

Individuals are personally responsible for their words and actions. An individual must ensure that any confidential and/or sensitive information is not posted. Individuals must not make any derogatory, untrue or discriminating comments about the school, its pupils/students or other employees. **Neither should any comments be made that are likely to affect the reputation of the school.**

Confidential information, including information which is available to an employee due to the nature of their job, but is not in the public domain, should not be disclosed unless specific permission has been granted to do so.

If there is any doubt, do not post it.

#### B.6. Do not respond to negative comments posted online

If negative or disparaging comments about the school, its pupils/students and/or other individuals with connections to the school, are posted online or by third parties to try to spark negative conversations, individuals must not respond and should bring this to the attention of their manager.

#### B.7. Know that the Internet is permanent

As soon as information is published online, it is essentially part of a permanent record, even if it is removed or deleted later or attempts are made to make it anonymous. Information can be disseminated very quickly via social media and is virtually impossible to retract once it has been published; even if it has been online for only a short time, it may well have been picked up and copied and/or forwarded on by computers around the world.

### C. STANDARDS OF BEHAVIOUR

The school is committed to making the best use of all available technology and innovation to improve the way it works. However, individuals must use all forms of social media with extreme care, together with sound judgement and common sense.

Failure to adhere to this policy and those policies listed at paragraph 1 may result in formal action within the School's Conduct Policy for Employees and other appropriate action in relation to governors, volunteers, etc.

In some circumstances, inappropriate communications may result in a police investigation.

### D. USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AT WORK

The use of school-owned laptops/computers/electronic devices to access social media sites for personal use is permitted where such use is restricted to lunch-breaks and usage is reasonable and appropriate.

Employees bringing personal electronic equipment in school, such as laptops/notebooks/hand held devices need to be aware that it is at the risk of the employees and the school will not be responsible for the safekeeping of any such devices. Personal use of these devices must also be restricted to lunchbreaks.

Employees should note their contractual responsibility to devote their time fully to their work during paid hours. The Schools' Conduct Policy will be used to investigate any concerns regarding any employee found to be using electronic equipment for personal use during working hours, the outcome of which may lead to disciplinary action up to and including dismissal. As part of any such investigation, the school will check the employee's internet usage and will retain this information as appropriate.

### **WhatsApp**

WhatsApp is a platform, which the Federation uses for communication with staff on a one-to-one basis and in group chats, in order to share information, ask and answer questions efficiently and aid communication. All aspects of this policy and the Staff Code of Conduct apply. When using WhatsApp as a platform for communication within the Federation, please note the following:

1. Remain professional in all communication, refrain from using profanities. Be considerate and respectful of each other
2. You should not breach GDPR in terms of naming individual children or parents, and only talk about what is happening in school/Federation in factual terms rather than emotive terms, avoiding naming individuals wherever possible
3. Mute the group to prevent repeated notifications.
4. Avoid messaging late at night or very early in the morning. Keep messaging at the weekends and holidays to the absolute minimum.
5. Keep discussions relevant to school matters – individual conversations should happen outside of the group
6. Where more in depth questions are raised or discussions are required, email should be used as an alternative.
7. Do not share individuals' comments or details with anyone outside of this group
8. Formal requests and serious matters e.g. leave of absence, allegations etc. should not be made on WhatsApp – use the Federation procedures
9. Consider what is appropriate for the whole group to know or just individual members.

10. Consider if you require an immediate or quick response, if not, email is a more appropriate form of communication.

#### Addressing disruptive behaviour on WhatsApp

Conversations can easily deviate from school matters and some individuals can dominate the chat, or make other people feel uncomfortable. These situations will need to be managed carefully but also promptly. If people in the chat are digressing to personal conversations, school leaders should remind them that the group is for school chat and suggest they make a new “social” group for other topics.

If someone is being disruptive or inappropriate, the participant will be contacted privately to let them know their behaviour is not acceptable for this space. However, if a participant continues their unacceptable behaviour they will be “removed” from your group.

#### **E. SUMMING UP**

- Be aware of your association with the school and Devon County Council in online spaces. If identified as an employee or adult associated with the school and/or Devon County Council, ensure your profile is appropriate and related content is consistent with professional expectations.
- Be aware of language and professional conduct.
- Be aware of issues such as libel, defamation and slander.
- Do not breach copyright
- Never share confidential or sensitive information.

Never share naked or semi-naked images

- Inform senior management if participating online in a professional capacity.
- Individuals should alert senior management immediately if anything has been posted, inadvertently or otherwise, may cause issues for individuals and/or the school

A breach of the Social Media Policy will result in the Schools’ Conduct Policy being used to investigate any concerns, the outcome of which may lead to disciplinary action up to and including dismissal. As part of any such investigation, the school will check the employee’s internet usage and will retain this information as appropriate.

#### **Changes to the Policy**

Sept 2023	P.3 WhatsApp, Instagram, X (formally known as Twitter) added
	P4 – 5 paragraph re: Class Dojo added
	p.4 the word ‘followers’ added
	p. 4 and 5 ‘Policy for Setting the Standards of Acceptable Behaviour and the Schools’ Conduct Policy’ changed to ‘Staff Code of Conduct’
	p. 7&8 WhatsApp section added



