

# **USE OF SOCIAL NETWORK SITES POLICY**

<b>Date Drafted:</b>	<b>May2019</b>
<b>Date Adopted by LGB:</b>	<b>June 2019</b>
<b>Review Frequency:</b>	<b>Bi-Annually</b>
<b>To be Reviewed By:</b>	<b>LOCAL GOVERNING BODY</b>

# 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The use of online social networking sites (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram etc.) has become a very significant part of life for many people. They provide a very positive way to keep in touch with friends and colleagues, and can be used to exchange ideas and thoughts on common interests, both personal and work-related.
- 1.2 Formal guidance is necessary to avoid occurrences of these services being used for less positive reasons or used for a substantial length of time during working hours.
- 1.3 Employee's use of social media in both a personal and business capacity can present risks to the school's confidential information and reputation, and can jeopardise our compliance with legal obligations.

## 2 USE OF SOCIAL NETWORK SITES

- 2.1 If an employee's personal internet presence does not make any reference to Merrill Academy and the school cannot be identified, the content is unlikely to be of concern to the school. If employment at the school is referred to then the information posted must comply with the employment conditions outlined below.
- 2.2 If an employee wishes to initiate a social networking site or already has one in place, they should use a disclaimer that protects the school e.g. 'These are my personal views and not those of Merrill Academy'.
- 2.3 An individual is free to talk about the school, however instances where the school is brought into disrepute will constitute misconduct or gross misconduct and disciplinary action will be applied.
- 2.4 An employee must not disclose confidential information relating to his/her employment at the school.
- 2.5 Sites must not be used to verbally abuse staff or students. Privacy and feelings of others should be respected at all times. Employees should obtain the permission of individuals before posting contact details or pictures. Care should be taken to avoid using language which could be deemed as offensive to others.
- 2.6 If information on the site raises a cause for concern with regard to conflict of interest, employees should raise the issue with the Director of HR.
- 2.7 If approached by a media contact about content on a site relating to Merrill Academy, employees should advise the Headteacher before taking any action.
- 2.8 Viewing and updating personal sites should not take place during working times, unless in exceptional circumstances, such as where activities form part of a research project and this has been agreed in advance as appropriate by the line manager. Reasonable access is acceptable before/after working hours and during work breaks (although please be advised that if a VDU is used throughout the day, employees are required to have regular breaks).
- 2.9 Sites must not be used for accessing or sharing illegal content.
- 2.10 Any serious misuse of Social Networking sites that has a negative impact on the school will be regarded as a disciplinary offence.

## 3 PERSONAL SAFETY AND PRIVACY

- 3.1 Employees need to be aware that the information they post on their personal social media profile can make them identifiable to students and parents/carers, as well as people they know in a private capacity.
- 3.2 Employees must therefore consider this when setting up their online profile particularly in relation to; use of a photograph, providing details of their occupation, employer, and work location.
- 3.3 Employees should ensure that people known to them through their work, where there could be a conflict of interest, are not linked to them through social media. The school considers it inappropriate to have service users as 'friends' through social media, especially where these people are vulnerable and their may be safeguarding issues.
- 3.4 Online sites such as Facebook are in the public domain, and personal profile details can be seen by anyone, even if users have their privacy settings on the highest level. Also if a user's profile is linked to other sites, any changes to their profile will be updated there too. Employees who have set their privacy level to the maximum can have their privacy compromised by 'friends' who may not have set their security to the same standard.

## 4 PERSONAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND RESPONSIBILITY

- 4.1 All employees are expected to behave appropriately and responsibly, and should be aware that they may be accountable to the school for actions outside of their work.
- 4.2 Online conduct is the employee's responsibility and it is important that employees are aware of posting information on social networking sites in a personal capacity cannot be entirely isolated from their working life.
- 4.3 Any information published online can be accessed around the world within seconds and will be publicly available for all to see, and it is not easy to delete/withdraw once published. The school views any comment that is made on a social media site is made publicly, and that any inappropriate comment made, will be considered in the context of which it is made e.g. disparaging comments made against a colleague made to all friends on Facebook could be viewed as bullying/harassment or could be considered to bring the school into disrepute.

4.4 Employees may be accountable for actions outside school, including making comments on social media sites, if that is contrary to any school policy, impacts on or compromises the employee's ability to undertake their role, or undermines management decisions. Such behaviour will be investigated and may result in disciplinary action being taken, and ultimately could result in dismissal.

#### ANY COMMUNICATIONS THAT EMPLOYEES MAKE THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA MUST NOT:

- Bring the school into disrepute, for example by:
  - Criticising, disagreeing or arguing with service users, colleagues or managers
  - Making defamatory comments about individuals or other organisations/groups
  - Posting images/text that is inappropriate or links to inappropriate content
  
- Breach confidentiality, for example by:
  - Referring to confidential information about an individual (such as a colleague or service user) or the school
  
- Do anything that could be considered discriminatory against, or bullying or harassment of, any individual or group of individuals, and in contravention of the school's procedures, for example by:
  - Making offensive or derogatory comments relating to sex, gender-reassignment, race (including nationality), disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief or age
  - Using social media to bully another individual (such as an employee of the school) or
  - Posting images that are discriminatory or offensive or links to such content
  
- Any other action that impacts on the employees ability to do their job for example by:
  - Online activity that is incompatible with the position they hold in the school
  - Any breach occurring inside or outside the workplace that is likely to affect the employee doing his/her work

The school does not discourage staff from using social media. However, all should be aware that the school will take seriously any occasions where the services are used inappropriately. If occasions arise of what might be regarded as online bullying or harassment, these will be dealt with in the same way as other potential disciplinary cases.

\*Service users refers to students, parents, carers, representatives from external agencies, lettings users etc.

#### EMPLOYEE GUIDANCE ON THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

- You must be mindful that any online activities/comments made in a public domain, must be compatible with your position within the school and safeguard yourself in a professional capacity
- Protect your own privacy. Ensure that your privacy settings are set correctly to ensure that your social network account does not compromise your professional position
- Comments made outside work, within the arena of social media, do not remain private and so can have an effect on or have work related implications. Therefore, comments made through social media, which you may intend to be 'private' can be copied and redistributed making it easy to lose control of. Presume that everything you post on line will be permanent and can be shared.
- Do not discuss school related issues online, including conversations about service users, complaints, management or disparaging remarks about colleagues or the school. Even when anonymised, these are likely to be inappropriate.
- Do not under any circumstances accept friend requests from a person you believe could be a service user or may conflict with your employment.
- Be aware that other users may access your profile and if they find the information it contains offensive, make a complaint about you to the Headteacher.
- Ensure that any comments and/or images cannot be deemed defamatory, libellous or in breach of copyright legislation.
- When setting up your profile online consider whether it is appropriate and prudent for you to include a photograph, or provide occupation or work location details.
- If you are very concerned about someone else's behaviour online, you should take steps to raise your concerns. If these are school related you should inform the Headteacher.
- You should not access social media sites or leave these running in the background during working time for personal use, on any devices within your control.