

Policy for Saint Ronan's Use of Social Media

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ISI Policy Code	
Scope of policy	EYFS, Pre Prep and Prep School

To be read in conjunction with:

- Online Safety Policy
- Safeguarding Policy
- Mobile Phone Policy

Definitions and Scope

The School defines social media as 'any websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking'. Saint Ronan's uses four social networking sites to share information about the School: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram.

This policy covers the School's approach to the running and maintenance of the four social media channels used by the School, to ensure adherence to the School's Online Safety and Safeguarding Policies.

The School's Social Media Policy also considers what action the School should take in the event of a complaint or unfavourable opinion about the School being posted on social media..

All members of the School community should bear in mind that information they share through social networking applications, even if they are on private spaces, may be subject to copyright, safeguarding and data protection legislation.

Anything posted on the School's Social Media forums must also operate in line with the School's Equalities, Harassment, Child Protection, Safer Recruitment and Online Safety and ICT Acceptable Use policies.

Why does Saint Ronan's use social media?

Today social media a part of everyday life. For many members of our communities, social media is the most commonly used communication channel; it's how people stay in touch with friends and family, and how many people access local and national news and events.

The School uses social media-to increase engagement with our wider community, for example to communicate news and events with parents and carers. This was especially important during COVID when the School used its various social media forums to encourage wide participation during lockdown and bind the community together.

What are the risks of using social media ?

There are four broad areas of risk relating to an online social media presence:

CONTENT: being exposed to illegal, inappropriate or harmful material

CONTACT: being subjected to harmful online interaction with other users,

CONDUCT: personal online behaviour that increases the likelihood of, or causes, harm to the user and/or others”?

COMMERCE: online risks including gambling, inappropriate advertising, phishing or financial scams

The School must ensure that its own use of social media sets a good example, represents the School in a positive way (adhering to the School’s Safeguarding and Online Safety policies) and does not expose users to the risks outlined above.

Not all members of the School community use the same tools; this could lead to some members of the community being isolated and missing out on vital information. Therefore, social media should not replace traditional communication routes but should form part of the School’s wider communication strategy. The School should ensure that content is made available in a variety of formats and locations, including official websites and newsletters, etc.

Procedures to reduce risks from use of the School’s social media sites (SSMS)

Saint Ronan’s uses SSMS to share news with the wider Saint Ronan’s School community and to keep the Saint Ronan’s School community and our supporters in touch. It is also used for marketing purposes.

Oversight and principles

A Supervisory Committee exists to ensure appropriate quality and content of all information on the SSMS. The Committee consists of Ben Clarke (as Administrator), Terry Stickney and the DSL, Andrea Bright.

The content of any School-sanctioned social media site and/or social media accounts using the name of Saint Ronan’s School, a Saint Ronan’s School logo, or clearly attached to Saint Ronan’s School in some way, should be sanctioned by the Supervisory Committee, should be entirely professional and should reflect well on the School.

Practice

No member of staff can upload directly onto SSMS; this can only be done by a member of the Supervisory Committee.

Staff **must not** send photographs of pupils to the Supervisory Committee for uploading on the SSMS if parents have notified that they wish their child’s photograph **not** to be used in this way. Furthermore, it is good practice for staff to ask children when taking individual pictures, whether they would prefer these were not used in the SSMS.

Standard practice is to publish only the first name and initial of surname, unless permission has been given by parents or pupils (if deemed of the age and ability to provide their own consent) for the full name to be used. The full name can be used when reposting only if the information is in the public domain and with permission of the parent involved if the child is under 18 years. Clothing named on the outside will be edited out.

Any images of children must be in suitable clothing and with suitable poses in suitable locations.

Staff must take into account the Safeguarding (Child Protection and Staff Conduct) Policy when making any posts on school social media accounts.

Any links to external sites from the accounts must be appropriate and safe; if they are shared these must be verified as reputable sites. Only appropriate hashtags should be used.

It is the responsibility of everyone using the site and social media in general to report abuse immediately.

Any inappropriate comments on, or abuse of, school-sanctioned social media and/or social media accounts using the name of Saint Ronan's School, a Saint Ronan's School logo, or clearly attached to Saint Ronan's School in some way, should immediately be removed and reported to the E-safety Officer and Designated Safeguarding Lead. Staff creating such comments may be subject to action under the disciplinary policy and procedures.

All school sanctioned social media accounts created for school purposes will include a link in the About or Info page to the Online Safety and Social Media Policies.

All copyright decisions will be made by the Supervisory Committee.

Comments on SSMS are reviewed daily and any concerns are discussed by the Supervisory Committee before deciding on the most appropriate course of action.

The Supervisory Committee has the sanction to remove, edit or delete any posts.

Responding to complaints and inappropriate comments about Saint Ronan's posted on social media

A complaint or inappropriate comment about Saint Ronan's may be posted publicly on a School, or other, social media site. Each situation will be different, and there may be complicating ["multiple"] factors which need to be considered. The following guidance from the **Education People** outlines the basic steps the School can take in response to public posts about the School. A flowchart is provided as Appendix 1.

A. *Keep calm*

Parents and member of the public are entitled to hold opinions about educational settings, many of which will be positive, some might not be so pleasant. Expressing these views however, is not always illegal and it is important to recognise that it isn't possible to prevent people posting comments online. Unless comments make a credible threat towards someone's safety (such as death threats or other specific threats of violence towards staff or children), name a teacher who is subject to an allegation, contain hate content or could be considered as harassment (and therefore a criminal offence has been committed) comments cannot and will not always be removed.

However, this does not mean that this behaviour should be tolerated, especially if it is directed at specific members of the community. The best course of action is for leaders to adopt a partnership approach with parents, where possible, and to speak directly with any members of the community involved when concerns are raised. In some cases, leaders may decide that the best response will simply be to monitor the situation. In these situations, leaders should still follow the below guidance regarding gathering evidence, in case action is required at a later stage.

B. *Gather evidence*

When a setting becomes aware of any information that is damaging towards an individual member of staff and/or community, it is important to gather evidence (such as screenshots and print-outs, includes times, dates and names where possible and ensuring the identity of the person who reported the issue is removed) and establish exactly what has been posted. It is important that evidence be obtained so that the facts can be established. Although sometimes difficult, it is essential

that leaders ensure that their response to comments posted on social media is proportionate and impartial.

Overreactions or emotionally led responses are likely to inflame the situation, which can mean that a successful positive outcome is less likely to occur for all involved. It is important that any evidence is kept, enabling settings to collate a record of events; this should include usernames, specific dates and times, as well as actions taken.

In many situations this will be a one-off concern which can be resolved quickly, however in some situations this could be part of a bigger or ongoing issue; therefore, a clear chronology will be essential if further action is required.

Parents may have set up a page or closed/secret group via WhatsApp or Facebook to discuss or in some cases, criticise the setting or members of staff. On a Facebook page, comments will always be public. In a closed or secret group, they will only be visible to group members. It is important where possible, to find out who has set up the page or group, as usually this is the parent who has the grievance. It can be difficult to trace the owner of a Facebook “page”, however a closed group will publicly identify the members, and also which members are “administrators”. It is essential that members of staff, including non-teaching staff and governors, do not become embroiled in any of the discussion as this can inflame the situation. Leaders should ensure that members of staff are aware of how to respond to concerns - further information is contained within section 4:

‘Preventative Actions’. In some cases, parents may post comments on their own personal Facebook profiles. The visibility of these comments will depend on the individual parent’s privacy settings. If a comment is public (this is indicated by the presence of a globe icon next to the post) then it will be visible to anyone who has access to the internet, even if they do not have a Facebook account. Other privacy settings may include “friends only” (only those people who are friends with the original poster can see the comment) or “friends of friends”. In cases where comments have been shared with “friends of friends” or “friends only”, it is essential that headteachers/managers ensure that the identity of the person who brought the concern to the settings attention is protected as far as possible.

C. Reassuring those affected

i. Supporting staff

If individual members of staff have been targeted or mentioned, then leaders will need to be mindful of their duty of care to those involved as there is a specific duty on employers to protect their staff from third party harassment. Appropriate support will depend on the nature of the concerns and the reaction of the individual. If the member of staff is already aware of the comments, headteachers/managers should explain to them how they intend to address the concerns and offer support to them. Leaders should encourage staff to let them know if there is any further support that they feel they need. If the member of staff is unaware of the comments, headteachers/managers should consider if it necessary to inform them, and if so, what would be the best approach. Depending on the nature of the comments, this decision may require additional advice:

- Staff may wish to contact their professional union for additional support and guidance
- Support may be accessed via the Education Support Network:
www.educationsupportpartnership.org.uk
- Staff and leaders can also access help via the Professional Online Safety Helpline:
www.saferinternet.org.uk/about/helpline
- The settings may want to take legal advice from their personnel provider
- If any allegation have been made against a member of staff, headteachers/managers will need to discuss those concerns directly with the LADO team:
www.kelsi.org.uk/childprotection-and-safeguarding/managing-staff-allegations

ii. Supporting other members of the community

There have been cases where negative or malicious comments posted on social media have not been about a member of staff, but about a child or another parent. It is important that headteachers/managers are aware of the need to promote the wellbeing and safety of the whole community, however, they should also be aware of some of the limitations and be clear about how achievable this may be in some cases. When responding to issues where parents are writing negative or unkind comments about other parents, the setting needs to consider how best to mediate concerns (if appropriate) and to what extent they can resolve concerns if they are having a detrimental impact on the setting. In cases where there is a concern regarding physical violence headteachers/managers will need to involve the police.

In some cases, there may be a requirement to consider the potential safeguarding impact (including emotional consequences and a risk to physical safety) on children if comments are made online about them. In many cases children will be unaware of these comments where they are not using social media, however in some situations children may be made aware by their parents. Settings should be aware that 'playground' gossip can cause considerable emotional distress to children and action will be required. A discussion may need to take place with a wider group of parents and settings may need to undertake direct work with a group of children to address concerns. In some cases, it may require involvement of other external agencies (such as the police if credible threats are being made) in line with existing safeguarding procedures. If headteachers/managers are unclear about how to respond, they should seek advice from the Education Safeguarding Service.

D. Meet face to face with parents or carers involved

In many cases, the reason why a parent has made comments about the setting or staff members online is due to being oblivious about the implications of making such comments, or because they are unaware of or disillusioned with the complaints procedure.

An immediate response in writing can occasionally inflame situations (and indeed in some cases ends up being shared on social media itself) so a face to face or "offline" discussion is likely to have a more positive outcome.

If multiple parents are involved, settings should consider how best to respond safely and effectively, whilst maintaining confidentiality. This may require multiple meetings with parents on an individual basis. The headteacher/manager (or other appropriate member of senior leadership staff) should

meet with the parents to express their disappointment with the current situation and explain that the setting would like to work with them to resolve the problem that is obviously causing them distress. Headteachers/managers should address the matter of social networking with the parents concerned and explain how this behaviour can have a detrimental impact on the setting and potentially their children's education, while not allowing the setting to address their concerns. It can be helpful, at this point, to discuss the importance of considering any messages they post online in the future, as these can have a detrimental impact on themselves as well as the wider community. Parents should be made aware that comments posed online (even if made "privately") can easily be misread or misinterpreted and can also be shared without their knowledge or consent. At this meeting it is important that printouts of the allegations or comments are available for parents; again, settings should take steps to ensure that any content which could identify the individual who brought it to the settings attention is removed.

At this stage, it is important that the headteacher/manager requests that any offending posts or pages are immediately removed and encourages the parents to work with the setting, following the complaints procedure if they are unhappy. If parents refuse to remove content, headteachers/managers can report the concern to website (see appendix 4 for advice regarding reports to Facebook) or escalate the concern to the Professional Online Safety helpline: www.saferinternet.org.uk/about/helpline . If the meeting does not have a successful outcome, it is important for the headteacher/manager to stress that the setting may have to take further action to resolve the matter. Although it is important not to cause further problems, the professional status of staff and the setting needs to be maintained and it cannot be compromised by any malicious comments or allegations. The setting may want to warn the parents that any existing comments or a continuation of posts could lead to civil or criminal action being taken, although the setting would prefer to avoid having to take this route. If headteachers/managers think that a criminal offence has been committed or believe that speaking directly to the parents would lead to a confrontation or offence being committed, they should speak with their Local Kent Police contact to work together to support the setting in discussing this with the parent concerned in more detail.

Resolving Difficult Situations

If the matter is not resolved through a face-to-face meeting, the setting has several options to try and address the situation. While the setting will not want to escalate the matter unnecessarily, it is crucial it tries to come to a sensible and proportionate conclusion.

A. Arrange a further meeting and invite the Chairman of the Governors.

To ensure that the parents understand the seriousness of the matter, a further meeting could be arranged with the Chairman of the Governors present to convey the damage that these comments are having on the community. It gives an opportunity for the parents to share any grievances and for an action plan to be established to deal with any concerns expressed.

B. Report content to the site involved

If parents do not agree to remove any offending content, the setting can report content to the website where it has been posted. This raises a 'ticket' with those who monitor content on the site, so they can assess this in relation to whether any of the terms and conditions have been violated. Settings should be aware that there may be a time delay in the review of this content and that if the content does not breach the terms and conditions, the site administrators will not remove it. Forced removal of comments will only occur if the comments break the law or break the website's terms and conditions.. For other services it may be helpful to visit the site being used; many platforms have a help or report section.

C. Seek further advice

The final step in some cases may be for a setting to seek legal advice on comments posted on a social media site. In some cases, this has resulted in a letter from a solicitor being sent out to the parents warning them that malicious allegations could result in legal action. Headteachers and managers should be aware that in some cases this can have a detrimental impact and may inflame situations further; it is recommended to try all other possible routes before proceeding.

In cases where a criminal offence has been committed, police advice should be sought at an early stage. This should usually take place via 101, but if there is an immediate risk of harm to any member of the community, this should be reported via 999. It is advisable that settings record any crime reference numbers etc., even if police action is not considered to be necessary.

If an allegation has been made against a member of staff, advice must be sought from the LADO service.

Dealing with complaints from members of the public

In some cases, complaints may be posted on social media by a member of the public; this could be a friend or family member of a parent, or someone completely unknown to the setting. In these situations, settings may only be able to act if the comments are criminal or are deemed to have broken the sites terms and conditions. If the person is known to a parent (for example they have commented on parents own post on their Facebook profile), the best approach will be to discuss the concern with the parent as outlined in section 2.

If the person is not identifiable (for example anonymous accounts on google reviews or Twitter profiles), the setting should report the content to the site concerned but be aware that it may not be removed.

If the comments posted by a member of the public give the setting a reason to believe that a member of the community is at risk of harm (such as credible threats are made against an individual) or believe a criminal offence has been committed, advice should be sought from the police. Leaders should consider if it is always required for them to respond directly to complaints made by members of the public. If it is deemed necessary, it is important to ensure the response is proportionate and impartial; overreactions or emotionally led responses are likely to inflame the situation further. In some cases, leaders may decide that the best response will be to monitor the situation. Leaders should still gather evidence and record decision making, in case further action is required at a later stage. If educational settings are concerned that an issue posted online by a member of the public may receive media attention, they may wish to seek advice from their local authority press team. Additionally, advice may be gathered via their own support channels, such as professional unions, personnel providers, legal support services or academy chains etc.

For Kent educational settings, the KCC Press Office can be accessed via:
www.kccmediahub.net/about

Preventative Actions

Allegations or malicious comments against members of staff or the setting can have an unwanted effect on the setting's ethos, which can result in a detrimental effect on children and young people. It is crucial that settings take steps to try and prevent these types of issues from reoccurring.

It is important for leaders to be realistic about what they hope to achieve when responding to negative comments or complaints on social media. Leaders should remember that isn't always possible to prevent parents posting comments online, and comments cannot always be removed. The focus should therefore be on achieving the best outcomes for children, especially if they are at the centre of the concern.

Settings may wish to regularly highlight awareness regarding responding use of social networking such as via newsletters etc.

If there have been specific issues, settings could consider sending a specific letter to parents to encourage them to be mindful about what they post on social networking sites and to be aware of the impact such comments could have on the community. The letter could also include the fact that unpleasant or hurtful comments should not be posted online as they may potentially be considered as a criminal offence.

The setting may want to remind all parents of the official communication and complaints channels which are available to be used should they need them, as this is the most appropriate way of dealing with any concerns. Settings may also wish to remind parents that they can "report" any unpleasant comments or content to Facebook or other social networking sites, who may remove comments and block/ban users who break these rules.

Parents should also be aware of the importance of role modelling appropriate behaviour for their children online, much like they should offline.

Leaders should ensure that all members of staff receive safeguarding training that is robust and up-to-date and covers online safety (as identified within 'Keeping Children Safe in Education'). This training should include ensuring that all members of staff know how to respond to concerns they may see online in a way that supports the setting and does not compromise their professional role. Leaders should ensure that all members of staff sign an Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) and are aware of expectations with regards their use of social media.

Appendix 1- What to do if a complaint or inappropriate comment is posted on a School social media site?

