



# The Southfield Trust Social Media Policy

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## **1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The internet provides a range of social media tools that allow users to interact with one another, for example from rediscovering friends on social networking sites such

as *Facebook* to keeping up with other people's lives on *Twitter* and maintaining pages on internet encyclopaedias such as *Wikipedia*.

- 1.2 While recognising the benefits of these media tools as new opportunities for communication, this policy sets out the principles that staff and contractors at The Southfield Trust (*at times in this document just referred to as 'The Trust'*) are expected to follow when using social media.
- 1.3 It is crucial that pupils, parents and the public at large have confidence in the school's decisions and services. The principles set out in this policy are designed to ensure that staff members use social media responsibly so that confidentiality of pupils and other staff and the reputation of the Trust and East Sussex County Council are safeguarded.
- 1.4 Staff members must be conscious at all times of the need to keep their personal and professional lives separate.

## 2 SCOPE

- 2.1 This policy applies to The Trust's Governing Body, all teaching and other staff, whether employed by the County Council or employed directly by the school, external contractors providing services on behalf of the school or the County Council, teacher trainees and other trainees, volunteers and other individuals who work for or provide services on behalf of the school. These individuals are collectively referred to as 'staff members' in this policy.
- 2.2 This policy covers personal use of social media as well as the use of social media for official school purposes.
- 2.3 This policy applies to personal webspace such as social networking sites (for example *Facebook*, *MySpace*), blogs, mircoblogs such as *Twitter*, chatrooms, forums, podcasts, open access online encyclopaedias such as *Wikipedia*, social bookmarking sites such as *del.icio.us* and content sharing sites such as *flickr* and *YouTube*. The internet is a fast moving technology and it is impossible to cover all circumstances or emerging media - the principles set out in this policy must be followed irrespective of the medium.

## 3 LEGAL FRAMEWORK

- 3.1 The Southfield Trust is committed to ensuring that all staff members provide confidential services that meet the highest standards. All individuals working on
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behalf of the school are bound by a legal duty of confidence and other laws to protect the confidential information they have access to during the course of their work. Disclosure of confidential information on social media is likely to be a breach of a number of laws and professional codes of conduct, including:

- The Human Rights Act 1998
- Common law duty of confidentiality, and
- The Data Protection Act 1998.

3.2 Confidential information includes, but is not limited to:

- Person-identifiable information, e.g. pupil and employee records protected by the Data Protection Act 1998
- Information divulged in the expectation of confidentiality
- School or County Council business or corporate records containing organisationally or publicly sensitive information
- Any commercially sensitive information such as information relating to commercial proposals or current negotiations, and
- Politically sensitive information.

3.3 Staff members should also be aware that other laws relating to libel, defamation, harassment and copyright may apply to information posted on social media sites, including:

- Libel Act 1843
- Defamation Acts 1952 and 1996
- Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994
- Malicious Communications Act 1998
- Communications Act 2003, and
- Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

3.4 The Southfield Trust and the County Council could be held vicariously responsible for acts of their employees in the course of their employment. For example, staff members who harass co-workers online or who engage in cyberbullying or discrimination on the grounds of race, sex, disability, etc or who defame a third party while at work may render The Trust or the County Council liable to the injured party.

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## **4 RELATED POLICIES**

- 4.1 This policy should be read in conjunction with the following school and County Council policies:
- East Sussex County Council Code of Conduct for Employees
  - All relevant Trust conduct and discipline policies

## **5 PRINCIPLES – BE PROFESSIONAL, RESPONSIBLE AND RESPECTFUL**

- 5.1 You must be conscious at all times of the need to keep your personal and professional lives separate. You should not put yourself in a position where there is a conflict between your work for the school or County Council and your personal interests.
- 5.2 You must not engage in activities involving social media which might bring The Trust or the County Council into disrepute.
- 5.3 You must not represent your personal views as those of The Trust or the County Council on any social medium.
- 5.4 You must not discuss personal information about pupils, The Southfield Trust or County Council staff and other professionals you interact with as part of your job on social media.
- 5.5 You must not use social media and the internet in any way to attack, insult, abuse or defame pupils, their family members, colleagues, other professionals, other organisations, The Trust or the County Council.
- 5.6 You must be accurate, fair and transparent when creating or altering online sources of information on behalf of The Trust or the County Council.

## **6 PERSONAL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA**

- 6.1 Staff members must not identify themselves as employees of The Southfield Trust or County Council or service providers for the schools or County Council in their personal webspace. This is to prevent information on these sites from being linked
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with the schools and the County Council and to safeguard the privacy of staff members, particularly those involved in providing sensitive frontline services.

- 6.2 Staff members must not have contact through any personal social medium with any pupil, whether from the Trust schools or any other school, unless the pupils are family members or close family friends.
  - 6.3 The Trust does not expect staff members to discontinue contact with their family members via personal social media once the school starts providing services for them. However, any information staff members obtain in the course of their employment must not be used for personal gain nor be passed on to others who may use it in such a way.
  - 6.4 Staff members must not have any contact with pupils' family members through personal social media if that contact is likely to constitute a conflict of interest or call into question their objectivity.
  - 6.5 If staff members wish to communicate with pupils through social media sites or to enable pupils to keep in touch with one another, they can only do so with the approval of the schools and through official school sites created according to the requirements specified in section 7 and Appendix A.
  - 6.6 Staff members must decline 'friend requests' from pupils they receive in their personal social media accounts. Instead, if they receive such requests from pupils who are not family members, they must discuss these in general terms in class and signpost pupils to become 'friends' of the official school site.
  - 6.7 On leaving The Southfield Trust service, staff members must not contact pupils by means of personal social media sites. Similarly, staff members must not contact pupils from their former schools by means of personal social media.
  - 6.8 Information that staff members have access to as part of their employment, including personal information about pupils and their family members, colleagues, County Council staff and other parties and school or County Council corporate information must not be discussed on their personal web space.
  - 6.9 Photographs, videos or any other types of image of pupils and their families or images depicting staff members wearing school or County Council uniforms or clothing with school or County Council logos or images identifying sensitive school or County Council premises (eg care homes, secure units) must not be published on personal webspace.
  - 6.10 School or County Council email addresses and other official contact details must not be used for setting up personal social media accounts or to communicate through such media.
  - 6.11 Staff members must not edit open access online encyclopaedias such as *Wikipedia* in a personal capacity at work. This is because the source of the correction will be recorded as the employer's IP address and the intervention will, therefore, appear as if it comes from the employer itself.
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- 6.12 The Trust or County Council corporate, service or team logos or brands must not be used or published on personal web space.
- 6.13 The Southfield Trust does **not** permit the use of the school's ICT system for the personal use of social media while at work.
- 6.14 Caution is advised when inviting work colleagues to be 'friends' in personal social networking sites. Social networking sites blur the line between work and personal lives and it may be difficult to maintain professional relationships or it might be just too embarrassing if too much personal information is known in the work place.
- 6.15 Staff members are strongly advised to ensure that they set the privacy levels of their personal sites as strictly as they can and to opt out of public listings on social networking sites to protect their own privacy. Staff members should keep their passwords confidential, change them often and be careful about what is posted online; it is not safe to reveal home addresses, telephone numbers and other personal information. It is a good idea to use a separate email address just for social networking so that any other contact details are not given away.

## **7 USING SOCIAL MEDIA ON BEHALF OF THE SOUTHFIELD TRUST**

- 7.1 There will be no social media site or presence on external social media platforms by the Trust or the individual schools.
- 7.2 Staff members can only use official school sites for communicating with pupils or to enable pupils to communicate with one another.
- 7.3 There must be a strong pedagogical or business reason for creating official school sites to communicate with pupils or others. Staff must not create sites for trivial reasons which could expose the school to unwelcome publicity or cause reputational damage.
- 7.4 Staff members must at all time act in the best interests of children and young people when creating, participating in or contributing content to social media sites.

## **8 MONITORING OF INTERNET USE**

- 8.1 The Trust monitors usage of its internet and email services without prior notification or authorisation from users.
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- 8.2 Users of The Trust's email and internet services should have no expectation of privacy in anything they create, store, send or receive using the school's ICT system.

## **9 BREACHES OF THE POLICY**

- 9.1 Any breach of this policy may lead to disciplinary action being taken against the staff member/s involved in line with The Trust or County Council Disciplinary Policy and Procedure.
- 9.2 A breach of this policy leading to breaches of confidentiality, or defamation or damage to the reputation of The Trust or the County Council or any illegal acts or acts that render The Trust or the County Council liable to third parties may result in disciplinary action or dismissal.
- 9.4.1 Contracted providers of The Southfield Trust or County Council services must inform the relevant school or County Council officer immediately of any breaches of this policy so that appropriate action can be taken to protect confidential information and limit the damage to the reputation of the schools and the County Council. Any action against breaches should be according to contractors' internal disciplinary procedures.
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