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St James' C of E Junior School

Policy on Parental Use of Social Networking and Internet Sites

Policy Approved by	
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Overview

Social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram and X (formerly known as Twitter) are now widely used and these types of media allow people to communicate in ways that were not previously possible. Unfortunately such sites can be used inappropriately by some as a means of expressing negative or offensive views about schools and their staff. This document sets out this school's approach to parental use of such sites and sets out the procedures that will be followed and action that may be taken when it is considered that parents have used such facilities inappropriately. Where there is reference to "parent" in this document this also include carers, relatives or anyone associated with the school.

Objectives

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Encourage social networking sites to be used in a beneficial and positive way by parents
- Safeguard pupils, staff and anyone associated with the school from the negative effects of social networking site
- Safeguard the reputation of the school from unwarranted abuse on social networking sites
- Clarify what the school considers to be appropriate and inappropriate use of social networking sites by parents
- Set out the procedures the school will follow where it is considered that parents have inappropriately or unlawfully used social networking sites to the detriment of the school, staff, pupils or anyone else associated with the school
- Set out the action the school 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 the school and provide feedback efficiently and easily. In addition, the school recognises that many parents and other family members will have personal social networking accounts which they might use to discuss/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 the school, staff, pupils or anyone else associated with the school:

- Is the social networking site the appropriate channel to raise concerns, give this feedback or express these views?
- Would a private and confidential discussion with someone in the school be more appropriate? If there are serious allegations being made/concerns being raised, social media or internet sites should not be used to name individuals and make abusive comments. Please contact the school to discuss any concerns you may have
- Are such comments likely to cause emotional or reputational harm which would not be justified, particularly if the school has not yet had a chance to investigate a complaint?
- The reputational impact that the posting of such material may have to the school, any detrimental harm that the school 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 the School (and those associated with it), it is **never** appropriate to do so. Other channels, such as a private and confidential discussion with School staff or using the School's formal complaints process are much better suited to this.

The School 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 the School/cyber-bullying;
• Making complaints about the School/staff at the School;
• Making defamatory statements about the School or staff at the School;
• Posting negative/offensive comments about specific pupils/staff at the School;
• Posting racist or other derogatory comments;
• Posting comments which threaten staff/children.

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

Procedure for addressing inappropriate use of social networks

The School 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, the School 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 the School considers inappropriate, the School will consider taking the following action:

• Take legal advice and/or legal action where the information posted is defamatory in any way or if the circumstances warrant this;
• Set out the School's concerns to you in writing, giving you a warning and requesting that the material in question is removed;
• Contact the Police where the School feels it appropriate – for example, if it considers a crime (such as harassment) has been committed; or in cases where the posting has a prejudicial element, is considered to be grossly obscene or is threatening violence;
• If the inappropriate comments have been made on a school website or online forum, the School may take action to block or restrict that individual's access to that website or forum;
• Contact the host/provider of the social media

If any comments are deemed to be defamatory i.e. which are untrue, inaccurate and may damage the reputation of the person, the individual may be advised to take legal proceedings against the author of those comments which may result not only in the comments being taken off the social media sites but also a financial cost to the author to reimburse the individual for any injury to feelings.

Any comments which include racist, sexist, homophobic remarks, harassment or intimidation and/or threats of violence will be reported to the Police for their investigation. Authors of such comments may find that criminal proceedings are then commenced against them.

We would like to remind you that you are legally responsible for what you do or say online and what you say openly can be accessed around the world in minutes and can be republished elsewhere. You must be willing to take personal responsibility for anything that you say online.

A school should be a safe place where relationships between staff, parents and visitors demonstrates a mutual respect and recognition of shared responsibility for pupils' welfare and educational progress.

We want to work with our parents to ensure that the school is a safe place for all and if you do feel strongly enough about an incident at the school involving a member of staff then we encourage you to resolve by meeting the Head teacher (or his/her representative) for an open and constructive discussion to ensure the best resolution for all concerned.