

MODEL POLICY ON PERSONAL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA BY TEACHING AND SUPPORT STAFF IN ACADEMIES

This model policy will apply to both teaching and non-teaching staff and has been agreed with the following recognised unions: ATL, NUT, NAHT, NASUWT, ASCL, Unison and GMB

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1. Introduction

This policy is one of a set of policies governing the conduct of employees of The Mead Academy Trust.

2. What is it?

Social media is a type of interactive online communication that allows parties to communicate instantly with each other or to share information in a public forum. There are various online technology tools that enable people engage in social media.

See [examples](#) at the end of this policy of social media sites.

This policy provides guidance to academy employees who use social media sites in their personal time (either at home or during an authorised break at work), with the aim of protecting both staff and the academy from disrepute.

3. Who does it apply to?

The governing body of The Mead Academy Trust has agreed to adopt this policy. The policy will be applied to all permanent, temporary and casual employees employed at the academy.

4. When does it apply?

This policy applies at all times when academy employees are making use of social media sites in a personal capacity.

It applies whether the employee is at home or at work and whether they are using academy equipment or their own device.

5. When does it not apply?

This policy does not cover the use of social media sites by employees within their role on behalf of the academy. Where employees use social media sites as part of their work the academy will make them aware of the academy's expectations and standards in the use of social media via that separate policy.

6. Social media etiquette

Social media allows people great freedom in how they communicate and express themselves. To help ensure everyone is able to equally benefit from social media sites employees at The Mead Academy Trust must abide by the following principles.

- Tell the truth;
- Write deliberately and with accuracy;

- Acknowledge and correct mistakes promptly;
- Preserve the original post, using notations to show where changes have been made, so as to maintain the integrity of any material published
- Never delete someone else’s post, although a poster could delete their own post.
- Give due consideration when posting comments and have regard to the advice within this policy;
- Strive for high quality with every post – including basic spellchecking;
- Stay on topic;
- Disagree with other opinions respectfully;
- Link to online references and original source materials directly;
- Disclose conflicts of interest;
- Keep private issues and topics separate from work issues and topics.

7. Main Points

7.1 Many employees make use of social media in a personal capacity and this policy is not intended to limit their use or enjoyment of social media.

7.2 However employees should remember that, even when not acting on the academy’s behalf, they can be held accountable for content which they post on social media sites which could be potentially damaging to the academy.

7.3 Damaging content includes any communication made in a personal capacity through social media which:

Brings the academy into disrepute	E.g. criticising the academy, pupils/students or colleagues/governors in an inappropriate manner, posting images that are inappropriate or links to inappropriate content.
Breaches confidentiality	E.g. revealing information owned by the academy; giving away confidential information about an individual (such as a colleague or pupil/student) or discussing the academy's internal workings (such as academy budget spending that have not been communicated to the public)

Is discriminatory against, or bullying or harassment of, any group or individual	E.g. making offensive or derogatory comments relating to sex, gender reassignment, race (including ethnicity), disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief or age; using social media to bully another individual; or posting images that are discriminatory or offensive, or links to such content.
Breaches copyright	E.g. by using someone else's images or written content without permission.

- 7.4 Employees must consider who can read what is posted, they must be aware that some sites are open to all and other sites allow the employee to control who can see what has been posted.
- 7.5 Employees need to ensure that they have reviewed privacy settings so that only those who they wish to read the content are able to do so.
- 7.6 Employees should not include their workplace and/or job title on their profile – being aware that this may make it easier for pupils/students, parents and members of the public to contact them in their personal time.
- 7.7 If an employee chooses to comment in a personal capacity on any issues relating to the academy they should make it clear that they are not representing the academy and that the views expressed are personal and do not necessarily reflect the views of the academy.

8. Accessing social media in academy time

Employees may make occasional and reasonable personal use of the internet (for example during their lunch break), as long as this does not interfere with the performance of their duties or the work of other colleagues.

Employees accessing social media for personal use on their own equipment (e.g. mobile phone, smartphone etc.) is only acceptable during official breaks.

9. How the academy protects itself

The academy does not monitor employee's personal social media pages without reason. However, as with any allegation of misconduct, the academy will investigate where breaches of this policy are brought to its attention by any means (e.g. via members of the public, employees, pupils/students).

10. Investigations which involve social media content

Any investigation which involves social media content will take into consideration:

- the intent of the content;
- the "moral intensity" of the content – what damage has been done;
- the implications – including the level of risk it places the academy at (including reputation, data etc.) and management time;
- the impact – on work colleagues, the public status of the academy, morale etc.;
- the individual's right to freedom of expression (provided it is not discriminatory, damaging, malicious or libellous).

Inappropriate content posted on social media sites either during, or outside of work time, may lead to either informal or formal disciplinary action. See [examples](#) at the end of this policy of social media sites.

Serious breaches of this policy, for example incidents of bullying of colleagues, discriminatory behaviour or social media activity causing serious damage to the school, may constitute gross misconduct and lead to summary dismissal.

Social media content which proves that employees have breached other academy policies may be used in disciplinary investigations relating to these matters.

11. Roles and responsibilities

11.1 Employee responsibilities

To carefully consider, before posting content on social media sites, whether this will bring the academy into disrepute, breach confidentiality or copyright or be considered offensive, defamatory, discriminatory, bullying or is potential harassment.

If you are unsure of whether it is appropriate to post certain content on a social media site advice can be sought from the headteacher / principal.

11.2 Headteacher / Principal responsibilities

The headteacher / principal is not expected to monitor personal use of social media by staff. However if a matter, relating to inappropriate use of social media, is brought to their attention they are responsible for looking into the matter in line with the relevant academy policy, taking into consideration the factors outlined in point 10 above.

12. Equal Opportunities

This policy has been Equality Impact Assessed to identify opportunities to promote equality and mitigate any negative or adverse impacts on particular groups.

13. Legislation and guidance

- Human Rights Act 1998
- General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) 2016 and Data Protection Act 2018
- Equalities Act 2011
- [ACAS Factsheets "Social Networking"](#)
- Guidance for safer working practice for adults who work with children and young people in education settings

This policy has been reviewed by our legal department to ensure compliance with the above legislation and our statutory duties.

14. Further information

There are a number of related policies and procedures that employees should be aware of including:

- Code of Conduct
- Dignity at work
- Disciplinary policy and procedure
- Grievance policy and procedure
- Whistleblowing policy

In addition, employees job descriptions may contain requirements relating to their conduct. There are also professional code of conducts e.g. teachers standards, that relate to the work an employee does and how it is done.

15. Examples of social media sites

<p>Social networking sites (e.g. Facebook)</p>	<p>Users create personal profiles, add other users as friends and exchange messages, including automatic notifications when they update their own profile. Additionally, users may join common-interest user groups, organised by common characteristics.</p>
<p>Blogging and micro-blogging sites (e.g. Twitter)</p>	<p>A blog is a type of website or part of a website usually maintained by an individual with regular entries of commentary and descriptions of events (blogging). A micro-blog is simply smaller in size.</p>
<p>Professional networking sites (e.g. LinkedIn)</p>	<p>Business-related social networking sites mainly used for professional networking. Users maintain a list of contact details of people with whom they have some level of relationship, called connections. This list of connections can then be used to build up a contact network, follow different companies and find jobs, people and business opportunities.</p>
<p>Online communities (e.g. MySpace)</p>	<p>An online community of users' personal profiles. These typically include photographs, information about personal interests and blogs. Users send one another messages and socialise within the community.</p>
<p>Video sharing websites (e.g. YouTube)</p>	<p>A website on which users can upload, share, and view videos. A wide variety of user-generated video content is displayed, including film and TV clips as well as amateur content such as video blogging. Most videos enable users to leave and exchange comments.</p>
<p>Collaborative web projects (e.g. Wikipedia)</p>	<p>Web-based projects where articles are written collaboratively by volunteers around the world, and almost all articles are freely editable by any visitor.</p>