



**Synergy** SCHOOLS  
*Learn, Grow & Shine Together*

## Social Media Policy (July 2023)

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### 1 INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

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*.

While recognising the benefits of these media for new opportunities for communication, this policy sets out the principles that the Synergy Schools' pupils, staff, parents and contractors are expected to follow when using social media. It is crucial that all stakeholders and the public at large have confidence in the federation'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 federation and the schools within it are safeguarded.

Staff members must be conscious at all times of the need to keep their personal and professional lives separate.

The purpose of having a school presence on social media is:

- to provide an effective school communication system that can be easily accessed by parents and the wider community alongside a school's website.
- to publicise school events.
- to announce any updated information.
- to highlight positive school achievements.
- to make school announcements (e.g. school closure due to snow).
- to provide a marketing tool for the school to a wider audience.
- to facilitate communication and networking opportunities for new and prospective parents.
- to maintain contact with past parents and past pupils.

### 2 SCOPE

This policy applies to Synergy School's governing body, all teaching and other staff, external contractors providing services on behalf of the school, 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.



This policy covers personal use of social media as well as the use of social media for official school purposes, including sites hosted and maintained on behalf of the federation (see sections 5, 6, 7).

This policy applies to personal webspace such as social networking sites (for example *Facebook*), blogs, microblogs 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

The Synergy Schools Federation is committed to ensuring that all staff members provide confidential services that meet the highest standards. All individuals working on behalf of the federation 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.

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 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.

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

The Synergy Schools Federation could be held 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 federation liable to the injured party.

## 4 RELATED POLICIES

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following school policies:

- Child Protection Policy
- Keeping Children Safe in Education
- Code of Conduct (Staff and Volunteer)

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

At all times, staff members must:

1. Consider the needs of pupils first and foremost and ensure that they are keeping them safe online.
2. Be conscious 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 and your personal interests.
3. Not engage in activities involving social media which might bring Synergy Schools into disrepute.
4. Not represent your personal views as those of Synergy Schools on any social medium.
5. Not discuss personal information about pupils, Synergy Schools' staff and other professionals you interact with as part of your job on social media.
6. 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 or schools within the federation.
7. Be accurate, fair and transparent when creating or altering online sources of information on behalf of Synergy Schools Federation.

## 6 PERSONAL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

1. Staff members must not identify themselves as employees of Synergy Schools Federation or service providers for the school in their personal webspace. Staff should, though, assume that it is known that they work for Synergy Schools as a search on the Internet will usually reveal who you work for.
2. Staff members must not have contact through any personal social medium with any pupil, whether from Synergy Schools or any other school, unless the pupils are family members.
  - a. Synergy Schools 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.
  - b. If contact with pupils' family members through personal social media is likely to constitute a conflict of interest or call into question their objectivity, staff members are strongly advised to consider disconnecting with that contact.
3. Staff members should decline 'friend requests' from pupils they receive in their personal social media accounts.
4. On leaving Synergy School's service, staff members must not contact Synergy Schools' 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.



5. Information that staff members have access to as part of their employment, including personal information about pupils and their family members, colleagues, and school or County Council corporate information must not be discussed on their personal webspace.
6. Photographs, videos or any other types of image of pupils and their families or images depicting staff members wearing school uniforms or clothing with school logos must not be published on personal webspace.
7. School email addresses and other official contact details must not be used for setting up personal social media accounts or to communicate through such media.
8. Staff members must not edit open access online encyclopedias 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.
9. Synergy School or individual school logos or brands must not be used or published on personal webspace.
10. Synergy Schools does not expect staff to use social media for personal use during directed time. Staff members are obviously expected to devote their contracted hours of work to their professional duties.
11. 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.
12. 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 SYNERGY SCHOOLS**

Staff members can only use official school sites for communicating with pupils, parents and other groups interested in the life of the school. 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 without the express permission of the Executive Headteacher.

Staff members must at all times act in the best interests of children and young people when participating in or contributing content to social media sites.

### **A. CONTENT OF WEBSITE**



1. Staff members must not disclose information, make commitments or engage in activities on behalf of Synergy Schools without authorisation.
2. Information provided must be worthwhile and accurate; remember what is published online will reflect on the school's image, reputation and services.
3. Stay within the law and be aware that child protection, privacy, data protection, libel, defamation, harassment and copyright law may apply to the content of social media.
4. Staff members must respect their audience and be sensitive in the tone of language used and when discussing topics that others may find controversial or objectionable.
5. Permission must be sought from the relevant people before citing or referencing their work or referencing service providers, partners or other agencies.
6. Staff members must never give out their personal information such as home contact details or home email addresses on these sites.

## **B. USE OF IMAGES**

These rules should be followed by all staff members with respect to the use of images online:

1. Do not use children's names in photograph captions. If a child is named, avoid using the photograph.
2. Ensure that parental consent is obtained for a child to be photographed and videoed.
3. Only use images of children in suitable clothing to reduce the risk of inappropriate use. Some activities, for example swimming and drama, present a much greater risk of potential misuse.
4. Address how images of children on an organisation's website can be misused. Images accompanied by personal information, such as the name of a child and their hobby, could be used to learn more about a child prior to grooming them for abuse.
5. Consider whether the use of a particular image is necessary or enhances the message. If not, don't use it.
6. State written expectations of professional photographers or the press who are invited to an event. These should make clear the organisation's expectations of them in relation to child protection.
7. Do not allow photographers unsupervised access to children.
8. The federation's leadership team understands that staff who have administrative access to social media pages may need to take photographs/videos on their own mobile phone during events. This is acceptable under the following rules:
  - a. The photographs/video follow the rules set out above
  - b. Any photographs are deleted from the staff member's phone after being uploaded to the social media page and/or the school's server. This should take place within a week of the media being created.

## **C. MANAGEMENT OF CONTENT**

Currently Synergy Schools have individual school websites, a federation website and an individual Facebook page. These sites have the strongest privacy and safeguarding settings to prevent breaches of confidentiality. For instance:

- Our Facebook pages prevent users from posting.
- Visitors are only allowed to comment to a post. Even so, initially the post is hidden from view and is then 'unhidden' by a staff member who has administrator rights.
- We don't allow cross-posting to ensure that we have full control of the page content.
- Visitors to the pages are not able to send messages to the page.
- Images cannot be tagged with children's names and then shared which potentially breaks their anonymity.
- Our page isn't automatically recommended to potential visitors.



- Any videos are unable to be downloaded from Facebook.

The content and postings in Synergy Schools-hosted sites is moderated. Moderation is the responsibility of the Executive Headteacher who delegates this responsibility to staff with administrator permissions.

## **8 MONITORING OF INTERNET USE**

Synergy Schools monitors usage of its internet and email services without prior notification or authorisation from users. Users of Synergy Schools email and Internet services should have no expectation of privacy in anything they create, store, send or receive using the school's IT systems.

## **9 BREACHES OF THE POLICY**

Any breach of this policy may lead to disciplinary action being taken against the staff member(s) involved in line with Synergy Schools' Disciplinary Policy and Procedure.

A breach of this policy leading to breaches of confidentiality, or defamation or damage to the reputation of Synergy Schools or any illegal acts or acts that render Synergy Schools liable to third parties may result in disciplinary action or dismissal.

Contracted providers of Synergy Schools' services must inform the relevant school 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 school. Any action against breaches should be according to contractors' internal disciplinary procedures.

Synergy Schools Federation reserves the right to ban any user of its social media platforms who breaks any of these rules on a permanent basis.

**Adopted by the Governing Body on 21<sup>st</sup> April 2021**

**Reviewed in July 2023**