



# The Wilnecote School

## Title of Policy: Social Networking Policy

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## Social Networking Policy

### Introduction

The rapid emergence of new technologies has brought about the opportunity to communicate with others in a variety of new ways. Increasingly, technology has become a vital part of both our working and our social lives and, when used responsibly, it can be a positive tool to enhance teaching and learning.

However, as with many new developments, the widespread use of social networking sites has implications for both individuals and institutions, none more so than schools. It is therefore important that as an educational establishment, we balance our duty of care to our staff and students with our duty to provide the best learning opportunities, while at the same time ensuring that we preserve our good reputation and that we meet our legal responsibilities.

This policy is just one in a series of policies linked to safeguarding and should be read in conjunction with the school's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy, Online Safety Policy, Whistleblowing Policy and Staff Code of Conduct.

### Purpose

The intention of this policy is to ensure that employees' use of social networking sites:

- does, when used explicitly for the purpose, enhance student learning
- serves to maintain the positive working relationships which exist in school
- does not reduce our ability to effectively safeguard students
- does not expose individuals or the school to potential legal action
- does not bring the name of the school into disrepute.

### Definition of 'social networking sites'

For the purposes of this policy, the term 'social networking' refers to any websites which allow individuals to interact with others, by sharing information, opinions, knowledge, interests, pictures, video clips or photographs. This includes sites such as Facebook, MSN Messenger, LiveJournal, Indaba, Ning, Flickr, ooVoo and Twitter but also covers other web-based services including podcasts, blogs, wikis and video sharing sites such as YouTube. Please note that this is not an exhaustive list; due to the rapid emergence of new sites, this policy is not limited to the named sites.

### Scope

This policy applies to all staff who work at The Wilnecote School. This includes teachers at all levels of responsibility, supply staff, support staff, including part time support staff, governors, volunteers, external service providers who work with our students and contractors.

## **Our Expectations**

Employees are personally responsible for the information they choose to publish online. The school encourages all of its staff to take care in protecting their privacy and that of the school, our students and their families.

The school regards all e-communications as being within the public domain, given that no one has control of the content once it is sent. In light of this, online activities should reflect the same levels of respect, consideration, honesty and professionalism that a colleague would use in person and this should be consistent with the standards and expectations outlined in '*Ensuring Excellence*'. Similarly, personal views expressed concerning non-school issues should not be in conflict with our school's ethos and expectations. Racist, radical extremist or homophobic comments, for example, would be considered unacceptable on the basis that as a school we do not tolerate discriminatory attitudes.

## **Social networking during the school day**

Social networking for purely social purposes should not take place during the school day, except for during an employee's designated break or lunch time. Where social networking sites are being used for educational purposes, this may take place at other points in the school day. However, colleagues need to be in a position to justify their use of the sites if required. In particular, the time spent using social networking sites, even if the aim is to enhance teaching and learning, should not be to the extent that it interferes with an employee's primary job responsibilities. The impact of its use should be measurable and commensurate with the amount of time given to this activity.

## **Identifying oneself as an employee of The Wilnecote School**

In identifying oneself as an employee of The Wilnecote School on a social networking site, an individual could be seen as a representative of the school. This means that everything posted on to that individual's page has the potential to reflect on the school and its image. Any employee naming The Wilnecote School also takes on the responsibility of representing the school in a professional manner and must therefore ensure that their profile and related content is consistent with how they wish to present themselves to colleagues, parents and students as well as being consistent with the image and ethos of the school.

## **References to school-based issues and stakeholders**

Discussions of school-based matters should be undertaken with caution. If an employee does express a view on a school-based matter, it is important that the employee makes it clear that the view does not represent that of the school itself.

Care must also be taken in making reference to other staff, students, parents, governors or any other member of our school community. Our relationship with our stakeholders is crucial and could be damaged through the making of ill-considered comments. Students in particular should not be referred to by name and any negative comments about members of our school community should not be made. Images of colleagues should not be placed onto any online site without first gaining permission from that colleague. Images of colleagues should be removed immediately upon their request. If a colleague has any doubt about the appropriateness of a comment or posting, they should err on the side of caution. It is important to remember that posts are archived online and cannot be permanently deleted.

### **Confidential information**

As a school, we often legitimately need to discuss confidential information with colleagues. This type of information should not be discussed or referred to, even implicitly, on social networking sites. This includes discussions on private messaging sections of these sites, which are not guaranteed to be a secure form of communication.

### **Safeguarding and Child Protection**

#### **▪ Friendships with students**

It is the policy of The Wilnecote School that employees are not personal 'friends' with current students on social networking sites. This is a measure to protect both vulnerable students and also colleagues from malicious allegations. Employees are permitted to communicate in forum groups with students where this is linked to their learning. Our experience has shown the use of forum groups on social networking sites to have been highly beneficial to student progress and the school does not want to discourage this. However, it is an employee's obligation to inform a member of SLT should they begin to feel that a student is misusing a forum site for purposes other than educational.

#### **▪ Friendships with ex students**

Employees may choose to be 'friends' on a social networking site with ex-students but, again, must remember that the content of their posts will reflect on them and may reflect on the school and others in the school community. It is also worth remembering that many students will still have siblings in the school who may well have access to their social network pages, as may their parents.

#### **▪ Posting of videos or photographs of students**

Videos, photographs or any other images of students should not be posted on any online forum without first having received signed authorisation from the parents/carers. However, the use of images of students on the school website, or for whole school publicity purposes, does not fall within the

Social Networking Policy. In all circumstances, images which identify students as being members of The Wilnecote School should only be used with extreme care.

### **Copyright and other legal issues**

Employees of The Wilnecote School must comply with the law with regard to copyrights and plagiarism. The work of others should not be posted on sites without permission unless it is in the form of brief quotations, which comply with 'fair use' exceptions.

Employees must also consider their legal position with regard to libel and defamation of character. Writing defamatory statements can result in legal action, brought by the victim. Furthermore, the school may take its own action if it feels an employee has brought the school's name into disrepute.

### **Conclusion**

The Wilnecote School is keen to embrace emerging technologies, such as social networking sites. Indeed, many of our students have already gained from the revision forums, which are used successfully by an increasing number of departments. Our aim is not to discourage this use but merely to ensure that all of our school community, both staff and students, remain safe while doing so. This policy, along with Continuing Professional Development sessions offered throughout the year, seeks to ensure that staff are well informed, enabling them to use social networking sites, confident in their ability to protect themselves and our students.