



Parental use of social networking and internet sites and other types of Social Media communication

Dear Parents and Carers

Overview

Social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter and social communication apps, such as WhatsApp are now widely used to communicate with one another. This type of media can be beneficial as it allows people to communicate in quick ways that were not previously possible. Social media is used widely and can be very useful when used effectively, such as promoting positives, reminders, queries and developing friendships. More so over the last eight months, digital communication has been needed and from a school's perspective, has enabled us to communicate with our community to keep in touch. Currently, with Covid-19 restrictions being adhered to, we are looking ahead to how we are able to manage the Christmas festivities, such as 'class productions' and we are looking to utilise the positive aspects of social media to support us with our ideas.

However, such sites can be inappropriately used by some as a means of expressing negative or offensive views about schools and their staff. Following on from our Remote Learning Policy, this letter sets out the school's approach to parental use of such sites and sets out the procedures we will follow and action we may take when we consider that parents have used such facilities inappropriately. When we have referred to "parent" in this letter, we also include carers; relatives; or anyone associated with the school.

Objectives

The purpose of this letter is to:

- Encourage social communication groups/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 communication groups/networking sites;
- Safeguard the reputation of the school from unwarranted abuse on social communication groups/networking sites;
- Clarify what the school considers to be appropriate and inappropriate use of social communication groups/networking sites by parents;
- Set out the procedures the school will follow where it considers parents have inappropriately or unlawfully used social communication groups/networking sites to the detriment of the school, its staff or its pupils, and anyone else associated with the school community;
- Set out the action the school will consider taking if parents make inappropriate use of social communication groups/networking sites.

Appropriate use of social communication/networking sites by parents

Social communication groups/networking sites have the 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

Headteacher: Mrs N Mace
Address: Tithepit Shaw Lane, Warlingham, Surrey CR6 9AQ
Telephone: 01883 622000 Email: office@hamsey.surrey.sch.uk
Website: www.hamsey.surrey.sch.uk

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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, its staff, its 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 private and confidential discussions with the school be more appropriate? e.g. if there are serious allegations being made/concerns being raised this should not be via social media. Social media/internet sites/communication groups must not be used to name individuals or to make abusive comments of any sort.
- Are such comments likely to cause emotional or reputational harm to individuals 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 on 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/Communication apps 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 rarely appropriate to do so. Other channels, such as a private and confidential discussion with the school, 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/communication apps. (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/homophobic comments;
- Posting comments which threaten violence.
- Where our safeguarding policy is breached, such as when photographs are posted on social media without parents/carers permissions which enables others to identify which school a pupil attends. Some pupils are not allowed for safeguarding purposes to be on social media and this could put their lives or others at risk.

As part of our on-line learning, we teach children about how to conduct themselves appropriately and stay safe on social media and communication devices. Parents should also ensure that their children are not using social networking/internet sites/communication devices/Apps 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/Apps/devices. Parents are the primary role models for their children and must lead by example in this way.

Procedures the school will follow if inappropriate use continues

The school will always try to deal with concerns raised by parents in a professional and appropriate manner and we ask that you allow us the time to do this. We recognise that sometimes in the heat of the moment you may post something in anger but we politely request that you use the correct channels to report a problem. We understand that parents may not always realise when they have used social networking sites/communication Apps 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. Often, the damage is already done, so I would urge you to stop and think before posting anything on social media. If the parent refuses to remove an offensive post and continues to use social networking sites/communication apps 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 racial or homophobic 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 Networking site to complain about the content of the site and ask for removal of the information;
- Take other legal action against the individual.

We would like to thank you for the lovely comments our community does post on social media and the recommendations to join Hamsey Green, which are always so lovely to read. We would also like to thank our parents and carers who come and speak with us when they have any concerns or suggestions to raise, which we value. We will be in communication with you shortly after the half term holiday to explain our plans for the Christmas festivities.

Kind regards



Mrs N Mace
Headteacher