Social Media Policy

Policy prepared by: OAT Model Policy

Responsible for policy: Miss T. Dale

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1. Introduction

1.1 As the employer of staff in our Academies, Ormiston Academies Trust (OAT) recognises the statutory responsibilities related to employment. Day to day management of staff is delegated to the Principal and line managers in each academy. Throughout this document reference is made to the responsibilities held by the Governing Body/Principal for operational purposes. Ultimate responsibility rests with the Trust.

1.2 The Governing Body of George Salter Academy is committed to ensuring that all staff are aware of their responsibilities in connection with the growing use of social networking sites. It recognises that the use of such sites has become a very significant part of life for many people. They provide a positive way to keep in touch with friends and colleagues, and can be used to exchange ideas and thoughts on common interests. Examples of such sites include, but are not limited to, blogs (short for web log), Myspace, Facebook, Twitter, Bebo, YouTube, Instagram, Windows Live Spaces, MSN, forums, bulletin boards, multiplayer online gaming, chatrooms and instant messenger.

1.3 The Governing Body, together with the Trust, will ensure that all staff are made aware of this policy and any other related ICT protocols. This policy shall be easily accessible to staff and new staff should also be made aware of the policy.

1.4 Staff are expected to keep a professional distance from students and there should be a clear separation of the private social lives of staff and those of students. Please see 6.1.2. There is no need for social networking to go on between staff and students and should be prohibited. The exception to this would be where an academy uses social networking sites as a communication tool with parents, the community and the wider population. (See para 6.1.14)

1.5 It is important that staff are able to use technologies and services effectively and flexibly whilst ensuring that they do not make themselves vulnerable. However, it is also important to ensure that this is balanced with the Governing Body's duty to safeguard children and the reputation of the Trust, the Academy and the wider community.

2. Who does this policy apply to?

2.1 This policy applies to all employees of the Trust working in the Academy.

3. Aims

3.1 This policy aims to:
- Enable employees to use social networking sites safely and securely
- Ensure that employees are aware of the risks associated with the inappropriate use of social networking sites
- Safeguard employees in connection with the use of social networking sites and ensure they do not make themselves vulnerable
- Ensure the Governing Body maintains its duty to safeguard children and the reputation of the Trust, the Academy and the wider community

4. Legislation

4.1 The following legislation must be considered when adhering to this policy:
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Data Protection Act 1998

- The common law duty of confidentiality
- The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
- Computer Misuse Act 1990, amended by the Police and Justice Act 2006

5. Responsibilities

5.1 The Governing Body

The Governing Body shall:
- Ensure this policy is implemented and procedures are in place that deal with the use of social networking sites.
- Ensure that all employees have access to this policy and that new employees are made aware of it.

5.2 The Principal/Line Managers

The Principal/Line Managers shall:
- Be familiar with this policy and guidelines and ensure that employees understand the policy and their own responsibilities.
- Ensure that staff are aware of the risks of the use of social networking sites and the possible implications of the inappropriate use of them.
- Make available, where appropriate, training on social media to staff members
- Instigate disciplinary procedures where appropriate to do so.
- Seek advice where necessary from the Trust HR function on the approach to be adopted if they are made aware of any potential issue.

5.3 Staff

Staff shall:
- Behave responsibly and professionally at all times in connection with the use of social networking sites.
- Co-operate with management in ensuring the implementation of this policy.

5.4 The OAT HR Function

- Provide the necessary professional advice and support to the Governing Body and all Academy staff when required

6. Use of Social Networking Sites

6.1   For their own security employees' should regularly review their privacy settings on all their social networking sites; however all communication via social networking sites should be made with the awareness that anything said, shown or received could be made available, intentionally or otherwise, to an audience wider than that originally intended. It is therefore advised that staff follow the following procedures:

6.1.1   Staff must not access social networking sites for personal use via Academy information systems or using Academy equipment other than at lunch periods or outside their contracted working hours.

6.1.2   Staff must not accept students as friends – personal communication could be considered inappropriate and unprofessional and makes staff vulnerable to allegations. The exception to this is where students are family members.

6.1.3   Staff are advised not to be friends with recent students. The potential for staff to be compromised in terms of wall content and open to accusations makes the risk not worth taking.

6.1.4   Staff should not place inappropriate photographs on any social network space. The definition of an 'inappropriate' photograph could include, but is not limited to, any image that offends, affects safeguarding, and could affect the professional reputation of the academy or its staff or where the permission of the people pictured has not been expressly given. Please refer to 6.1.10.

6.1.5   Staff should not post indecent remarks.

6.1.6   If a member of staff receives messages on his/her social networking profile that they think could be from a student they must report it to their Line Manager/Principal and contact the internet service or social networking provider so that they can investigate and take the appropriate action.

6.1.7   Staff are advised not to write about their work, but where a member of staff chooses to do so, he/she should make it clear that the views expressed are his/hers only and do not reflect the views of the Academy. However, all other guidelines in this policy must be adhered to when making any reference to the workplace.

6.1.8   Staff must not disclose any information that is confidential to the Academy or disclose personal data or information about any individual/colleague/student, which could be in breach of the Data Protection Act.

6.1.9   Staff must not disclose any information about the Academy that is not yet in the public arena.

6.1.10   In no circumstances should staff post photographs of students on social media platforms that are not connected to the academy (please see 6.1.14). The exception to this is if an employee's own child(ren) attend an OAT academy. In these circumstances, it is accepted that images of their own children and their friends when at parties or such similar personal events may be posted. Care should be taken to ensure the suitability of the images. Images should not be posted in relation to the academy.

6.1.11   Staff should not make defamatory remarks about the Academy /colleagues / students /parents or post anything that could potentially bring the Academy into disrepute.

6.1.12   Staff should not disclose confidential information relating to his/her employment at the Academy.

6.1.13   Care should be taken to avoid using language which could be deemed as offensive to others.

6.1.14   Where an academy uses social networking sites for communication purposes; e.g. it has its own Facebook page or Twitter account; these sites can be accessed via academy ICT equipment. However, this should be closely monitored and only those with administrator rights should communicate via these sites. Any misuse of the sites by staff, students, parents or the wider community should be reported immediately to the Principal. Any misuse of sites by the Principal should be reported immediately to the Chair of Governors.

6.1.15   Where staff are concerned that they are being subjected to online abuse they must immediately contact their line manager/Principal who will provide the necessary support in line with the academy's Bullying and Harassment Policy.

7. Monitoring the use of the internet

7.1   The academy reserves the right to monitor staff members' usage and their access to particular social media websites may be withdrawn in any case of misuse. Such misuse may result in disciplinary proceedings

7.2   Users of email and internet services should have no expectation of privacy in anything they create, store, send or receive using the academy's ICT system.

8. Disciplinary Action/Breach of Policy

8.1   If any instances of the inappropriate use of social networking sites are brought to the attention of the Principal, depending on the seriousness of the allegations, disciplinary action may be taken.

8.2   The OAT Disciplinary policy will be considered if an employee posts an inappropriate social media entry (e.g. tweet or Facebook entry) if it impacts on the academy (for example reputational damage) regardless of whether it was posted at work or at home. Serious breaches of this policy may constitute gross misconduct and can lead to summary dismissal.

8.3   Any breach of this policy may lead to disciplinary action being taken against the staff member involved in line with the academy's disciplinary policy. Examples include: misuse of the internet, having pupils as friends, usage which is outside the limits of personal use during the working day, breaches of confidentiality, defamation or damage to the reputation of the academy or any illegal acts that render the academy liable to third parties.

8.4   There may be instances where the Academy will be obliged to inform the police of any activity or behaviour for which there are concerns as to its legality.

9. Other policies and procedures

This policy will be supported by the following policies:
- Disciplinary policy
- ICT policies
- Internet use Policies
- Whistleblowing Policies
- Staff code of conduct
- Safeguarding Children in Education

10. Review

This policy will be reviewed every two years in consultation with the recognised trade unions.

11. Contacts

Employees are also encouraged to contact their trade union representative for advice and support where appropriate.

For advice on the content of this policy please contact:

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