

Education and Learning Procedures and Guidelines

SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDANCE 2023

INTRODUCTION

Dumfries & Galloway Council recognises that social media has become a part of everyday life for our employees and can be used positively. Social media apps include Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Threads, Instagram, Tik Tok, Snapchat, Reddit, WhatsApp and LinkedIn. It is a rapidly changing landscape and many other social media apps are, and more will become, available. This policy covers all social media apps.

While a large amount of activity on social media is either entirely harmless or non-work related, concerns can arise where a post made by employee in a personal capacity, expresses views which the Council would not wish to be associated with. The behaviour expected online is not any different from that expected of employees on a daily basis in other methods of communication, such as verbal or written. As a basic rule, if an employee is not happy for others to see particular comments, media or information, they simply should not post it online. This applies even where privacy settings are applied to personal profiles.

Dumfries & Galloway Council's **Social Media Guidance (July 2020)** applies to all staff, including school-based staff, and should be read in conjunction with this LNCT approved guidance.

The **General Teaching Council Scotland's (GTCS) Code of Professionalism and Conduct** states that as a registered teacher:

- 1.2 You must maintain appropriate professional boundaries, avoid improper contact or relationships with pupils and respect your unique position of trust as a teacher.
- 1.3 You should avoid situations both within and out-with the professional context which could be in breach of the criminal law, or may call into question your fitness to teach, specifically:
 - You should not attempt to establish an inappropriate relationship with any pupil by means which might include (but are not limited to):
 - communication of a personal nature.
 - engaging in an inappropriate way through the internet or by other means with pupils.
 - sending e-mails or text messages to pupils, of an inappropriate nature.
- 1.4 You must uphold standards of personal and professional conduct, honesty and integrity so that the public have confidence in you as a teacher and teaching as a profession.
- 4.3 You should not make malicious or unfounded criticisms of, or accusations about, colleagues that may undermine them professionally or in the professional judgements they make.

In addition, Dumfries and Galloway Council's position is that:

- Teachers should not contact students for learning related work through social media. This should only be done through GLOW.
- Teachers should not accept pupils as friends/contacts on social media apps. Specific school social media accounts should only be set up with approval from the Headteacher, with the appropriate local authority permission. Within the GTCS Code of Professionalism and Conduct it is clearly stated that teachers are required to be mindful that the internet and social networking can quickly blur the professional boundary between teacher and pupil. Teachers need to be alert to the risk that actions which might, on the face of it, seem quite innocent, can be misunderstood and misconstrued by others. Teachers must avoid inappropriate communication (including via social networking) with individuals under 18 or in relation to whom you they be in a position of trust or have a professional relationship.
- Everything that is published online is in the public domain and as such you, as a teacher, must be prepared for others to post comments.
- Teachers should ensure that your contributions are both accurate and measured.
- All teachers should be respectful to and of their colleagues.
- You will not make public critical comments about Dumfries and Galloway Council as your employer. Failure to adhere to this could be regarded as a disciplinary matter. This is consistent with all employees of Dumfries & Galloway Council. You must also not share comments which could be deemed to be critical of Dumfries and Galloway Council.
- You must be aware that creating libellous claims online make you and potentially your employer liable.
- You must report immediately to your line manager if you suspect that your social media account has been hacked or cloned and has been used inappropriately.

The above measures are designed to protect you in your role as a teacher.

Social Media and the Law

The use of social media is covered by a range of statutory laws, which include;

1. Communications Act 2003
2. Contempt of Court Act 1981
3. Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2009
4. Protection from Harassment Act 1997

In addition, users are obliged to comply with the terms and conditions of use of social media apps e.g. Meta (who own Facebook) have Terms of Service which states:

What you can share and do on Meta Products

We want people to use Meta Products to express themselves and to share content that is important to them, but not at the expense of the safety and well-being of others or the integrity of our community. You therefore agree not to engage in the conduct described below (or to facilitate or support others in doing so):

- You may not use our Products to do or share anything:
 - That breaches these Terms, the Community Standards and other terms and policies that apply to your use of our Products.
 - That is unlawful, misleading, discriminatory or fraudulent (or assists someone else in using our Products in such a way).
 - That you do not own or have the necessary rights to share.
 - That infringes or violates someone else's rights, including their intellectual property rights (such as by infringing another's copyright or trademark, or distributing or selling counterfeit or pirated goods), unless an exception or limitation applies under applicable law.

Further Guidance

Increasingly within our schools, there are issues relating to the use of social media by teachers, parents and pupils and young people. Increasingly Headteachers and staff are finding that posts are being made which include negative statements about the school and/or particular members of staff.

The Flow Chart (**Appendix 1**) outlines the recommended steps which can be taken in the event of schools and/or individual members of staff who are subjected to threatening and abusive comments and actions. An alternative is for an individual to refer the matter immediately to Police Scotland.

The steps in the flow chart could also be used if parents or carers exhibit abusive behaviour towards members of staff during face-to-face meetings.

A helpful set of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), regarding the use of social media, has been added at **Appendix 2**.

Rodger Hill
Schools' Manager – People
1 August 2023

Agreed by LNCT on 03 October 2023

GUIDANCE FOR HEADTEACHERS

Parental Actions Causing Alarm and Distress On Social Media

The Process:

Incident with Parent(s)

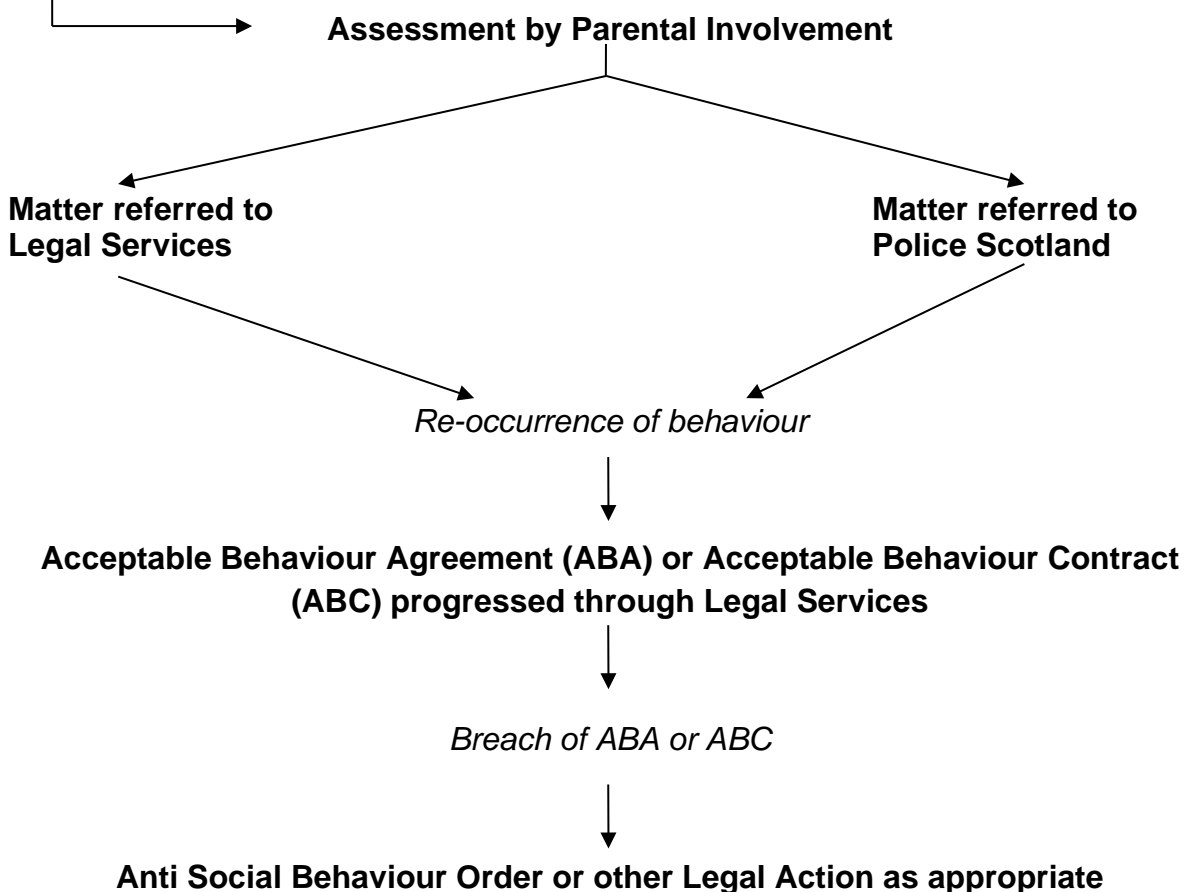
- Social media comments
- Online threatening or abusive behaviour

Meeting between Headteacher and Parent(s) to discuss the implications of their action for the school and for individuals they have named.

Re-occurrence of behaviour

Warning Letter issued to Parents by Education & Learning's Parental Involvement Support Officer indicating that the behaviour was causing alarm or distress.

Re-occurrence of behaviour



Social Media Use

Q. Should I accept students as friends on media?

No. You should not accept current pupils or students in a school as Contacts or Friends on social media. Giving access to personal information on profiles opens up the risk of inadvertently offering access to friends of friends, or contacts you do not know.

Only accept friends who are colleagues or personal adult friends, while always being aware that you have no control over the friendships or material they are publishing.

Teachers should not contact students for learning related work through social media. In the rare occasion where they may wish to do so, e.g. during student absence, they may use Glow. On Glow, interactions are recorded for your safety. Use video discussions in the same way as you would conduct face to face meetings in the school premises (are you in the room alone or with other students and/or staff?).

Q. What do I do if I receive repeated requests from students to become Friends?

Be firm. This type of request is inappropriate. You should reply with a clear rejection, maybe along the lines of: "I use this social network for my personal life and keeping in touch with old friends. If you need to see me about work then contact me at school or when I'm logged into Glow". If the student persists you should raise the issue with your line manager.

Q. Why should I not set up a social media group for my students?

While this might seem like a better idea for separating school and personal life, you are still open to the risks associated with befriending students on your own personal profile. In any case, you should always be mindful of school and authority policies.

Q. What about setting up a specific school social media account?

If you were to do this, then you must seek approval from your Headteacher and from your local authority.

Q. I am about to enter teaching and I various social media accounts. What should I do?

Many probationer teachers or students in training currently have social media profiles. Any new teacher should audit their privacy settings to restrict who can have access to their information.

If you have friends in the community in which you teach, you should recognise that you may teach friends' family members and that they may get access to personal

information about you. It is better to avoid such risks by either editing your profile or removing the information.