Social Networking Policy

September 2025

Introduction

Pele Trust and its schools recognises and embraces the numerous benefits and opportunities that social media offers. While employees are encouraged to engage, collaborate and innovate through social media, they should also be aware that there are some associated risks, especially around issues of safeguarding, bullying and personal reputation.

For the purposes of this policy, "social media" is a broad term for any kind of online platform which enables people to directly interact with each other, and which allows people to share information, ideas and views, including their comments and responses to the views of others. Examples of social media include, but are not limited to; blogs, Facebook, Tik Tok, LinkedIn, X (formerly Twitter), Threads Google, Instagram, Myspace, Flickr and YouTube, and professional body sites. New and emerging platforms should be assumed to be automatically in the scope of this policy.

Scope

This policy:
- applies to **all** employees and volunteers regardless of length of service. The policy also applies to Directors and Academy Committee members. It does not apply to agency workers or self-employed contractors.
- does not form part of any employee's contract of employment and it may be amended at any time.
- should be read in conjunction with the Pele Trust Staff Code of Conduct
- covers personal use of social media as well as the use of social media for official Pele Trust or school purposes
- includes personal communications via social media accounts that are likely to have a negative impact on professional standards or the school's reputation

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is not to restrict an individual's use of social media as we recognise the value of these networking sites as a communication and engagement tool. Pele Trust, and Pele Trust schools do engage in the use of social media for these purposes.

The purpose of this policy is to encourage good practice, to protect Pele Trust, its schools and its employees, and to promote the effective use of social media as part of the Trust and school activities. This policy seeks to set clear guidelines about what is and what isn't appropriate use of social media.

This policy covers personal and professional use of social media and aims to encourage its safe and responsible use by the school and its employees.

The policy applies regardless of whether the social media is accessed using the school's IT facilities and equipment, or equipment belonging to members of staff, and regardless of whether the social media is used during, or outside, of the Trust or school's usual hours of operation.

This policy covers all individuals working or officially representing Pele trust at all levels and grades, including full-time and part-time employees, fixed-term employees, agency workers and volunteers.

Roles and Responsibilities

Employees should:
- maintain professional boundaries with students at all times and should never communicate with current students via social media
- This is with the exception of family members and, where there is a genuine need, the children of close family friends
- not post any personal information that could jeopardise their own, their colleagues, or their family's privacy or identity. They must not post any personal information about pupils, parents or other parties within the school community.
- not use their work email address when registering for, or posting on, any websites (not just social media sites) in a personal capacity
- not use the school or Trust logo on a personal site
- remain professional and within the boundaries of the topic being discussed when using professional body message boards/forums or sites, such as LinkedIn
- be aware of their online reputation and recognise that their online activity can be seen by others including parents, pupils and colleagues on social media
- be aware that their own online presence and content can reflect on Pele Trust and its schools
- be conscious at all times of the need to keep personal and professional lives separate. Staff should not put themselves in a position where there is a conflict between their work and personal interests.
- ensure that any use of social media is carried out in line with this policy and other relevant policies such as Code of Conduct and Acceptable use of IT

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- be aware that any excessive use of social media in school may result in disciplinary action
- be responsible for their words and actions in an online environment. They are therefore advised to consider whether any comment, photograph or video that they are about to post on a social networking site is something that they want pupils, colleagues, other employees of the Trust to read. If in doubt, don't post it!

School leaders are responsible for:
- disseminating this policy to all staff, e.g. during induction, at staff meetings, through CPD
- addressing any concerns about inappropriate use of social media by colleagues
- responding to concerns or questions employees may have on the use of social media
- operating within the boundaries of this policy and ensuring that all staff understand the standards of behaviour expected of them
- escalating concerns to the Headteacher where necessary (or the CEO should concerns relate to the Headteacher)

Acceptable Use

Employees should be aware that content uploaded to social media is not private. Even if you restrict it to 'friends', there is still capacity for it to be saved, forwarded, changed and re-posted or distributed beyond the intended recipients. Therefore, employees using social media should conduct themselves with professionalism.

Employees should not upload any content on to social media sites that:
- is confidential to the Trust or school, or its staff its students or parents, its suppliers, customers or contractors
- refers to the Trust or school, its staff or governors, its students or parents, its clients, its suppliers and contractors
- uses the Trust or school logos
- amounts to bullying
- amounts to unlawful discrimination, harassment or victimisation
- brings the Trust or school into disrepute
- contains lewd, sexually explicit, threatening, offensive language or comments, images or video clips, or similarly inappropriate material
- undermines the reputation of the Trust, school and/or individuals
- is discriminatory or offensive about work colleagues
- is defamatory or knowingly false
- breaches copyright
- is in any other way unlawful

Where the school has its own official social media accounts (e.g. X (formerly Twitter), YouTube, Facebook, Linkedin) posting can only be undertaken by those staff that are authorised to do so by the Headteacher and in accordance with this policy. Due consideration should be given to General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) when posting photographs of pupils.

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The Trust accepts that some employees will have family or personal/close friends who are also parents of current pupils so to that end are advised, rather than directed, not to accept or invite requests from parents of current pupils on their personal social media accounts such as Facebook.

All electronic communication with parents should be through the use of work email but if this takes place via social media it must be through the Trust or school's social media accounts.

It is accepted that communication via social media channels may occur between employees and their own family and close friends (who may also be pupils and/or parents) however the intent of this policy still applies and content shared between, or posted to close or personal friends, will not be a reasonable defence should those posts be deemed to breach the acceptable use standards.

Employees should be aware of both professional and social boundaries and should not therefore accept or invite 'friend' requests from, or communicate directly via social media channels, with pupils or ex-pupils under the age of 18.

Employees should note that the use of social media accounts during lesson time is not permitted.

Safeguarding

The use of social networking sites introduces a range of potential safeguarding risks to children and young people.

Potential risks can include, but are not limited to:
- online bullying
- grooming, exploitation or stalking
- exposure to inappropriate material or hateful language
- encouraging violent behaviour, self-harm or risk taking

In order to mitigate these risks, there are steps you can take to promote safety on line:
- Do not use any online information in an attempt to locate or meet a child
- Ensure that any messages, photos or information comply with existing policies

Reporting safeguarding concerns
- Any content or online activity which raises a safeguarding concern must be reported to the Designated Safeguarding Lead or headteacher
- Any online concerns should be reported as soon as identified as urgent steps may need to be taken to support and protect the young person
- With regard to personal safeguarding, you should report any harassment or abuse you receive online while using your work accounts

Reporting, responding and recording cyberbullying incidents

Staff should never engage with cyberbullying incidents. If in the course of your employment with this Trust/school, you discover a website containing inaccurate, inappropriate or inflammatory

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written material relating to you, or images of you which have been taken and/or which are being used without your permission, you should immediately report this to the headteacher at your school.

Staff should keep any records of abuse such as text, emails, voicemail, website or social media. If appropriate, screen prints of messages or web pages could be taken and the time, date and address of site should be recorded.

Action by employer: inappropriate use of social media

Following a report of inappropriate use of social media, a senior leader will conduct a prompt, initial investigation.

Any member of staff suspected of committing a breach of this policy (or if complaints are received about unacceptable use of social networking that has potentially breached this policy) will be investigated in accordance with the Pele Trust Disciplinary and/or Pele Trust Anti-Harassment and Bullying Policy.

If the outcome of an investigation leads to disciplinary action, serious breaches could result in the dismissal of the employee. Where conduct is considered to be unlawful, the Trust will report the matter to the police and other relevant external agencies.

Monitoring

All Pele Trust and school ICT systems may be monitored in accordance with the ICT Security Policy so personal privacy cannot be assumed when using school devices and networks.

Schools can monitor the usage of its own internet and email services without prior notification or authorisation from users (staff, contractors and pupils) when justifiable concerns have been raised.

Pele Trust respects the privacy of its employees. However, postings made on a personal account may attain a wide readership and will therefore be considered public rather than private. Publicly accessible postings may be investigated if there is a suspected breach of this or related policies.

Legislation

In applying this policy, the school/trust will adhere to its rights, responsibilities and duties in accordance with the following:

- Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000
- General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) 2018
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- The Equality Act 2010
- The Defamation Act 2013

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- Keeping Children Safe in Education 2023

And with Pele Trust's own policies including:
- Pele Trust Staff Code of Conduct
- Pele Trust Disciplinary Policy
- Acceptable Use policies (school)
- Safer Recruitment guidance

The internet is a fast-moving technology and it is impossible to cover all circumstances or potential issues therefore the principles set out in this policy must be followed irrespective of the medium.

When using social media, staff should be aware of the potential impact on themselves and the employer, whether for work-related or personal use; whether during working hours or otherwise; or whether social media is accessed using the employer's equipment or using the employee's equipment.

Staff should use discretion and common sense when engaging in online communication. There are some general rules and best practices in the list below, which staff may find helpful.

Social Media: how to use it safely (National Cyber Security Centre) - here
Social Media in the workplace (ACAS) – here
Propriety in digital and social media (Civil Service) – here

Our Schools

Belsay School

Darras Hall Primary School

Heddon St Andrew's CE Primary School

Ponteland High School

Ponteland Primary School

Richard Coates CE Primary School