Social Media Policy

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Version – 03

Version Control

Version	Date	Status	Author (AU) / Approver (AP)
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Draft 01	Dec 2022	To be ratified by Board of Directors	Trust Board (AP)
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Review

Next Review	Spring 2027

1. Introduction

Social media (e.g. Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, LinkedIn, WhatsApp) is a broad term for any kind of online platform which enables people to directly interact with each other. However, some games, for example Minecraft or World of Warcraft and video sharing platforms such as You Tube have social media elements to them.
Grove Learning Trust recognises the numerous benefits and opportunities which a social media presence offers. Staff, parents/carers and pupils are actively encouraged to find creative ways to use social media. However, there are risks associated with social media use, especially around the issues of safeguarding, bullying and personal reputation. This policy aims to encourage the safe use of social media by Grove Learning Trust, its staff, parents, carers and children.

2. Scope

This policy is subject to Grove Learning Trust's codes of conduct and acceptable use agreements.
This policy:

- Applies to all staff and to all online communications which directly or indirectly, represent the trust.
- Applies to such online communications posted at any time and from anywhere.
- Encourages the safe and responsible use of social media through training and education
- Defines the monitoring of public social media activity pertaining to Grove Learning Trust.

The trust respects privacy and understands that staff and pupils may use social media forums in their private lives. However, personal communications likely to have a negative impact on professional standards and/or the trust's reputation are within the scope of this policy.

Professional communications are those made through official channels, posted on a trust account or using the trust name. All professional communications are within the scope of this policy.

Personal communications are those made via a personal social media account. In all cases, where a personal account is used which associates itself with, or impacts on, the trust, it must be made clear that the member of staff is not communicating on behalf of the trust with an appropriate disclaimer. Such personal communications are within the scope of this policy.

Personal communications which do not refer to or impact upon the trust are outside the scope of this policy.

Digital communications with pupils are also considered. Staff may use social media to communicate with learners via a trust social media account for teaching and learning purposes but must consider whether this is appropriate and consider the potential implications.

3. Organisational Control

Roles & Responsibilities

- **Leadership Team**
  - Facilitating training and guidance on Social Media use.
  - Developing and implementing the Social Media policy.
  - Taking a lead role in investigating any reported incidents. Making an initial assessment when an incident is reported and involving appropriate staff and external agencies as required.
  - Receive completed applications for official Trust Social Media accounts.
  - Approve account creation.
- **Administrator**
  - Create the account following leadership approval
  - Store account details, including passwords securely
  - Activate two-step verification on the account where possible
  - Be involved in monitoring and contributing to the account
  - Control the process for managing an account after the lead staff member has left the organisation (closing or transferring)
- **Staff**
  - Know the contents of and ensure that any use of social media is carried out in line with this and other relevant policies Attending appropriate training
  - Regularly monitoring, updating and managing content he/she has posted via school/academy accounts
  - Adding an appropriate disclaimer to personal accounts when naming the trust

4. Process for creating new accounts

The trust community is encouraged to consider if a social media account will help them in their work, e.g. a phase or department Twitter account, or a "Friends of the school" Facebook page. Anyone wishing to create such an account must present a business case to the leadership team which covers the following points:-

- The aim of the account
- The intended audience
- How the account will be promoted
- Who will run the account (at least two staff members should be named)

- Will the account be open or private/closed

Following consideration by the leadership team an application will be approved or rejected. In all cases, the leadership team must be satisfied that anyone running a social media account on behalf of the trust has read and understood this policy and received appropriate training. This also applies to anyone who is not directly employed by the trust - including volunteers or parents.

5. Monitoring

Trust accounts must be monitored regularly and frequently (preferably 7 days a week, including during holidays). Any comments, queries or complaints made through those accounts must be responded to within 24 hours (or on the next working day if received at a weekend) even if the response is only to acknowledge receipt. Regular monitoring and intervention is essential in case a situation arises where negative comments, bullying or any other inappropriate behaviour arises on a trust social media account.

6. Behaviour

- The trust requires that all users using social media adhere to the standard of behaviour as set out in this policy and other relevant policies.
- Digital communications by staff must always be professional and respectful and in accordance with this policy. Staff will not use social media to infringe on the rights and privacy of others or make ill-considered comments or judgments about staff. Trust social media accounts must not be used for personal gain. Staff must ensure that confidentiality is maintained on social media (even after they leave the employment of the trust).
- Users must declare who they are in social media posts or accounts. Anonymous posts are discouraged in relation to school activity.
- If a journalist makes contact about posts made using social media staff must inform the leadership team immediately.
- Unacceptable conduct, (e.g. defamatory, discriminatory, offensive, harassing content or a breach of data protection, confidentiality or copyright) will be considered extremely seriously by the trust and will be reported as soon as possible to a relevant senior member of staff, and escalated where appropriate.
- The use of social media by staff while at work may be monitored, in line with trust policies. The trust permits reasonable and appropriate access to private social media sites. However, where excessive use is suspected, and considered to be interfering with relevant duties, disciplinary action may be taken.
- The trust will take appropriate action in the event of breaches of the social media policy. Where conduct is found to be unacceptable, the trust will deal with the matter internally. Where conduct is considered illegal, the trust will report the matter to the police and other relevant external agencies and may take action according to the disciplinary policy.

7. Legal Considerations

- Users of social media should consider the copyright of the content they are sharing and, where necessary, should seek permission from the copyright holder before sharing.
- Users must ensure that their use of social media does not infringe upon relevant data protection laws, or breach confidentiality.

8. Handling Abuse

- When acting on behalf of the trust, handle offensive comments swiftly and with sensitivity.
- If a conversation turns and becomes offensive or unacceptable, trust users should block, report or delete other users or their comments/posts and should inform the audience exactly why the action was taken.
- If you feel that you or someone else is subject to abuse by colleagues through use of a social networking site, then this action must be reported using the agreed trust protocols.

9. Tone

The tone of content published on social media should be appropriate to the audience, whilst retaining appropriate levels of professional standards. Ensure posts are:

- Engaging
- Conversational
- Informative
- Friendly (on certain platforms, e.g. Facebook)

10. Use of images

Trust use of images can be assumed to be acceptable, providing the following guidelines are strictly adhered to:

- Permission to use any photos or video recordings should be sought in line with the trust academies' procedures. If anyone, for any reason, asks not to be filmed or photographed then their wishes should be respected.
- Under no circumstances should staff share or upload pupil pictures online other than via trust owned social media accounts.
- Staff should exercise their professional judgement about whether an image is appropriate to share on trust social media accounts. Pupils should be appropriately dressed, not be subject to ridicule and must not be on any trust academies' list of children whose images must not be published.
- If a member of staff inadvertently takes a compromising picture which could be misconstrued or misused, they must delete it immediately.

11. Personal use

- **Staff**
  - o Personal communications are those made via a personal social media account. In all cases, where a personal account is used which associates itself with the trust or impacts on the trust, it must be made clear that the member of staff is not communicating on behalf of the trust with an appropriate disclaimer. Such personal communications are within the scope of this policy.
  - Personal communications which do not refer to or impact upon the trust are outside the scope of this policy.
  - Where excessive personal use of social media within trust time is suspected, and considered to be interfering with relevant duties, disciplinary action may be taken.
  - The trust permits reasonable and appropriate access to private social media sites during staff breaks.
- **Pupil**
  - Staff are not permitted to follow or engage with current or prior pupils of the trust on any personal social media network account.
  - The trust's education programme should enable the pupils to be safe and responsible users of social media.
  - Due to the age of pupils, they are discouraged from engaging with any social media directly.
- **Parents/Carers**
  - o If parents/carers have access to a trust's learning platform (e.g. Seesaw) where posting or commenting is enabled, parents/carers will be informed about acceptable use.
  - The trust has an active parent/carer education programme which supports the safe and positive use of social media. This includes information on school's websites.
  - Parents/Carers are encouraged to comment positively or post appropriately about the trust. In the event of any offensive or inappropriate comments being made, the trust will ask the parent/carer to remove the post and invite them to discuss the issues in person. If necessary, refer parents to the trust's complaints procedures.

13. Monitoring posts about the school

- As part of active social media engagement, it is considered good practice to proactively monitor the Internet for public postings about the school/academy.
- The trust should effectively respond to social media comments made by others according to a defined policy or process.

14. Managing your use of Social Media:

- "Nothing" on social media is truly private
- Social media can blur the lines between your professional and private life. Don't use the trust logo and/or branding on personal accounts
- Check your settings regularly and test your privacy
- Keep an eye on your digital footprint
- Keep your personal information private
- Regularly review your connections – keep to those you want to be connected to
- When posting online consider; scale, audience and permanency of what you post
- If you want to criticise, do it politely.
- Take control of your images – do you want to be tagged in an image? What would children or parents say about you if they could see your images?
- Know how to report a problem

15. Managing school/academy social media accounts

The Do's:

- Check with a senior leader before publishing content that may have controversial implications for the school
- Use a disclaimer when expressing personal views
- Make it clear who is posting content
- Use an appropriate and professional tone
- Be respectful to all parties
- Ensure you have permission to 'share' other peoples' materials and acknowledge the author
- Express opinions but do so in a balanced and measured manner
- Think before responding to comments and, when in doubt, get a second opinion
- Seek advice and report any mistakes using the school's reporting process
- Consider turning off tagging people in images where possible

The Don'ts

- Don't make comments, post content or link to materials that will bring the trust into disrepute
- Don't publish confidential or commercially sensitive material
- Don't breach copyright, data protection or other relevant legislation
- Consider the appropriateness of content for any audience of trust accounts, and don't link to, embed or add potentially inappropriate content
- Don't post derogatory, defamatory, offensive, harassing or discriminatory content
- Don't use social media to air internal grievances.

Acknowledgements

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Grove Learning Trust

Social Media Policy Summary

At Grove Learning Trust, we recognise the numerous benefits and opportunities which a social media presence offers. All trust members are actively encouraged to find creative ways to use social media positively, following this guidance.

It is your responsibility to maintain a professional online persona and be mindful of your digital impact.

Always:

- **Use social media responsibly:** Be mindful of the privacy of others and avoid sharing confidential information.
- **Maintain a professional tone:** When using social media for the trust, use a professional and respectful tone.
- **Get permission:** Before sharing photos or videos, check permissions
- **Be clear about who you are:** If using a personal account to talk about the trust, clarify that you are not speaking on behalf of the trust.
- **Report problems:** If you encounter abuse or inappropriate content, report it immediately.
- **Think before you post:** Consider the permanence and reach of your posts before hitting publish.
- **Seek guidance:** If unsure about anything, consult a senior leader for guidance.
- **Disclaim personal views:** If expressing personal opinions online, use a disclaimer
- **Manage your social media settings:** Regularly review privacy settings and keep your personal information secure.

Never:

- **Post offensive content:** Always avoid posting anything that is derogatory, defamatory, harassing, or discriminatory.
- **Violate copyright:** Always ensure you have permission to share any copyrighted material.
- **Use social media excessively at work:** Excessive personal social media use during work hours may result in disciplinary action.
- **Engage with students on personal social media:** Staff must not follow or connect with current or former students on personal social media accounts.
- **Post confidential information:** Avoid sharing any confidential or sensitive trust information online.
- **Air internal grievances:** Don't ever use social media to air complaints about the trust.

Top Tip:
Always take time to consider the content of a post carefully.
Once it's been posted, it's no longer in your control.