

Parental Use of Social Networking and Internet Sites

Our Vision

From tiny seeds, we grow and learn together

Our school vision is inspired by the parable of the mustard seed. When planted and nurtured by a loving community, every seed can grow and flourish.

Our school is like the mustard tree; a place where all are valued and belong.

Our children are like tiny seeds; in good soil they can grow as loving, courageous and joyful individuals, ready to branch out and be good news in an ever-changing world.

Our team of gardeners enable each unique child to flourish, removing barriers, and supporting growth.

Little people can do big things through love, courage and joy

Jesus told them a parable: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a tiny mustard seed planted in a field. It is the smallest of all seeds but becomes the largest of plants, and grows into a tree where birds can come and find shelter."

Overview

Social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp and X and all other social networking sites, messaging platforms, online forums and other digital communication channels allow people to communicate in ways that were not previously possible. However, such sites can be inappropriately used by some as a means of expressing offensive views about schools and their staff. This document sets out Crookham Infant 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 document, we also include carers, relatives, or anyone associated with the school.

Objectives

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Encourage social networking sites to be used in a beneficial and positive way by parents

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

Appropriate use of social networking sites by parents

Social networking sites have 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 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? Social media/internet sites should not be used to name individuals and make abusive comments about those people. Please contact the school to discuss any concerns you may have.
- 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 to 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 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), there is usually a more appropriate way 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. (This list is non-exhaustive and intended to provide examples only):

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- Making allegations about staff or pupils at the school/cyber-bullying
- Making complaints about the school or staff on social media. Any complaints should always be directed to the school.
- Making defamatory statements about the school or staff at the school
- Posting comments which identify specific pupils/staff at the school
- Posting racist comments
- Posting any threatening comments
- Sharing confidential information about pupils, families, or staff.
- Posting photographs of children without appropriate consent. Parents should not share photographs or videos taken at school events that include other children unless they have the consent of the children's parents/carers
- Bullying, harassment, intimidation, or discriminatory comments.
- Content that could compromise safeguarding e.g. Concerns about the safety or welfare of a child must never be discussed or investigated through social media. Such concerns should be reported directly to the school's Designated Safeguarding Lead or through the school's safeguarding procedures.

Parents should also ensure that their children are not using social networking/internet sites in an inappropriate manner. It is expected that parents explain to their children what is acceptable to post online. We would remind parents that children under the age of 13 are not permitted to use most social networking apps/sites. Parents are also expected to monitor their children's online activity, including in relation to their use of social media.

Procedure the School will follow if inappropriate use continues

Crookham Infant School will always try to deal with concerns raised by parents in a professional and appropriate manner. Parents are encouraged to raise concerns directly with the school through the appropriate complaints procedure before discussing concerns on social media. However, should the school need to intervene, we 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. If the parent refuses to do this and continues to use social networking sites in a manner the school considers inappropriate, the school will consider taking the following action:

- Online abuse directed at staff, parents, governors, or pupils will not be tolerated. Serious incidents may be referred to the relevant authorities.
- Any inappropriate use of social networking sites should be reported to the Headteacher immediately and they will contact the adults involved directly.
- Take legal advice on the appropriate actions the school should take

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- Set out the school's concerns in writing, giving a warning and requesting that the material in question is removed
- Contact the Police where the school feels it appropriate to do so
- If the inappropriate comments have been made on a school website or online forum, the school may act 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
- Consider legal action against the individual
- Online abuse directed at staff, parents, governors, or pupils will not be tolerated. Serious incidents may be referred to the relevant authorities.

Appendix 1

WhatsApp groups can be a useful and efficient way to share information and support communication between parents. This guidance sets out the school's expectations to ensure that such groups remain a positive, respectful and appropriate forum for all members of the school community.

Please note that Class WhatsApp groups are not operated, moderated or endorsed by the school and messages shared within these groups are made by parents and carers in their personal capacity.

Expected Standards of Communication:

We would encourage all users of these groups to:

- Communicate in a courteous, respectful and considerate manner at all times
- Be mindful that messages are sent to a large and diverse audience
- Use language that reflects the school's values and sets a positive example for children
- Respect differences in opinion, background and culture within the school community.

What you should not use WhatsApp groups for

- To raise or discuss concerns, complaints or grievances about the school, members of staff, pupils or other parents
- To discuss individual children or specific incident;
- To post offensive, abusive, defamatory or inflammatory comments
- For arguments, disputes or confrontational exchanges.

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Raising Concerns

Any concerns regarding a child, another child, or any aspect of school life should not be raised via WhatsApp groups and instead, parents should raise concerns directly with the school through the appropriate channels:

- The class teacher in the first instance;
- A member of the senior leadership team, where necessary
- The school's formal complaints procedure.

This ensures that matters are addressed promptly, fairly and with appropriate context and confidentiality.