



# Social Networking Policy

December 2013

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# **Social Networking Policy**

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## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 As the employer of staff in our Academies, Northern Education Trust (NET) 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 The Blyth 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, Bebo, YouTube, 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. 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 The 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

- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- 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.
- 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 Trust 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.

6.1.2 Staff must not accept students as friends – personal communication could be considered inappropriate and unprofessional and makes staff vulnerable to allegations.

- 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.
- 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. The exception to this is if an employee's own child(ren) attend a NET 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.

## **7. Breaches of the Policy**

- 7.1 The Governing Body does not discourage staff from using social networking sites. However, all staff should be aware that the Trust and the Governing Body will take seriously any occasions where the services are used inappropriately. If occasions arise of what could be deemed to be online bullying or harassment, these will be dealt with in the same way as other such instances.

- 7.2 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.
- 7.3 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.

## CONTACTS

For advice on the content of this policy please contact:

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