Academies Trust

8th Floor, Angel Square,
Manchester, M60 0AG

Social Media Policy

Approved by Trust Board on 13 July 2022
Applicable from 01 September 2022

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1. Introduction

This Policy relates to all members of the Co-op Academies community, including but not limited to: pupils/students, parents/carers, staff, agency workers, contractors, volunteers, governors, trustees.

Co-op Academies Trust works on the principle that if we don't manage our social media reputation, someone else will.

Online Reputation Management is about understanding and managing our digital footprint (everything that can be seen or read about us online). Few parents/carers will apply for a school place without first 'googling' the school, and the Ofsted pre-inspection check includes monitoring what is being said online.

Negative coverage almost always causes some level of disruption. Up to half of all cases dealt with by the Professionals Online Safety Helpline (POSH: helpline@saferinternet.org.uk) involve schools' (and staff members') online reputation.

Accordingly, we manage and monitor our social media footprint carefully to know what is being said about our academies and our Trust and to respond to criticism and praise in a fair, responsible manner.

We encourage our academies to achieve the National Online accreditation to promote the very best use of social media for all stakeholders.

2. Staff, pupils' and parents/carers' social media presence

Social media (including here all apps, chat groups, sites and games that allow sharing and interaction between users) is a fact of modern life, and we accept that many parents/carers, staff and pupils will use it. However, we expect everybody to behave in a positive manner, engaging respectfully with our academies and each other on social media, in the same way as they would face to face.

This positive behaviour can be summarised as not making any posts which are bullying, aggressive, rude, insulting, illegal or otherwise inappropriate (e.g. racist, homophobic, transphobic). This applies both to public pages and to "private" posts, e.g. parent chats, pages or groups.

All members of the Trust community are reminded that (particularly in the context of social media), it is important that permission is sought before uploading photographs, videos or any other information about other members of the Trust community.

The statements in the Acceptable Use Policies (AUPs) which members of the Trust community may be required to sign are also relevant to social media activity, as is the Trust's Data Protection Policy.

We will continue to work with, outline and role model to staff,students and parents/carers the very best of safe practise using social media at every best opportunity. e.g. parental guidance to help their children, messages in Central Updates.

Parents/Carers

If parents/carers have a concern about the school, we would urge them to contact us directly and in private to resolve the matter. If an issue cannot be resolved in this way, our Complaints Policy should be followed. Sharing complaints on social media is unlikely to help resolve the matter, but can cause upset to staff, pupils and parents/carers, also undermining staff morale and the reputation of the academy (which is important for the pupils we serve).

Many social media platforms have a minimum age of 13 (note that WhatsApp is 16+), but our academies regularly deal with issues arising on social media with pupils/students under the age of 13. We ask parents/carers to respect age ratings on social media platforms wherever possible and not encourage or condone underage use. It is worth noting that Online Harms regulation is likely to require more stringent age verification measures over the coming years.

However, our academies have to strike a difficult balance of not encouraging underage use at the same time as needing to acknowledge reality in order to best help our pupils/students to avoid or cope with issues if they arise. Online safety lessons will look at social media and other online behaviour, how to be a good friend online and how to report bullying, misuse, intimidation or abuse. However, children will often learn most from the models of behaviour they see and experience, which will often be from adults.

Parents/carers can best support this by talking to their children about the apps, sites and games they use, with whom, for how long, and when (late at night / in bedrooms is not helpful for a good night's sleep and productive teaching and learning at school the next day).

Our academies and the Trust have official social media accounts and will respond to general enquiries if raised through these, but ask parents/carers not to use these channels to communicate about their children.

Generally speaking, email is the official electronic communication channel between parents/carers and the school, and between staff and pupils, unless an individual academy has let parents/carers know that communication will be through a different mechanism e.g. Google Classroom.

<u>Pupils/Students</u>

With the exception of pre-existing or otherwise reasonable relationships (e.g. extended family member, neighbour, family friend) pupils/students are not allowed to be 'friends' with or make a friend request to any staff, governors, volunteers and contractors or otherwise communicate via social media.

Pupils/students are discouraged from 'following' staff, governor, volunteer or contractor public accounts (e.g. following a staff member with a public Twitter account). However, we accept that this can be hard to control. In the reverse situation, however, staff must not follow such public student accounts.

Pre-existing relationships should be declared upon entry of the pupil or staff member to the school. Other attempts to form 'friendships' may be a safeguarding concern and should be notified to the DSL (if by a child) or to the Headteacher (if by a staff member).

<u>Staff</u>

Colleagues are expected to follow this Policy, and to adhere to our Code of Conduct (see Section 5 on social media).

Colleagues are obliged not to bring the Trust, academy or profession into disrepute through their use of social media. Colleagues should be mindful when discussing the school or its stakeholders on social media and be careful that their personal opinions might not be attributed to the academy or Trust, bringing the academy /Trust into disrepute.

No personal information about students, including photos should be posted on personal social media accounts, this can put children at risk and is against GDPR guidelines. It is also against the Code of Conduct.

3. Social media incidents

Breaches of this policy and of school AUPs (Acceptable Use Policies) will be investigated in accordance with an academy's Behaviour Policy (for pupils) or the Disciplinary Procedure (for staff).

Further to this, where an incident relates to an inappropriate, upsetting, violent or abusive social media post by a member of the academy community, we will request that the post be deleted and will expect this to be actioned promptly.

Where an offending post has been made by a third party, the school may report it to the platform where it is hosted, and may contact the Professionals' Online Safety Helpline, POSH (run by the UK Safer Internet Centre) for support or help to accelerate this process.

The police or other authorities may be involved where a post is potentially illegal or dangerous.

4. Extremism

Our academies have obligations relating to radicalisation and all forms of extremism under the Prevent Duty. Staff will not support or promote extremist organisations, messages or individuals, give them a voice or opportunity to visit the school, nor browse, download or send material that is considered offensive or of an extremist nature. We ask for parents/carers' support in this also, especially relating to social media, where extremism and hate speech can be widespread on certain platforms.

5. Further questions

If parents/carers have further questions, they can contact the Headteacher / Principal at the academy; the NSPCC has a parent online safety helpline which can help with general issues that are not school specific.

Staff should also speak to their Headteacher / Principal (or relevant Trust SLT member for central / hub colleagues) in the first instance, who may then call on the expertise of internal or external colleagues or services if required.

6. Review

This Policy will be reviewed in consultation with our recognised trade unions once every three years, or earlier if required. This Policy is the joint responsibility of the Chief People Officer, Head of Marketing & Engagement, Head of IT and the Trust SLT's Safeguarding Lead.