



Social Media Code of Conduct for Parents and Carers

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Social Media Code of Conduct for Parents

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I Introduction

Social media is increasingly a part of many of our lives, in both professional and personal capacities, allowing us to easily connect with a wide range of people and organisations.

In creating this policy, the Trust is not seeking to dissuade the distribution of information online or the freedom of expression of parents/carers. Equally, the Trust is not seeking to stifle criticism; the Trust welcomes any and all feedback provided through the appropriate channels. The purpose of this policy is to encourage mindful reflection by parents and carers of their online interactions with Outwood Grange Academies Trust and their staff.

Whilst the Trust recognises the value of social networking, it is important to be mindful of the potential risks in using services, which can at times blur the line between professional and personal, private and public. Social media websites, whilst offering much potential for sharing information, can be used to fuel campaigns and circumnavigate legitimate complaints against schools and academies, including against staff, and in some cases other parents/carers or students. Such use of social media can result in damage to the school community by damaging the Academy and/or the Trust's reputation. Outwood Grange Academies Trust considers the use of social media being used in this way as unacceptable and not in the best interests of students, the Academy/Trust and staff. Social networking sites set out clear rules about the content which can be posted on their sites and also provide robust mechanisms to report content or activity which breaches this.

As a Trust we relish the opportunity to be part of the regeneration of the areas we work in and it is important to adopt a partnership approach with parents/carers, and to speak directly with any members of the community involved when any concerns are raised. By posting content online, rather than through appropriate channels, parents/carers deprive the Academy/Trust of the opportunity to address concerns swiftly and effectively.

It is not always possible to prevent comments being posted online, however there are legal implications should comments make a credible threat to safety, name a member of staff who is subject to an allegation, contain hate content, contain factually inaccurate and/or defamatory content, or could be considered as harassment.

This document serves to outline the expectations of parents/carers, students and others in their use of social media. The purpose of this policy is to ensure that methods of communication are used effectively.

2 Legal Framework

This policy has due regard to any and all statutes and guidance including (but not limited to):

- Data Protection Act 1998
- Defamation Act 2013
- Protection of Freedoms Act 2012 (as amended)
- The Malicious Communications Act 1988
- The Communications Act 2003
- The Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001
- The Harassment Act 1997
- The General Data Protection Regulation 2018

3 Expectations

Parents/carers, students and staff have a reasonable expectation that all members of the school community will treat them with respect and dignity. This applies to all communication; written and verbal, online or otherwise.

Parents/carers are requested to set an example to students via their communication, in particular online. It's worth noting that cyber-bullying is a real concern for our students and parents play a key role in demonstrating to students what behaviour is and is not acceptable.

Outwood Grange Academies Trust expects parents and students to behave in a civilised manner online and not post abusive, harassing or inappropriate comments regarding any student, parent/carer or member of staff. Parents/carers are invited to use the Outwood Grange Academies Trust Complaints Procedure to address any concerns or complaints they have.

Outwood Grange Academies Trust recognises to value social media brings to the school community and would encourage the distribution of positive and congratulatory messages about the school and its students.

Outwood Grange Academies Trust also welcomes the use of social media for parents/carers, community groups etc to liaise between themselves regarding Academy matters, such as the creation of a social media page in advance of a trip in order to share ideas and co-ordinate travel. However, any such sites should not be set up using the name of the Academy or using any Academy or Outwood Grange Academies Trust logos or branding and must not be set up in such a way that they appear to be representing the Academy or the Trust. Such sites should also be set as private groups so that information is kept as private possible and access is limited to those who have a legitimate reason to do so.

All Outwood Grange Academies Trust schools have their own social media pages and any third party pages set up with the intention of imitating or impersonating these pages will be removed.

Outwood Grange Academies Trust will not tolerate abusive or disruptive behaviour within any area of the Academy grounds or on social media. The Academy retains the right to withdraw permission for parents/carers to enter the Academy site, under Section 547 of the Education Act 1996, to ensure the safeguarding of students and staff. Parents/carers or students making inappropriate comments online towards staff or other students will be asked to remove said comments immediately. Parents who make threats of physical harm towards any student, parent or staff member may be banned from the Academy grounds. Students may face other disciplinary sanctions as a result of any inappropriate behaviour online.

It will always be the intention of the Academy and Trust to resolve any concerns or complaints (see complaints policy) at the earliest possible stage and we would always encourage those with concerns to raise them with the appropriate person/Academy in the first instance.

4 Code of Conduct

Outwood Grange Academies Trust would expect that parents/carers and students support them in providing a safe, positive and respectful learning environment for their children/themselves by:

- Refraining from making complaints, negative comments or factually inaccurate statements about Outwood Grange Academies Trust, its Academies or any of its staff in any public forum including social networking sites. If a parent/carer wishes to make a formal complaint then the academy complaints procedure should be followed.
- Supporting the implementation of the Home-Academy Agreement which asks parents to support the Academy's approach to online safety, cyber-bullying and malicious communications.
- Showing respect and concern for others both inside and outside of the Academy
- Set a good example in their own speech and behaviour towards all members of the Academy staff
- Not naming any pupils or staff in a negative context online – instead parents and carers are invited to discuss matters directly with the Academy and/or use the Outwood Grange Academies Trust complaints procedure in order to address concerns/complaints.
- Work in partnership with the Academy for the benefit of children; this includes approaching the Academy to resolve any issues of concern and to discuss and clarify specific events in order to bring about a positive solution
- Respect the learning environment appropriately (both on and off site)
- Not posting photos of students at the Academy without obtaining the relevant consent (from the students or their parents/carers) and to be mindful of safeguarding implications when posting content online.
- Not posting photos of Outwood Grange Academies Trust staff. This includes using photos found on the Academy or Trust website.
- Not posting any content online under the pretence or guise of the Academy or Outwood Grange Academies Trust. This includes the use of Outwood Grange Academies Trust or Academy logos or the setting up of pages using the Academy or Trust name or branding.

5 Further Action

Any negative comments posted online result in a negative impact on the image of the Academy and the Trust. This negative impact can have a lasting effect and cause significant reputational damage which in turn affects the hard work all Outwood Grange Academies Trust staff do to deliver the best possible education for our students. Comments about individuals, such as individual staff members or other parents/students, can have serious consequences on their wellbeing. As outlined above, other methods of redress are available for all to use in order to address concerns/complaints (such as the OGAT Complaints Procedure) and therefore there should be no legitimate reason for this content to be published in any other form. For this reason, Outwood Grange Academies Trust will consider all negative content posted online extremely seriously.

The first course of action where any inappropriate content online is identified by the Trust, our Academies, or our staff will be for the person(s) responsible to be invited to remove this content. This could be by written request or those responsible may be asked to attend the Academy for a formal meeting where the request will be made verbally.

Neither the Academy nor the Trust will respond to complaints or allegations via social media sites.

Reporting offending material

If a person does not agree to remove any offending content or pages they have set up, then the Academy will report offending material to the Social Media site in question. Depending on the content, a referral may also be made to the Police. It is worth noting that many Social Media site's policies (e.g. Facebook, Twitter) have their own processes for dealing with such material which include the possibility of permanently disabling accounts and banning users.

In some cases it may be necessary for the Academy to seek legal advice on comments posted on a social media site. This may result in a letter from the Trust being sent out to the parents warning them that if content is not removed legal action will be taken.

If, after the steps above the content is still not removed, legal action may be taken directly against those responsible for the content.

In all cases where a criminal offence has been committed then Police advice will be sought at an early stage. If there is an immediate risk of harm to any member of the Academy community this will be reported via 999.

6 Related Policies

- OGAT Complaints Procedure