



## **Social Media Policy**

The commitment to diversity, equality, and inclusivity is at the heart of our values at Austin Friars. Equality means creating an environment where pupils have the chance to achieve their full potential, free from barriers, prejudice, and discrimination. Inclusion is about recognising that each pupil is unique and that their needs can be met in different ways. Diversity means recognising, respecting, and celebrating the added value that differences bring. Our unwavering dedication to our school values – Truth, Love and Unity - is how we fulfil our mission at Austin Friars. It is through our commitment to diversity, equality, and inclusivity that our pupils are empowered to be authentic and succeed.

Austin Friars is an equal opportunities employer and is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment.

### **Policy statement**

We recognise that the internet provides unique opportunities to participate in interactive discussions and share information on particular topics using a wide variety of social media; however, use of social media can pose risks to the School's confidential and proprietary information, reputation, and can jeopardise compliance with legal obligations including Safeguarding.

### **Who is covered by the policy?**

This policy applies to all members of staff. In this policy 'staff' includes teaching and non-teaching staff, Trustees, and regular volunteers (but access to systems is not intended in any way to imply an employment relationship). 'Visitors' includes anyone else who comes to the School, including occasional volunteers. This policy does not form part of any contract and it may be amended at any time.

### **Scope and Purpose of the Policy**

This policy deals with the use of all forms of social media and social networking sites. A social networking site is any website which enables its users to create profiles, form relationships and share information with other users. It also includes sites which have online discussion forums, chat rooms, media posting sites, blogs and any other social space online. It includes but is not limited to *Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter and Wikipedia*.

It applies to the use of social media for both business and personal purposes, whether during School hours or otherwise. The policy applies regardless of whether the social media is accessed using the School's IT facilities and equipment or equipment belonging to individuals.

A breach of this policy may be dealt with as a disciplinary matter using the School's disciplinary procedures and may result in a punishment commensurate with the type and seriousness of the breach.

Disciplinary action may be taken regardless of whether or not the breach is committed during School hours. Any individual suspected of committing a breach of this policy will be required to co-operate with the School's investigation, which may involve handing over relevant passwords and login details.

The School may request that individuals remove internet postings which are deemed to constitute a breach of this policy. Failure to comply with such a request may, in itself, result in disciplinary action.

#### **Personnel responsible for implementing the policy**

The Headmaster has overall responsibility for the effective operation of this policy, but has delegated day-to-day responsibility for its operation to the Bursar. Responsibility for monitoring and reviewing the operation of this policy and making recommendations for change to minimise risks lies with the Bursar in liaison with the Senior Management Team.

All line managers and Heads of Department have a specific responsibility for operating within the boundaries of this policy; ensuring that staff understand the standards of behaviour expected of them and taking action when behaviour falls below its requirements.

All staff are responsible for the success of this policy and should ensure that they take the time to read and understand it. Any misuse of social media should be reported to a member of the Senior Management Team. Questions regarding the content or application of this policy should be directed to the Bursar.

#### **Compliance with related policies and agreements**

Social media should never be used in a way that breaches any other School policies. If an internet post would breach any School policies in another forum, it will also breach them in an online forum. For example, staff are prohibited from using social media to:

- breach the School's ICT Acceptable Use Policy;
- breach any obligations with respect to the rules of relevant regulatory bodies;
- breach any obligations relating to confidentiality;
- breach the School's disciplinary rules;
- defame or disparage the School or its affiliates, parents, staff, pupils, suppliers, or other stakeholders;
- harass or bully in any way OR breach the School's Anti-bullying Policy;
- unlawfully discriminate against individuals OR breach the Equal Opportunities Policy;
- breach the School's Data Protection Policy (for example, never disclose personal information about a colleague, pupil or parent online);
- breach any other laws or ethical standards (for example, never use social media in a false or misleading way, such as by claiming to be someone other than yourself or by making misleading statements).

Behaviour online can be permanent and so staff must be extra cautious about what they say as it can be harder to retract.

Staff must also be aware of the particular risks to internet security that social media presents and take any extra measures necessary not to allow their actions on social media sites to create vulnerability to any School systems.

#### **Responsible use of social media**

Staff must be aware that their roles come with particular responsibility and they must adhere to the School's strict approach to social media.

Staff must:

- ensure that wherever possible their privacy settings on social media sites are set so that pupils cannot access information relating to their personal lives;
- seek approval from the Head before they speak about or make any comments on behalf of the School on the internet or through any social networking site;
- report to their Head of Department immediately if they see any information on the internet or on social networking sites that disparages or reflects poorly on the School;
- immediately remove any internet postings which are deemed by the School to constitute a breach of this or any other School policy;
- consider whether a particular posting puts their effectiveness as a teacher at risk;
- ensure they post only what they want the world to see, including pupils, parents and colleagues.
- avoid posting comments about school related topics, even if it is made clear that views on such topics do not represent those of the School, these comments could still damage the School's reputation.

Staff must not:

- provide references for other individuals, on social or professional networking sites, as such references whether positive or negative can be attributed to the School and create legal liability for both the author of the reference and the School;
- post or publish on the internet or on any social networking site, any reference to the School, colleagues, parents or pupils;
- circulate or post commercial, personal, religious or political solicitations, or promotion of outside organisations unrelated to the organisation's business;
- use commentary or material deemed to be defamatory, obscene, proprietary, or libellous. Staff must exercise caution with regards to exaggeration, colourful language, guesswork, obscenity, copyrighted materials, legal conclusions, and derogatory remarks or characterisations;
- discuss pupils or colleagues or criticise the School or staff;
- post images that include pupils;
- initiate friendships with pupils on any personal social network sites;
- accept pupils as friends on any such sites; staff must decline any pupil-initiated friend requests.

**Business use of social media**

Social media should not be used for purposes relating to the School's business or the delivery of its curriculum to pupils unless the prior authority of the Headmaster has been obtained. If an employee's duties require them to speak on behalf of the organisation in a social media environment, approval must be sought for such communication from the Headmaster, who may require the employee to undergo training before they do so and impose certain requirements and restrictions with regard to online activities.

Where the use of social media is authorised for such purposes this Policy must be followed. Any social media accounts, (including blogs, forums, Twitter etc), sites or pages used or set up for the purpose of furthering the School's business or facilitating the provision of the curriculum to its pupils shall remain the property of the School and the Network Manager must have access to it. If any member of the School community is contacted for comments about the organisation for publication anywhere, including in any social media outlet, these enquiries must be directed to the Headmaster.

### **Personal use of social media**

The School recognises that employees may work long hours and occasionally may desire to use social media for personal activities by means of School IT systems, the School allows such occasional use so long as it complies with the guidelines set out in this policy and in the ICT Acceptable Use Policy and does not interfere with employment responsibilities or productivity.

Excessive use of social media that interrupts staff productivity will be subject to a disciplinary procedure, consistent with this policy.

Personal social media postings should make it clear that individuals are speaking on their own behalf, be written in the first person and use personal e-mail addresses when communicating.

If a member of staff discloses their affiliation as an employee of the School, they must state that their views do not represent those of the School. For example, "the views in this posting do not represent the views of my employer". Profiles and any content posted should be consistent with the professional image presented to parents and colleagues.

### **Social media and the end of employment**

If a member of staff's employment with the School should end, for whatever reason, any personal profiles on social networking sites should be immediately amended to reflect the fact that they are no longer employed or associated with the School.

All professional contacts that a member of staff has made through their course of employment at the School, belong to the School, regardless of whether or not the member of staff has made social media connections with them.

All members of staff agree that on the termination of employment they will provide to the Network manager any relevant passwords and other information to allow access to any social media site, page or account which has been used or set up for the purpose of furthering the School's business or facilitating the provision of its curriculum and will relinquish any authority they may have to manage or administer any such site, page or account.

### **Respecting intellectual property and confidential information:**

Individuals should not do anything to jeopardise confidential information and intellectual property through the use of social media.

In addition, individuals should avoid misappropriating or infringing the intellectual property of other companies and individuals, which can create liability for the organisation, as well as the individual author.

Logos, brand names, slogans or other trademarks should not be used and confidential or proprietary information should not be given without prior written permission.

### **Respecting colleagues, pupils, parents, trustees and suppliers:**

Staff must also be aware that personal communication (by any media) between staff and pupils is not permitted unless under the direct authority of the Headmaster or Deputy Head and that such communication must be relevant to the day-to-day workings of the School, e.g. cancellation of fixtures.



Staff must be aware that inappropriate communication between staff and pupils may result in disciplinary action and that this could lead to dismissal.

**Monitoring and review of this policy**

The Headmaster in conjunction with the Bursar shall be responsible for reviewing this policy annually to ensure that it meets legal requirements and reflects best practice.

The Headmaster has responsibility for ensuring that any person who may be involved with administration or investigations carried out under this policy receives regular and appropriate training to assist them with these duties.

Staff are invited to comment on this policy and suggest ways in which it might be improved by contacting the Headmaster.

Headmaster  
September 2025