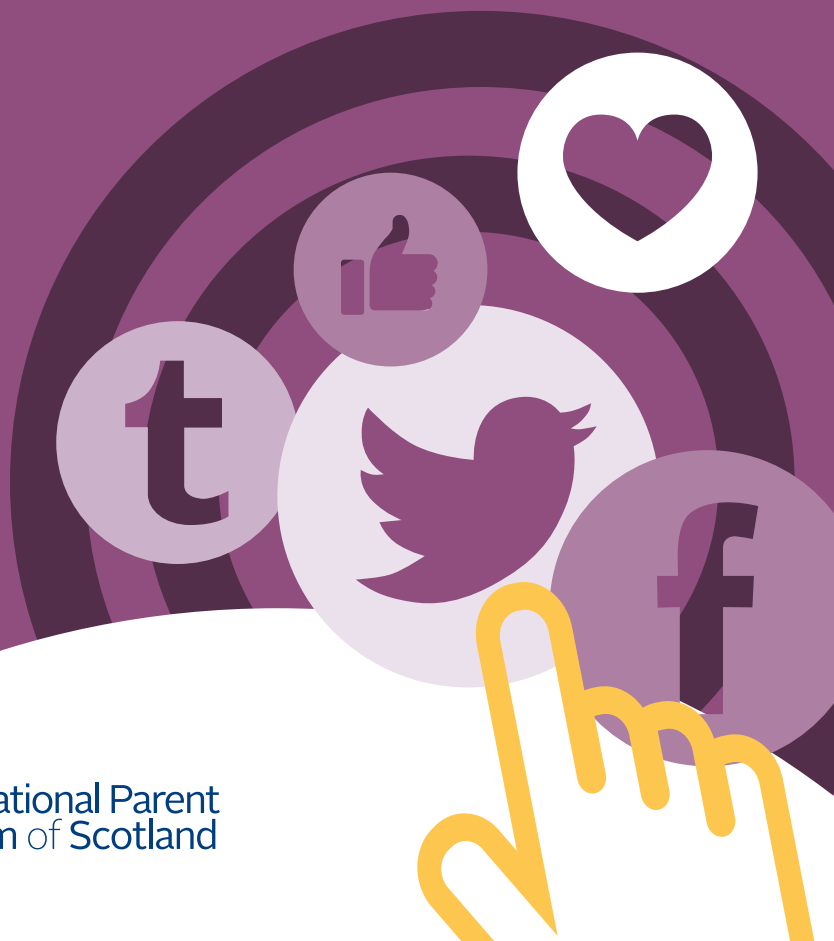


Clicked

social media and your
school community

A RESOURCE FOR PARENT COUNCILS





About this information

Most people use some form of social media or electronic communication (such as email) at home and/or at work. In school settings, there are strict guidelines for teachers on not using their personal accounts to communicate with pupils or parents^{1,2}. There are grey areas though, often to do with expectations and assumptions on the part of parents and teachers. And there have been recent issues of abuse and orchestrated campaigns against teachers and pupils, resulting in distressing situations for all.

The National Parent Forum of Scotland works in partnership with national and local government and other organisations involved in education and child wellbeing to ensure that parents play a full and equal role in education. The overall aim is to help every child to maximise their potential through their school life. So, we've produced this resource for Parent Councils so you can work with parents and wider school communities to raise awareness of some of the grey areas.

Social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Blogs and others, are great for allowing us all to interact and to create and exchange information online; and for keeping parents connected and up to date with what's going on at school. They are increasingly popular in schools as a way of broadcasting information. Parents can easily see what's going on in the classroom; send messages to teachers; find out when parents' evenings are on – all at a click. Teachers may use subject/department Facebook groups to communicate with pupils and give out homework. Schools may use their Facebook page to promote the school to prospective parents. And they may use Twitter to send news and updates to parents who are on the move.

All this is convenient and easy and, when it's working well, it can create a sense of community; bringing people with common interests – teachers, parents, pupils, communities – together. This includes island populations where pupils may be boarding out during the week or for longer.

¹ www.gtcs.org.uk/web/FILES/teacher-regulation/professional-guidance-ecomms-social-media.pdf

² The term 'parents' in this document includes guardians and any person who is liable to maintain or has parental responsibilities within the meaning of section 1(3) of the Children (Scotland) Act (1995), or has care of a child or young person.

But social media has its downside: not everyone uses it (through choice, out of principle, or lack of access) and not everyone uses it well. Some of that's to do with social media itself: there are good and bad things about the facility to post pictures or respond off the cuff. But some of it is just down to how people treat one another (wittingly or unwittingly), respect and trust (whether online or offline).

For example, choosing the children to appear in the posts requires careful consideration. One parent commented in our survey, 'Certain children (pretty girls mainly) tend to be used more than others in social media posts'. A teacher we spoke to said that some children are far more enthusiastic, active and involved than others and so their pictures tend to appear more often. And yet another said that it tended to be the children they were most around – those with extra behaviour or learning needs!

67%
of Scottish teachers
received abusive
comments
from parents on
Facebook and Twitter
about their performance
as a teacher

The parents and teachers we spoke to share similar concerns about what they like and don't like about social media. Safety and privacy are the big ones; but also, what social media is used for, when and how. Share and share alike means different things to different people and, in our hurry or in the heat of the moment, we may forget to think carefully about what we say and share online, and how it might come across. Schools may routinely use Twitter to inform parents, but Twitter is more likely to be used in professional rather than personal spheres. So, while it's great for exchanging information with colleagues, it may not be relevant to some parents.

How parents and teachers use social media is significant – not just because it makes for good relationships between them and within schools, but also because parents and teachers are role models for children and young people. We are the people who should be keeping children safe. At the very least, we parents should not be taking the role of 'embarrassing parent' to new levels. We should definitely not be one click off committing hate crime. A recent survey of teachers in Scotland found that 67% had received abusive comments from parents on Facebook and Twitter about their performance as a teacher³. What good will that do them or their pupils?

³ www.nasuwat.org.uk/uploads/assets/uploaded/ee100e8f-ad6a-400c-93a914cc908ac574.pdf

Although whole-school Twitter and Facebook accounts are increasingly popular, few schools have a policy which sets out what's expected of teachers, school support staff, parents and pupils, and which everyone involved in the wider school community can sign up to. Most schools have policies on taking and sharing photographs of children and require parents to give their permission. Most have anti-bullying policies, which may or may not include cyberbullying, and may be aimed at pupils rather than others in the school. Most have complaints procedures, but these may not specify that complaints should not be made on social media.

So, this resource is a starter for Parent Councils to discuss some common issues with your respective pupils, parents and teachers. It includes some background information and checklists; a leaflet for you to give to parents; and an outline 'agreement' for you to share with schools.

It's not rocket science – just common sense



It's based on what parents, teachers and Parent Councils have told us, and backed up with desk research.

If there's anything you want to let us know about, just email office@npfs.org.uk. We will be reviewing this document annually to ensure it is up to date and useful.

As part of this work, we've been gathering samples of social media policies. We can share these with you – there's no point in re-inventing the wheel. But the digital world is constantly changing, and so policies and practice have to respond to what's happening right now.



What parents told us

In June 2017, we surveyed parents through Parent Councils asking them what they liked and didn't like about social media, and what they wanted. Parents and carers⁴ responded from across Scotland, evenly split across primary and secondary schools. This is what they told us:

Using social media

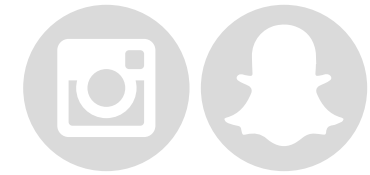
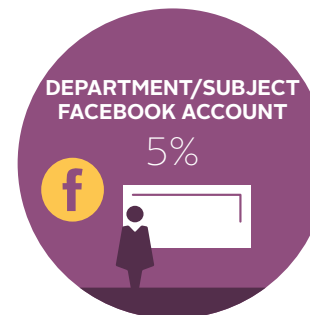
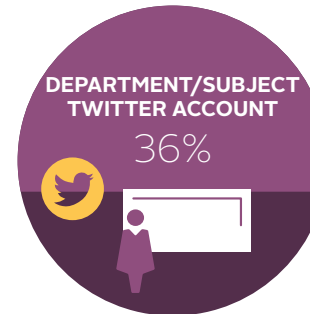
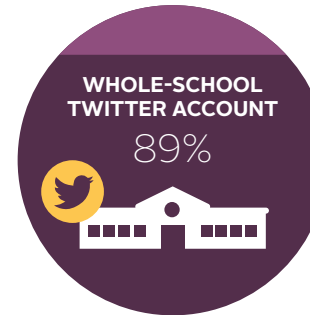


Around four out of five of the schools mentioned in the survey were using Twitter.

The most commonly used form was a whole-school Twitter account (89%). Much less frequent were department/subject Twitter accounts (36%); whole-school Facebook accounts (28%); and department/subject Facebook accounts (5%).

A few schools used other social media such as Instagram and Snapchat.

⁴ 134 parents and carers.



Most parents thought that:

- Schools should use social media to give information rather than for two-way communication
- Otherwise, some limited interaction would be fine, for example a 'well done'. Anything more should be through the school office
- Any posts should link to a contact person

For the one in five parents whose school didn't use social media, over half would like it, mainly because they thought it would keep them up to date.





What parents like about how their school uses social media

- Convenient (cuts down on letters home and texts)
- Immediate
- Easy to use
- Informative
- Opens up communication
- Fun: photos and videos
- Chance to see activities and events
- See daily activities (as children don't tell you)
- Kept informed and reassured when children are on trips
- Celebrates successes
- Gain sense of the whole school



It opens up communication and you can get involved

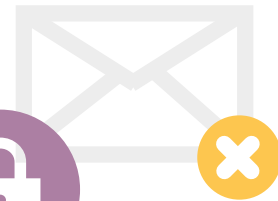
I love to see what my children have been doing throughout the day and my girls come home and ask me to look on Twitter to see if their photos or videos are on there

The school uses social media in a responsible way which celebrates the successes and achievements of the pupils exceptionally well



What parents dislike about how their school uses social media

- The lack of clear policy
- Little scope for opting out
- Not used enough/used too much
- Privacy concerns
- Lack of consistency: different teachers/departments in a school do different things
- Risk of missing important information, for example because of late night tweets
- They may not use the particular social media platform which the school uses (for example Twitter is used more in work settings than personal ones)
- Inappropriate comments (for example to complain about the school, a teacher or other children)
- Reinforces certain values/children/achievements. For example often used to celebrate success and not routine activities



I actually don't really like that the school communicates on Twitter – it's too public for my liking and informs anyone who follows of planned and past activity

Sometimes feels like information overload, too many tweets per day, an assumption that all parents will be using it etc...

Can sometimes be overtaken by parents' opinions rather than info but it is a useful forum for discussion





Social media policy

Over two thirds (70%) of the parents surveyed thought that schools should have a social media policy for parents and schools to sign up to. Most of those who thought it wasn't necessary said it was enough to rely on teacher professionalism, (but acknowledged there is a lack of training in engaging with parents online).



Absolutely, and not just a tag-along to a photo policy. It needs to be concise and encompass social media as used in all aspects of school life (teachers and other parents, school publicity etc)

I do not agree with Facebook as being the only tool or update mechanism. As a mother of three kids I actively DISCOURAGE any participation in Facebook due to peer pressure and online bullying etc

My main concerns are pupil security – I wouldn't want any pupil information such as pictures linking them to the school as I explicitly teach my children not to do this themselves on social media. Also, that if it is used for sharing information with parents that is not shared other ways then it will be possible to miss important information. The policy should make very clear what social media is and isn't sensible to be used for

I think the policy should describe how social media can provide a platform for regular two-way dialogue on school policy and events and achievements

Protecting children as much as possible whilst still sharing events, school and national/local education news and achievements

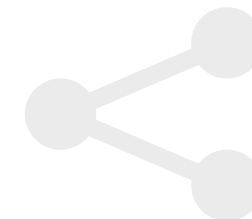


Parents thought such a policy should include:

- Option to opt out
- Terminology
- Privacy: rules on using pupils' names, photos and locations
- Rules for auxiliaries and parent helpers on school trips
- What schools will/won't share on social media
- How often parents should expect posts

Almost two thirds (63%) of the parents surveyed would like guidance on using social media, which would include the following topics:

- Expectations, for example explaining when school will use social media and that it should not replace face-to-face contact
- Parents sharing pictures, personal information
- Reminding parents how easy it is to misconstrue language online
- Boundaries, for example 'gossip' and swearing
- Respect for staff
- The law



Sample school media agreement

Schools are communities where people share and have common interests.

If we are good at encouraging others, being helpful, learning from one another, sharing good times, having fun, setting a good example, we can all do that online as well as offline.

When we are in company, most of us try not to talk about ourselves all the time; shout; insult other people; or tell the whole room our deepest secrets. So, if we don't do it offline, we shouldn't do it online.

How we are on social media is no different from how we should be in other aspects of life.

SCHOOL STAFF, PUPILS, PARENTS/ CARERS AND OTHERS – ONLINE AND OFFLINE – AGREE TO:

- Be polite and friendly
- Listen to each other
- Respect each other
- Set a good example on social media
- Use social media in ways which are good for pupils and the wider school community
- Abide by the rules of engagement, for example on Facebook
- Talk to one another directly if there's something we don't like (or like) or if we need to get information to or from somebody in a hurry
- Not discuss school business, pupils, teachers, parents/carers on social media; not engage in disputes online
- Act immediately to remove photos or comments which do not promote best interests
- Not post anything on social media which discriminates against individuals or groups on the basis of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation

What parents can expect of the school

1. The school is for everyone in it: we need to include everyone. Sometimes we can't please everyone.
2. Our professional responsibilities to children and young people come first.
3. The school has a social media policy.
4. We will give all parents/carers a copy of this policy.
5. It is for everyone connected with the school: we will ensure that all teachers, parent helpers and ancillary staff sign up to the social media policy.
6. We have rules of engagement on all school social media platforms.
7. We will ask parents/carers to give written permission for their child(ren)'s photos to be shared on the school's Facebook/Twitter/other account.
8. We will not share photographs or other details about a child without parent/carers' permission.
9. We will ensure that any parent/carers can opt out entirely.
10. We will moderate our school social media platforms to ensure all posts are respectful and comply with our policy.
11. We will ask you about parent/carers' preferences for information and alerts.
12. We will ensure that all teaching staff and probationers are aware of the GTC professional guidance on the use of electronic communication and social media.
13. We will listen to any parent/carers who is concerned or unhappy about any aspect of social media which is affecting them or their child's experience at school.
14. We will take prompt action if a parent/carers or another adult or child connected to the school disrespects or breaches the privacy of a child, another parent/carers, a teacher, or anyone else connected with the school.
15. We will report any abuse which is added to external social networking sites using the 'report abuse' facility.
16. We will ask the writer of such comments to remove them immediately.
17. If any member of the school community publicly humiliates or abuses another on social media we will consider this as bullying behaviour.
18. We will speak to the police and/or take legal advice if we are concerned that behaviour could be abusive, criminal, defamatory and/or dangerous.



Parent Councils are an important link between parents and schools. The following checklists suggest some topics for you to explore with parents and schools to encourage good practice. It's not prescriptive because your school may already have a policy or part of a policy, and there's so much variation in how schools and parents use social media.

The checklist for discussion with teaching staff would help to cover the basics of a policy, or double check that what is there already. This works for common scenarios, parental agreement and what to do when things go wrong.

The checklist for discussion with parents aims to help you prepare the ground for distributing the leaflet for parents included with this resource.

It would also be good to discuss the checklist for parents with teaching staff and vice versa. It could be very illuminating.

Don't forget to speak to the pupils about what they want from the school's social media.

There are links to further information and more detailed checklists on www.npfs.org.uk/2018/05/clicked/

Checklist for discussion with parents/carers

What do you expect of your school in its use of social media?

What do you expect of parent helpers/school support staff?

What do you expect of yourself and other parents?

Do you know if your school has a social media policy and, if so, where you can read it?

What are the different circumstances in which it might be better to phone or email the school or a teacher rather than use social media (and when would social media be more useful)?

If you have a concern or a complaint about the school or a teacher, how would you go about raising this?

If it's about another parent/carer, or somebody else involved in the school community, what would you do?

What would you say are basic rules about respect and behaviour on social media?

What are good ways to avoid regretting what you have posted or to avoid what you say being misunderstood or causing upset?

What are basic rules about privacy: photos, names, locations?

Do you think you would know if you were breaking the law?

Checklist for discussion with school staff

What social media does your school use to communicate with parents and why/when?

Are you aware of the GTC Scotland guidelines on the use of social media in schools?

Do you have a standalone social media policy which explains the school's approach?

Do you have any sort of policy relevant to social media? This could be for example cyberbullying within the bullying policy, privacy agreement for pupil photographs, emergency alert procedures, complaints procedure?

Do staff use social media consistently with parents or is there variation across classes, departments, subjects, office/teaching/school support staff?

Are you confident that parents know about any policy, know how and when your school uses social media, and/or can access social media?

Do you think parents know what you expect of them in social media communication and what they can expect of the school (including parent helpers)?

How do you differentiate between personal and professional use of social media (for example expectations of all those who use whole-school accounts)?

Do you know the law relevant to social media: abuse, defamation, and sharing pictures without consent?

Speak to your school
not your screen

More information

General Teaching Council for Scotland:
professional guidance on the use of
electronic communication and social media
www.gtcs.org.uk/web/FILES/teacher-regulation/professional-guidance-ecomms-social-media.pdf

NASUWT Scotland: abuse of technology
www.nasuwt.org.uk/uploads/assets/uploaded/ee100e8f-ad6a-400c-93a914cc908ac574.pdf

E-safety self review tool
<https://360safescotland.org.uk/>

GTC Scotland: dos and don'ts of social
media (for student, probation and early-
phase teachers)
www.in2teaching.org.uk/Blogspot/View/4688Thedosanddontsofsocialmedia.aspx

UK Council for Child Internet Safety
www.gov.uk/government/groups/uk-council-for-child-internet-safety-ukccis

Child Exploitation and Online Protection
(CEOP) Centre
www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre/

Thinkuknow (CEOP site with advice for
young people, parents, teachers and
others)
www.thinkuknow.co.uk

Scottish Out of School Care Network:
social media and mobile phones
https://soscn.org/osc_a_to_z/social_media_and_mobile_phones

Social media for schools: a guide
to Twitter, Facebook and Pinterest:
interesting article by a teacher
www.theguardian.com/teacher-network/2012/jul/26/social-media-teacher-guide

The Key (for school leaders; some useful
information but needs a subscription)
<https://schoolleaders.thekeysupport.com/pupils-and-parents/engaging-parents-and-carers/resolving-issues/parental-online-abuse-of-schools-advice-and-recourse/>

Fuller checklists at
www.npfs.org.uk/2018/05/clicked/

Many thanks to all those involved in the creation of the Clicked resources, in particular: The Argyll and Bute Headteacher Group; The Scottish Parental Involvement Officers Network; The Scottish Learning Group; and all of the individual parent / carers and parent councils who gave up their time to give us feedback.





the National Parent
Forum of Scotland

www.parentforumscotland.org

enquiries@parentforumscotland.org



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