

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

TROUBLESHOOTING SCENARIOS



This document presents seven hypothetical scenarios concerning cyberbullying and social media policy in order to model some of the problems that may arise in relation to social media use in schools. Each scenario lists the key issues involved, as well as effective responses in accordance with best practice. The scenarios are intended as examples only, and schools should tailor solutions to suit their particular circumstances.

Scenario 1

Teacher X recently attended a professional learning seminar about creating a digitally rich classroom. She is keen to implement some of the strategies she learned during this professional development, and she has identified an opportunity for students to explore the characteristics of places by searching and sharing images of the world's environments on Instagram. When seeking permission from the school's principal to start a school Instagram account, Teacher X makes sure to emphasise the learning potential in utilising the site to share images, but the principal is concerned that the school's current policies do not adequately address the use of social media for educational purposes.

Key issues

- The school must ensure that staff are well-informed about the protocols and procedures involved in using social media for educational purposes, particularly when communicating with students.
- Parents need to know about when and how social media is being used in the classroom.
- The school's student use agreement must be updated to adequately address the behavioural expectations of students when learning and interacting with social media.
- The school must retain editorial rights over the school's Instagram account and monitor online activity on this site.

Actions

1. Assess the risks associated with students' use of a social media account.
2. Create a whole-staff professional learning opportunity to establish and review policies relevant to social media. Use this opportunity to remind staff of their duty of care regarding online communication with students.
3. Schedule a parent information session to discuss the learning opportunities afforded by the use of social media for educational purposes.
4. Update relevant school policies to address the use of social media for educational purposes. Include all of the necessary procedures in the school policy.
5. Use school newsletters to broadcast policy changes and outline the protocols students must follow when using online services.
6. Retain editorial rights to the Instagram account and do not provide students with the login information.
7. Establish the editorial and monitoring process and nominate a staff member to take responsibility for the editing of the online content.

Scenario 2

One Monday, a teacher on lunchtime duty reports seeing a woman lurking near the school fence and watching a particular group of 12 year olds. The police are contacted and they drive past, but the woman has gone. Staff are alerted to her presence and to the need to be vigilant. The teacher on duty on Tuesday notices the same scenario, but he recognises the woman as the parent of a student. This is reported to the principal, who asks the mother to come in for a discussion. The mother is not known for problematic behaviour, and the principal is hoping to gain insight into her actions. The mother states that her daughter has been the victim of cyberbullying perpetrated by a number of girls in her class. She is hurt by the messages and scared as a result of threats telling her she is not safe at school, so the mother has been hanging around during lunch to keep an eye on her.

Key issues

- The school must refer to school policies to decide how to deal with bullying that happens outside school but impacts on students in school.
- When notified of after-school incidents, staff should be informed about the possibility of subsequent incidents occurring on school grounds.
- There must be clear procedures and points of contact for families to communicate with a school about cyberbullying their child may be experiencing.

Actions

1. Refer to relevant school policies. These may include the bullying or cyberbullying policy, the behaviour management policy and the communications policy. Review existing policies to ensure that they contain clear procedures for reporting bullying or cyberbullying, and amend policies as necessary.
2. Raise communication as a core issue for all parents, using the school board, school council, newsletters, websites or similar communication channels. Inform parents that the whole-school community has a responsibility to address issues such as threats to student safety, and discuss the school's communication policy for both online and offline communication.
3. Instigate evidence-based actions to effectively respond to incidents of bullying and cyberbullying, including the implementation of online safety approaches in the classroom.
4. Advertise after-hours support services for students experiencing bullying or cyberbullying.

Scenario 3

The school principal is contacted by a media representative requesting comments from about a website called 'And They're Teachers!' The principal is unaware of the site, and he decides to look into it before making any comment. He is horrified to see that the site contains embarrassing images of several staff members from the school. Areas of the school environment are evident in the background of some images, while others are close-up shots of different staff. The principal also notes that several students from the school have made derogatory comments on these pictures, some even using names or referring to when and where the pictures were taken: 'Another boring class with Ms Smith!'

Key issues

- Potential media exposure could present a negative image of the school.
- The school must deal with students' negative online behaviour towards school staff.
- The school may need to provide support for school staff who experience negative exposure online.
- The school must address students' inappropriate use of personal devices and school devices, both during school hours and after hours.
- Teachers may also require guidance on presenting a professional image and maintaining professional relationship in the classroom.

Actions

1. Ensure that the site is removed from the public domain.
2. Issue an appropriate response to media request. Steps to contain media exposure may include seeking public relations advice, involving legal services or contacting the Department of Education.
3. Notify all staff of the incident and the follow-up actions to be taken.
4. Provide counselling to teachers affected by this event.
5. Address the involvement of students identified on site who posted inappropriate and abusive messages. Follow the guidelines established in relevant policies, which may include sanctions or suspensions for out-of-hours activities if the student-teacher relationship is established. If necessary, refer students to additional support services.
6. Hold year-group assemblies informing students about the site and explaining the consequences for inappropriate use of social media.
7. Send a letter to all families addressing the consequences of social media misuse. Assist parents by offering referrals to websites and other educational materials about appropriate use of social media.
8. Instigate actions to build key understandings and competencies about pro-social behaviour online, implementing explicit teaching and student learning through the school curriculum.

Scenario 4

With permission from the principal, the school football coach sets up a Facebook page for communication with students and parents regarding training, game times, rosters, events and so on. The coach is careful to consult with parents regarding the purposes of the site, and all parents and students are required to sign a positive use agreement. During lunch, a student from the football team logs on to Facebook using a school computer to check the status of the night's training session, given the weather forecast. When the bell rings, the student forgets to log out, and another student notices that the page is still logged in. He takes the opportunity to post a comment on the group wall: 'There is no point in training, you are all losers'. The football coach notices the comment before the training and speaks to the football student, who is genuinely surprised by the comment. Together, they deduce that he did not log out at lunchtime.

Key issues

- The school should appoint a moderator or moderating team to oversee online activity on the Facebook page and other school-hosted sites.
- The school must ensure that it retains editorial rights on all school-hosted sites and does not allow comments to become public without moderation.
- Students must be reminded to always log out of their accounts, particularly when using shared computers.
- The school needs to monitor students' online behaviour, especially their use of school devices during school hours.
- If the publisher can be identified, the school must decide on an appropriate disciplinary action.

Actions

1. Retain a screen shot of the comment and delete the comment on Facebook ASAP.
2. During homeroom or assembly, communicate to students the importance of ensuring they correctly log out of profile pages, particularly when using school services.
3. Have the coach brief members of the site about the posted comment and how to react if the situation arises again.
4. If the identity of the publisher is known, follow the school's behaviour management procedures to administer the appropriate response to this behaviour.
5. In year group assemblies, inform students of school policy and procedures about online behaviour, especially in relation to impersonating another person online.

Scenario 5

During school break time, a teacher notices a student taking 'selfies' (images of themselves) with friends, which they then post on Instagram. The teacher confiscates the student's phone, following the school's policy for mobile phone devices. As per the policy, the phone is returned to the student at the end of the day. That evening, the student tells his parents about the confiscation and this results in an angry call from the parents to the school principal the following morning. The parents emphasise their concerns about being unable to contact their child if the phone is confiscated.

Key issues

- School policies relating to the use of personal devices during school hours may require review.
- Parents must be made aware that communication with students during school hours can be achieved via the school office.
- The school should formulate an acceptable use policy that is signed by parents and students upon enrolment and amended annually where necessary to accommodate increasing digital access.

Actions

1. Refer to relevant school policies. These may include the students' ICT use agreement, the communication policy, and the mobile phones in schools policy. Review these policies and amend them if necessary.
2. Reiterate to students and parents the school's policies concerning personal device use on school grounds.
3. Communicate to parents the proper procedure for contacting their children during school hours.
4. Consider developing a communication policy that aims to ensure consistent reinforcement of school policies to students and parents.

Scenario 6

A family reports to the school that a Year 9 girl has been making repeated derogatory Facebook comments about the small stature and late development of their son, a boy in her class. The boy initially said nothing about these postings but after a while became upset and informed his parents, who informed the school and asked to discuss the management of the matter. The boy has commented to his parents that he does not want to go to school, as he is concerned several other students in his class have seen the online content.

Key issues

- The school must ensure that support is available for the boy.
- School staff should be aware that cyberbullying after school can impact on the classroom environment.
- The school should remain vigilant in looking for signs of cyberbullying, such as students' work deteriorating or truancy.

Actions

1. Review relevant school policies. These may include the bullying or cyberbullying policy, the behaviour management policy and the students' ICT use agreement.
2. Meet with the student experiencing the cyberbullying and their parents in order to understand the current situation.
3. Obtain copies of the Facebook material from the target's parents.
4. Determine if there has been any breach of school procedures or policies, and refer to policies when deciding upon the recommended course of action.
5. Take action as per the school policy, and inform all parties of this procedure.
6. Request that the pastoral care team follow up with both students.
7. Instigate evidence-based actions to effectively respond to incidents of bullying and cyberbullying, including explicit teaching through the curriculum.

Scenario 7

Student A, a ten-year-old girl, is given a new smartphone for her birthday. She is very excited about using the phone and uses it at every opportunity, taking and sharing pictures and videos and communicating online with friends. On the oval after school one day, Student A and her friend Student B come across two older girls in their school uniforms pushing each other around, culminating in a fight. Student A films the fight and uploads it onto YouTube. Someone who knows the fighting girls recognises them in the video and broadcasts it more widely. The next day, the video is brought to the principal's attention.

Key issues

- The school has a responsibility to monitor students' conduct when they are in school uniform and on school grounds.
- The school needs to educate students about the consequences of filming people without permission and then posting it in a public forum.
- Students should be educated about how they can lose control of material after it has been posted online.
- The school needs to address any issues related to the fighting and filming that are potentially criminal and can lead to police involvement.

Actions

1. Refer to relevant school policies, such as the behaviour management, duty of care, mobile phone and copyright policies.
2. Report the video to the site administrator, requesting that it be removed.
3. Follow school procedures for media exposure, including seeking public relations assistance and legal advice.
4. Identify the students involved and follow behaviour management procedures.
5. Hold year-group assemblies to remind students of the school's mobile phone policy, including their use of personal devices. Address the consequences of both indirect and direct involvement in these incidents.
6. Post a letter home to all families addressing social media issues and consequences of sharing inappropriate content.
7. If necessary, contact the police about any illegal activity.