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# POLICY ON THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR THE DIOCESAN SCHOOLS SYSTEM

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## 1) PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance about the use of social media in the educational, administrative and personal contexts for staff members employed in the Diocesan Schools System (DSS) for the Diocese of Broken Bay. This guidance includes staff members' use of social media in the school context with students and parents and the maintenance of professional standards in a staff member's own use of social media. This policy has been constructed to assist in protecting students and staff members of the DSS.

## 2) POLICY FRAMEWORK

### Catholic Context

Recent church documents provide a starting point for how staff members should engage with social media and utilise it in an educational setting. They address specifically the opportunities and challenges of using social media in the Church context.

In its 2009 Social Networking Protocol of the Catholic Church in Australia<sup>1</sup> the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference stated:

*The overarching principle ..... should be that of human dignity, and at each step in the social networking endeavour, care should be taken by church personnel to ensure that the innate dignity of each person is upheld.*

*Clear distinctions should be maintained between personal and professional communication in the social networking environment.*

*The use of photographs or videos should be carefully monitored, and permissions should be sought from all who appear in photographs or videos before being posted or tagged.*

*[Social networking should be used] to build appropriate relationships that can encourage and foster growth in faith. This engagement should facilitate a growing in relationship with Christ.*

In anticipation of World Communications Day in June 2014<sup>2</sup>, Pope Francis stated:

*The revolution taking place in communications media and in information technologies represents a great and thrilling challenge; may we respond to that challenge with fresh energy and imagination as we seek to share with others the beauty of God.*

The Melbourne Declaration on the Educational Goals for Young Australians<sup>3</sup> (MCEETYA, 2008) recognises the new challenges associated with the digital age:

*Rapid and continuing advances in information and communication technologies (ICT) are changing the ways that people share, use, develop and process information and technology. In this digital age, young people need to be highly skilled in the use of ICT.*

The Australian Curriculum requires that students develop ICT capability as they learn to use ICT effectively and appropriately to access, create and communicate information and ideas, solve problems and work collaboratively in all learning areas at school, and in their lives beyond school. The capability involves students in learning to make the most of the technologies available to them, adapting to new ways of doing things as technologies evolve and limiting the risks to themselves and others in a digital environment.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <http://mediablog.catholic.org.au/?p=335>

<sup>2</sup> [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications/documents/papa-francesco\\_20140124\\_messaggio-comunicazioni-sociali.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications/documents/papa-francesco_20140124_messaggio-comunicazioni-sociali.html)

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/resources/National\\_Declaration\\_on\\_the\\_Educational\\_Goals\\_for\\_Young\\_Australians.pdf](http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/resources/National_Declaration_on_the_Educational_Goals_for_Young_Australians.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <http://australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/general-capabilities/information-and-communication-technology-ict-capability/>

## Definition of Social Media

Social media is defined as any form of online publication or presence that allows interactive communication including, but not limited to, social networks, blogs, internet websites, in-App messaging/forum services, internet forums, and wikis. Examples of social media include, but are not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Google+, Flickr.2 and Tumblr.

Online learning communities include both communities created by teachers and/or students for internal use within a school and communities created by a third party and accessed by DSS teachers and students. Examples of online learning communities include, but may not be limited to, technologies such as Edmodo, Google Classroom, Class Dojo, and SeeSaw.

This policy does not stand alone. It must be read and interpreted alongside other relevant DSS policies. This policy is aligned to the Pastoral Care Policy<sup>5</sup> and has been developed to assist in sustaining safe and supportive school environments that uphold the dignity of the human person.

## Principles

This policy is underpinned by the following principles:

- Online behaviour should at all times demonstrate a Christ-centred respect for the dignity of each person.
- Staff members are expected to conduct their activities in a manner that supports and advances the mission of Catholic schooling in the Diocese – the education and formation of students in Catholic discipleship.
- Social media is a powerful tool for learning when used in an informed and considered manner.
- State and Federal legislation and the child protection protocols and policies of the DSS must always be observed.
- Staff members and student online interaction must have a clear purpose and occur only in an educational context.
- Staff members and students must behave in an ethical manner when interacting and using online community sites and resources.
- Staff members' personal social networking online must be congruent with the professional standards expected of staff members in a Catholic school.
- Professional Learning programmes are provided in schools for staff members on the appropriate use of social media and for parents through the Broken Bay Catholic School Parents and/or school based initiatives.
- Educational programmes are provided for students to ensure the appropriate use of social network and community learning sites on the Internet.

## POLICY CONTENT

### Staff Use of Social Media in Learning Contexts

Staff members are able where appropriate to use online learning communities with their students in order to achieve educational outcomes. In doing so, teachers and school authorities have a duty of care to take reasonable measures to protect students from risks of harm that are reasonably foreseeable.

When using online community sites with students, consideration must always be given to the age and development of students. Relevant age limits for students using social media platforms must be strictly observed.

Staff members must ensure that they prepare students to act in accordance with the guiding principles before using online community sites for learning.

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<sup>5</sup> [http://www.csodbb.catholic.edu.au/uploads/rsfil/002274\\_ceac.pdf](http://www.csodbb.catholic.edu.au/uploads/rsfil/002274_ceac.pdf)

The use of online community sites that support an educational or administrative function must be authorised by the principal or his/her delegate. The decision-making process must include an assessment of risk with regard to teacher and student safety.

Parental/carer permission must be obtained for students to register and/or engage with online learning communities. This permission should be in writing and signed by the parent/carer.

Staff members must respect students' rights to privacy in academic work, records and results when posting online.

Any learning activity must not be linked back to a student's own personal social network page.

### **Staff Members Using Social Media and Online learning Communities with Students**

Staff members must discuss any use of online community sites with the principal or his/her delegate outlining the activity and its educational goals before establishing a social media site for use with students.

Students need clear instruction about their responsibility for appropriate interaction with others and suitable content posting online. Students who do not follow the conditions of the school may be denied any further on-line access.

Students should be taught about the appropriate use of social media within the context of cyber-safety education and responsible digital citizenship.

The posting online of school, student or staff member photographs needs to be carefully considered in the context of privacy requirements and the DSS Privacy Policy.

Another teacher or member of the school leadership team must also have full administrator access to the site.

Any social media site created by a staff member needs to be monitored by that staff member frequently and actively. In the event of inappropriate material being posted on the site the staff member needs to capture the inappropriate material for the purpose of clarifying with the student or students what it is about, store that captured content and then delete the on-line content found to be inappropriate. Inappropriate posts must be reported to the school principal or team leader

### **Staff Personal Use of Social Media**

Staff members should not accept students as 'friends' on their own social network sites or interact with students on social networking sites.

Staff members must not discuss students or co-workers or publicly criticise school policies or personnel on social networking sites.

Staff members must not post images that include students on social networking sites.

Staff members must not conduct themselves or communicate in a manner inconsistent with the Catholic ethos or values of the DSS or that in any way brings themselves or the DSS into disrepute.

Staff members must ensure any posting to social media or blogging sites is consistent with the standards expected of professionals in Catholic education.

### **Maintaining Professional Standards**

It is acknowledged that there may be rare occasions when staff and former students communicate through their personal social media accounts e.g. in youth ministry. However, staff members should be aware that communicating with former students through personal social media accounts may be in breach of Professional Guidelines for staff or may be perceived to be compromising their professionalism even though a professional relationship no longer exists. Contact with former students leaves a staff member open to allegations that the staff member used his or her position to develop and maintain a personal relationship with the student before the student left the school. This may require an investigation and/or action under the Child Protection: Addressing Allegations of Inappropriate Behaviour by Staff Policy.

Staff members should ensure that they use social media both in a personal or a professional context to represent the Catholic workplace well, and not to use social media to bring themselves or their employer into disrepute.

Employees need to understand that their digital communication may never be regarded as private or confidential when it relates to students and their parents.

### **Professional learning**

It is the responsibility of each school to provide professional learning for staff members in implementation of this policy. The Education Officer - eLearning can advise and/or support school leaders in developing appropriate professional learning.

In meeting the obligations of this Policy, each Diocesan Systemic School will need to ensure that:

1. Staff have access to an electronic and/or hard copy of the current policy; and
2. Staff have an opportunity to receive clarification around aspects of the policy that they may not fully understand.

Whilst aspects of the Social Media Policy may be treated within the context of staff induction, the induction of new staff to the diocese and the early career teacher induction programmes, it is important that school records such as the meeting agendas and staff meeting minutes reflect activity related to the implementation of this Policy. This will assist in determining Policy compliance within the context of school review and/or related enquiry.

### **Community use of social media**

Schools are increasingly embracing social media to communicate with parents about school events and to share experiences of students' learning. It is a powerful tool to build relationships between parents and the school and among the parent community, and enables parents to have a window into their child's school day.

However social media also has the potential to be a destructive influence within a school community. Irritations and grumbles that might once have been the subject of a brief exchange among two or three parents, face-to-face or on the phone, now have the capacity to reach people through the school community and beyond it.

Not only can this escalate a minor grumble into a major issue, it can harm the reputation of a school, staff member or student, polarise a community and in the most serious cases where false allegations are made about an individual, open the person making the post to a defamation action.

In order to maximise the benefits of social media, both official school sites and private sites, it is recommended that members of the community follow these guidelines:

- Respect each person's human dignity.
- Community members should not post something on social media they would not say to someone in person.
- Complaints should be raised with the school in accordance with the Complaints Handling Policy.
- All community members should be respectful of other people's privacy, particularly that of students.
- If a person is uncomfortable about someone else's social media comment on a private site, they should express their concerns and if the person does not desist, unsubscribe from the site.

## ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

### Principals

Principals have a responsibility to:

- implement this policy,
- provide professional learning opportunities for staff around policy implementation,
- refer to DSS Child Protection Policies and be guided by advice provided by the CSO Child Protection Team, Family and Community Services and the NSW Police in relation to matters involving child protection and social media issues.

### Teachers

Teachers have a responsibility to:

- implement this policy,
- provide instruction to students in on-line personal safety issues including Social Media which are age and stage appropriate.

### The Catholic Schools Office (CSO)

The CSO has a responsibility to:

- support schools to implement this policy,

## RELATED LEGISLATION, POLICIES, GUIDELINES AND SUPPORT MATERIAL

Legislation

- Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986 (Cth)
- Copyright Act 1968 (Cth)
- Copyright Amendment (Digital Agenda) Act 2000 (Cth)
- Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 (NSW)
- Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 (NSW)
- Defamation Act 2005 (NSW)
- Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)
- The Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth) Policies
- Australian Catholic Bishops Pastoral Letter on Internet Safety  
<http://www.youtube.com/ACBCcomms>
- Social Networking Protocol for the Catholic Church in Australia Australian Catholic Bishops Conference December 2009 <http://www.catholic.org.au>
- Staff Use of Social Media in Sydney Catholic Schools – CEO Sydney 2012
- Social Networks: portals of truth and faith; new spaces for evangelisation – (Pontifical Council for Social Communications 2013)

## RELATED DIOCESAN POLICIES AND GUIDELINES

- Acceptable Use Policy for Internet/Intranet and Network Services
- Anti-bullying Policy
- Behaviour Support Policy: Promoting safety & positive behaviour for learning for the Diocesan School System (DSS)
- Child Protection Policy: Addressing Allegations of Inappropriate Behaviour by Staff
- Managing Conduct and Performance Policy
- Managing Workplace Complaints Policy
- Pastoral Care Policy
- Pastoral Care and Wellbeing Framework for Learning
- Preventing Discrimination, Harassment and Bullying Policy
- Policy for Addressing Employee Performance and Disciplinary Matters
- Privacy Policy for Diocesan Systemic Schools, Diocese of Broken Bay

- DSS Cyber-safety Guidelines for Schools
- Professional Guidelines for Staff in their Relationships with Students
- Principles of Employment
- Quick guide for Principals: Dealing with Social Media concerns

### **POLICY REVIEW**

This policy will be reviewed not less frequently than once every three years.

### **POLICY DATES**

Date of completion and adoption:	2013
Date of current version	2018
Date of next review:	2021

authorised by  
**Peter Hamill**  
Director of Schools