Hillcross Primary School

School Community Social Media Policy

Mission, Vision and Culture

Think, Nurture, Thrive and Be Proud!

Our ambitious and child-led curriculum combined with our outstanding practice creates opportunities for all children to achieve success and meet their full potential, both personally and academically. As a nationally recognised Thinking School and a Rights Respecting Gold School, we nurture an empathetic community of creative, respectful, curious and independent thinkers and provide opportunities for our children to develop their unique talents and skills. We pride ourselves in our dedication to fostering positive wellbeing, celebrating diversity and promoting a culture of environmental awareness and responsibility.

Through our school culture of Collaboration, Consistency, Challenge and Celebration, and by promoting the values of Aspiration, Courage, Honesty, Respect and Responsibility, we empower a resilient school community of compassionate, responsible global citizens, committed to making the world a better place.

1. **Purpose of the policy**

The policy aims to:

- Set guidelines and rules on the way members of the school community use social media channels
- Establish clear expectations for the way members of the school community engage with each other online
- Support the school's policies on data protection, online safety and safeguarding

All members of the school community including staff, governors, volunteers, visitors, pupils and their families are required to read, understand and comply with this social media policy.

This policy applies to the use of social media for both business and personal purposes, whether during school/working hours or otherwise. It applies regardless of whether the social media is accessed using:

- School IT facilities and equipment
- Personal equipment belonging to members of the community, including families and children
- Any other IT/Internet-enabled equipment

All members of the school should bear in mind that information they share through social networking applications, even if they are in private spaces, may be subject to copyright, safeguarding and data protection legislation. Everyone must also operate in line with the school's equalities, harassment, child protection, safer recruitment, and online safety and ICT acceptable use policies.

This policy should be read alongside our Staff Social Media Policy, which provides more detailed guidance for staff members on their professional use of social media.

Definition of Social Media

For the purposes of this document, 'social media' is considered to include all technologies that allow individuals to communicate and share information (including photos and video). This includes group messaging services such as WhatsApp.

The internet is a fast-moving technology and it is impossible to cover all circumstances or emerging media – the principles set out in this policy must be followed irrespective of the medium. When using social media, staff should be aware of the potential impact on themselves and the employer, whether for work-related or personal use; whether during working hours or otherwise; or whether social media is accessed using the employer's equipment or using the employee's equipment. Staff should use discretion and common sense when engaging in online communication.

Given the rapid pace of technological change, you might want to add a brief statement about how the principles in this policy apply to emerging technologies and AI-generated content.

2. Use of Official School Social Media

The school's official social media channel is Instagram: @hillcrossprimary

The account is managed by the Senior Leadership Team (SLT). Staff members who have not been authorised by the Headteacher to manage, or post to, the account, must not access, or attempt to access, these accounts.

The school may post:

- Achievements of pupils and staff
- Photos or posts about school trips, events and activities
- Seasonal greetings and messages about religious festivals
- Alerts about changes (e.g. changes to procedures, severe weather updates, staffing changes)
- Reminders (e.g. approaching deadlines, events or class activities, reminders about policies/procedures)
- Advertisements for school events or activities
- Job vacancies or requests for volunteers
- Links to newsletters, guidance and factsheets for parents and carers
- Invitations to provide feedback

If you have suggestions for something you'd like to appear on our school social media channel, please speak to the Senior Leadership Team.

The school **will not** post:

- Names and photos of individuals (unless they have given consent)
- Harmful or abusive comments
- Messages to specific people
- Political statements
- Advertisements for businesses unless directly related to the school
- Links to staff members' personal accounts

The school will only 'like' Instagram posts with a non-commercial interest – being 'liked' by us doesn't imply endorsement of any kind. The school may follow other users on Instagram – being followed by us doesn't imply endorsement of any kind.

3. Personal Use of Social Media by Staff

The school expects all staff (including governors and volunteers) to consider the safety of pupils and the risks (reputational and financial) to the school when using social media channels, including when doing so in a personal capacity. Staff are also responsible for checking and maintaining appropriate privacy and security settings of their personal social media accounts.

Staff members will report any safeguarding issues they become aware of.

When using social media, staff **must not**:

- Use personal accounts to conduct school business
- Accept 'friend requests' from, or communicate with current pupils and those that have left the school that are under the age of 15
- Complain about the school, individual pupils, colleagues or parents/carers
- Reference or share information about individual pupils, colleagues or parents/carers
- Post images of pupils
- Express personal views or opinions that could be interpreted as those of the school
- Link their social media profile to their work email account
- Use personal social media during timetabled teaching time.

Staff are aware of both professional and social boundaries and will not therefore accept or invite 'friend' requests from parents on their personal social media accounts. All communication with parents via social media should be through the school's communication systems.

Any concerns regarding a member of staff's personal use of social media will be dealt with in line with the Staff Code of Conduct and Acceptable Use Policies.

4. Personal Use of Social Media by Pupils

The school encourages pupils to:

- Be respectful to each other, family members, members of staff, and the school, at all times
- Direct any complaints or concerns through the school's official channels, so they can be dealt with in line with the school's complaints procedure

Pupils **should not** use social media to:

- Complain about an individual member of the school community
- Complain about the school
- Make inappropriate comments about members of the school community
- Post images of other members of the community without their permission

Any concerns about a pupil's social media use will be dealt with in line with the school's Relationships and Behaviour policy and acceptable use policy.

5. Personal Use of Social Media by Parents/Carers

The school expects parents/carers to help us model safe, responsible and appropriate social media use for our pupils.

When communicating with the school via official communication channels, or using private/ independent channels to talk about the school, parents and carers should:

- Be respectful towards, and about, members of the school community at all times
- Direct any complaints or concerns through the school's official channels, so they can be dealt with in line with the school's complaints procedure

Parents/carers should not use social media to:

- Complain about individual members of the school community
- Complain about the school
- Make inappropriate comments about members of the school community
- Draw attention to, or discuss, behaviour incidents
- Post images of children other than their own

5.1 Informal Parent WhatsApp groups

We expect parents/carers to follow the above social media guidelines when using class WhatsApp groups.

Parental WhatsApp groups, especially Year Group ones, have replaced the traditional 'class rep' system and are a fantastic way for parents to support each other practically such as reminders about school deadlines, clarification on routines and procedures and even to get a small frustration off your chest - a problem shared is a problem at least halved and very often someone will have the missing piece of information that helps to explain or resolve the issue raised. These groups can also be very useful ways of supporting each other on a more personal level – most people don't have time to stop and chat or to arrange 'coffee catch ups' on a regular basis anymore and this would have been the time when you find out which shop sells the most robust school shoes at the most reasonable rate, or how to buy a Hillcross water bottle.

To ensure everyone can benefit, please be as inclusive as you can if you are involved in setting up a Year Group WhatsApp group.

Please be mindful about the messages being posted – is the message appropriate for the forum?

Sometimes conflicting messages are shared. Double check correspondence from the school if you hear conflicting messages, even if you are told a member of staff 'said so' – there is a lot that happens in a school day to day, we are only human and they sometimes get things mixed up.

Parent WhatsApp groups can become very negative and at times some of the messages posted can make people feel deflated or uncomfortable. Please think carefully about the content and nature of the messages you post on WhatsApp groups.

What NOT to include in messages:

- Gossip, personal opinions and views on/about school related matters/people - rumours start easily, can cause unnecessary angst and upset and are often not accurate.

    - If as a school we feel there is something that every parent needs to know about we will communicate with you all as a group, otherwise we will contact individual families on a need-to-know basis.
- Concerns and complaints relating to the school or a member of staff - this should go directly to the school.
- Names or identifiable data of children or adults (including photographs), unless you have sought and been given permission to do so.
- Messages to specific people - use personal chats for this.
- Causes, Political or religious statements, including fundraisers, charity drives or awareness campaigns
- Advertisements for businesses, events, products, services unless directly related to the school
- Harmful or abusive comments

When people misuse the Year Group WhatsApp Groups, it can make other parents feel the need to leave the group. This means that they will then miss out on the many benefits of being part of it. Please use this forum respectfully.

6. Training and Awareness

Staff have online safety training annually and updates are provided at least annually at the beginning of each academic year. Reminders and updates are also provided as appropriate via staff weekly briefings and/or the Weekly School Bulletin.

All new members of our school community are asked to familiarise themselves with this policy when they join the school. This is revisited and/or changes communicated via regular staff briefing sessions, school bulletins or workshop/training opportunities.

Direct age-appropriate online safety lessons are delivered to all children across the school, these are explicitly supported across the curriculum e.g. in PSHE lessons and Collective Worship. Appropriate use of social media, and the necessary pre-skills children will need to draw upon, are also referred to as opportunities to do so present themselves across all aspects of school life.

Children in Year 5 take part in a workshop led by an organisation called Growing Against Violence (G.A.V). The workshop explores how digital technology has changed the way people communicate. It explores the relationship young people have with social media and why smart phones/tablets are integral to young people's lives. The session considers the children's use of social media in a more in-depth way, using critical thinking and consideration of their online decision-making. Issues relating to social media, grooming, cyber bullying, gaming and inappropriate images are examined and the children are made aware of the law surrounding these issues and how to report abuse if they encounter it.

Growing Against Violence (G.A.V). also lead a workshop for parents and carers to explore issues, discussing valuable information and practical strategies relating to social media, sexting, online grooming, gangs, and serious youth violence. This workshop offers parents and carers an opportunity to meet other parents/carers, allowing them to share and discuss concerns.

7. Beaches of this policy

Any member of staff suspected of committing a breach of this policy (or if complaints are received about unacceptable use of social networking that has potentially breached this policy) will be investigated in accordance with the school's disciplinary procedure.

Any child suspected of committing a breach of this policy will be investigated in accordance with the school's Relationships and Behaviour Policy.

Any other member of the school community suspected of committing a breach of this policy…

Year Group WhatsApp Groups
We recognise the benefits of WhatsApp Groups; the school cannot take responsibility for them because we do not set them up. We encourage families to be brave if you think the group is becoming overly negative and gently challenge each other using a standard script such as 'It sounds like you are unhappy, the best thing you can do to resolve your concerns is to raise this with the school.' However, whilst these informal groups are not officially monitored, we do encourage families to report any concerns they have about the use of this communication tool to a Senior Leader if they have tried to resolve any inappropriate use unsuccessfully or if they do not feel it is appropriate to address the matter directly. We will liaise with the Administrators of the group to speak to the families involved and help them decide if a person should be removed from a group.

The school will respond to serious incidents in line with the relevant legislation, including the following:

- Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000
- UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR)
- Data Protection Act 2018
- Data (Use and Access) Act 2025
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- The Equality Act 2010
- The Defamation Act 2013
- Malicious Communications Act 1988
- Communications Act 2003
- Computer Misuse Act 1990

Acceptable use of social networking must comply with UK law. In applying this policy, the school will adhere to its rights, responsibilities, and duties in accordance with the legislation above.

Monitoring and review
From time to time the school will monitor or record communications that are sent or received from within the school's network, including but not limited to social media postings and activities. This applies to personal devices using the main school network, but not the guest WIFI.

This policy will be reviewed on a yearly basis and, in accordance with the following, on an as-and-when-required basis:

- Legislative changes.
- Good practice guidance.
- Case law.
- Significant incidents reported.

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Equality Impact Assessment

Under the Equality Act 2010 we have a duty not to discriminate against people on the basis of their age, disability, gender, gender identity, pregnancy or maternity, race, religion or belief and sexual orientation. We are committed to treating all members of the school community fairly and challenging negative attitudes about disability and accessibility and to developing a culture of awareness, tolerance and inclusion. This policy has been equality impact assessed and we believe that it is in line with the Equality Act 2010 as it is fair, it does not prioritise or disadvantage any member of the school community and it helps to promote equality and accessibility at our school. The curriculum is planned to be inclusive and meet the needs and interests of a full range of learners. Activities and resources will be differentiated and adult support used to ensure that children access the curriculum and make the best possible progress.

Safeguarding Commitment

The school is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, in line with the most recent version of Keeping Children Safe in Education, and expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment. We take seriously our duty of care to our pupils and staff which includes safeguarding them from the risk of being drawn into terrorism - this includes not just violent extremism but also non-violent extremism, which can create an atmosphere conducive to terrorism and can popularise views which terrorists exploit. We work closely with social care, the police, health services and other services to promote the welfare of children and protect them from harm. Radicalisation is recognised as a specific safeguarding issue and is addressed in line with the Government Prevent Strategy and The Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015.

Privacy Policy

Hillcross School is committed to ensuring protection of all personal information that we hold. We recognise our obligations under data protection laws, which include the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), the Data Protection Act 2018, and the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The Governing Body will monitor the outcomes and impact of this policy on an annual basis including trends in progression across specific groups of teachers to assess its effect and the school's continued compliance with equalities legislation.

Approved: November 2025
Reviewed: November 2026
Date of next review: November 2027

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Appendix A

Responsible use of social media – Guidance for Parents

Remember that anything you post online is not really private. Below are some common-sense guidelines and recommendations that parents are advised to follow to ensure responsible and safe use of social media.

- Follow this social media policy.
- Maintain professional dialogue and boundaries - remember that humour is relative, even a few 'light-hearted' comments or images may not be perceived as such by other people. The guiding rule is: if in doubt, don't post it.
- Think about the potential risks of oversharing your own personal information.
- Never post anything that is offensive or aggressive, even if you are very angry or upset. It can easily be taken out of context.
- Give due regard to the potential for defamation of character. Making allegations on social networking sites could result in formal action being taken.
- Ensure that any comments and/or images could not be deemed as defamatory or in breach of copyright legislation.