

Social Media Policy

Purpose

This policy outlines the guidelines for staff when using social media and other forms of electronic communication to ensure that interactions with learners outside the provision remain professional, appropriate, and aligned with safeguarding principles.

Scope

This policy applies to all staff, volunteers, and contractors at Next Steps Ed who may engage with learners or their families through social media, messaging platforms, or other digital means. It also sets expectations for learners regarding the appropriate use of social media in relation to staff and peers.

Principles

At Next Steps Ed, we are committed to:

- Protecting the welfare and safety of learners in all forms of communication.
- Maintaining professional boundaries at all times.
- Ensuring compliance with safeguarding policies, data protection laws, and professional codes of conduct.
- Promoting responsible use of social media by staff and learners.

Acceptable Use of Social Media

Staff Conduct on Social Media

- Staff must not engage with learners or ex-learners on personal social media accounts.
- Any professional social media accounts used to communicate with learners must be approved by the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and comply with safeguarding guidelines.
- Staff must maintain appropriate privacy settings on personal social media accounts to prevent learners from accessing personal content.
- Staff must not share personal contact information (e.g., phone numbers, personal email addresses) with learners.

Breaching a school's social media conduct can lead to disciplinary actions, legal consequences, damage to the staff member's career and harm to the school's reputation.

Learner Expectations

- Learners must not attempt to connect with staff through personal social media accounts.
- Learners are encouraged to report any inappropriate or concerning online interactions to a trusted adult or the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL).
- Cyberbullying, harassment, or other forms of inappropriate behavior on social media are strictly prohibited and will be addressed in line with the school's behavior policy.

Professional Use of Social Media

Approved Accounts

- All professional social media accounts (e.g., for school clubs or educational purposes) must:
 - Be approved by the SLT.
 - Use the official school name and branding.
 - Be monitored regularly for inappropriate activity.

Content Guidelines

- Posts must be educational, informative, or celebratory of school achievements and events.
- Personal opinions, political views, or content unrelated to the school's purpose are not permitted.
- Photos or videos of learners must not be posted without prior parental consent.

Communication with Learners

- Communication must be transparent, professional, and within the scope of the provision's educational goals.
- One-to-one communication with learners via social media is not permitted.

Messaging and Other Digital Communication

Staff Responsibilities

- Staff must only use school-approved platforms (e.g., school email, virtual learning environments) to communicate with learners outside of provision hours.
- Messaging platforms such as WhatsApp or personal SMS must not be used for learner communication.
- All communication must be accessible to the SLT for monitoring if required.

Learner Responsibilities

- Learners must use school-approved platforms for communication with staff.
- Any inappropriate messages or contact should be reported immediately to the DSL.

Safeguarding and Reporting Concerns

- Staff must report any safeguarding concerns arising from social media or digital communication to the DSL immediately.
- Learners and parents/carers will be informed about appropriate online behavior and how to report concerns.
- Allegations against staff will be managed in line with the school's safeguarding policy and statutory guidance (e.g., Keeping Children Safe in Education).

Training and Awareness

- All staff will receive training on the appropriate use of social media and engaging with learners online.
- Learners will be educated on digital citizenship and the risks of social media through PSHE lessons and assemblies.
- Parents/carers will be provided with guidance on monitoring their child's online activity.

Breaches of Policy

- Staff found to have breached this policy may face disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal, in line with the school's disciplinary procedures.
- Learners who breach this policy may face consequences in accordance with the school's behavior policy.

Monitoring and Review

- The SLT will monitor the implementation of this policy and review its effectiveness annually.
- Feedback from staff, learners, and parents/carers will inform updates to the policy.

Key Contacts

- Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL): Mica Smith
- Deputy DSL: Olivia Campbell
- IT Coordinator: Olivia Campbell

This policy reflects Next Steps Ed's commitment to safeguarding, professionalism, and fostering a safe online environment for all members of the school community.

Policy Review Date: 10th December 2025

Policy Approved By: Mica Smith - Director