



SOCIAL MEDIA IN SCHOOLS

**Guidelines for school staff using social media
and other technologies**



Department of
Education

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Introduction

As a school staff member, you are subject to a level of public scrutiny over and above most other public sector employees because you work with children. For many of you, web based and other electronic communications are an essential part of your social and professional lives. Using new technologies, whether during or outside working hours, presents significant risks for you. The use of applications such as the internet and web based communications are governed by Department of Education policies as well as State and Federal legislation.

This brochure provides advice on:

- social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace and Twitter
- social media sites like YouTube and Flickr
- internet telephony technologies including Skype and chat rooms
- communication technologies such as SMS, MMS and video calling.

These applications pose professional, privacy and security challenges. Of particular concern is the ease with which professional boundaries and appropriate staff–student conduct relationships can be breached.

If you are unsure of your obligations in these areas, seek advice from the Standards and Integrity Directorate on 1800 655 985.



Legitimate use of communication technologies

You should not engage in social interaction with students through social networking sites unless there is an educationally valid context. In the event of a complaint or allegation being received by the Department, the responsibility will be on you to demonstrate that the use was appropriate.

You have legitimate reasons to use communication technologies as part of teaching and learning programs such as:

- **communicating by email with parents and students about student assignments and progress**

In order to be transparent and accountable for communications with students and parents, you and your students should use Department email addresses (eg Fred.Flintstone@student.det.wa.edu.au).

- **creating applications such as web pages and blogs as part of the teaching program**

You need to ensure you:

- 1 obtain informed parent/guardian consent for students to use the technology
- 2 provide parents/guardians with information explaining how the technology works
- 3 reach agreements with parents/guardians covering the use of social media both at home and at school including an understanding of potential risks

- 4 provide opportunities for parents/guardians to experience social media.

- **studying social media as texts in learning areas such as English and media studies**

Here the phenomenon of social media is the focus of learning rather than just being the means to achieve the learning. Examples might include the impact of Twitter on the formation of public opinion or the rapid transmitting of news images by mobile phones around the world in seconds.

The competent and effective use of these technologies by students is now firmly on school curricula. Educational outcomes include preparing students to take their place in a modern technological workforce and being able to interact socially with their peers and the wider community.

In using these legitimate applications, you must not place yourself or your students at risk. The context, purpose and potential impact of using these applications should always be considered. You must maintain a professional tone in all communications with students. These technologies should only be used for teaching and learning programs and in accordance with school and Department policies.



Non-legitimate use of communication technologies

Staff conduct and electronic communication

You must always conform to the professional boundaries of staff-student relationships. This includes social interaction through electronic devices and through social networking sites (Facebook, MySpace, YouTube or Twitter).

This interaction must always have an educationally valid context.

Guidelines

The intent of these procedures is to clarify the professional boundaries to protect you and your students from potential misinterpretation of the staff-student relationship.

These procedures apply to all social interaction between you and your students both during and outside of working hours where a staff-student relationship exists.

(See the Department of Education Child Protection policy.)

The Department does not currently have a specific policy dealing with social networking by its staff. However, existing codes and policies set clear guidelines and boundaries for appropriate behaviour between you and your students by any means, especially out of school hours. For example the:

- Staff Conduct policy
- Child Protection policy
- Students Online policy
- Public Sector Code of Ethics.

In relation to social media, you must not:

- enter chat rooms with students
- exchange personal mobile phone numbers with students
- correspond with students using personal email addresses eg Hotmail and Yahoo
- take photographs or videos of students without parent/guardian consent
- take photographs or videos of students for non-school purposes
- send or exchange images or videos of school staff, students or any aspect of school operations without authorisation or approval
- download and store inappropriate images or other inappropriate material on Notebook for Teachers laptop computers outside school hours and off school sites.



Identifying risks for staff

Many social networking technologies can create a false sense of anonymity. Web socialising in particular encourages high levels of familiarity which may result in the blurring of professional boundaries. Risks include:

- **allegations of teacher misconduct**

This may involve inappropriate contact with students or inappropriate conduct outside of school hours.

- **unauthorised sharing of official information with students**

This might include disclosing the personal home circumstances of another student, for example:

- where the parents are separating
- when financial difficulties are being faced by the parents of another student
- when a particular student has an illness which has to be managed carefully by the school.

- **inadequate supervision of students online**

This may result in cyber bullying or access to inappropriate material.

- **publishing information or material by staff**

This may include images captured during social functions outside of school hours that could impact on a staff member's professional standing as an employee of the Department.

- **appropriate storage and transmission of still and video images**

This may include, for example, confiscating student mobile phones for 'sexting'¹ or videoing schoolyard fights. When confiscating a student's mobile phone, you need to be careful not to compromise your personal safety and professional integrity. You should not access the content of the mobile phone or store it in your desk or cupboard. The phone must be taken to the principal **immediately**.



Breaching confidentiality of information

You must ensure you:

- do not breach confidentiality
- take care to safeguard data
- do not disclose official information without authorisation.

You need to take particular care with USB devices which store school data.

Extreme caution should also be used when transmitting media files by applications such as email or Bluetooth.

An email received in the course of your employment is considered a public record and is subject to the Department's Record Management policy.

Schools are encouraged to have clear guidelines for the use and management of email communications including those directly with parents/guardians and students.

¹ "Sexting is the act of sending sexually explicit messages or photographs primarily between mobile phones." (Source: Wikipedia)



Duty of care towards students

The Department's Duty of Care for Students policy is relevant to the supervision of students engaging with social media technologies when in a teaching and learning environment.

Teaching staff owe a duty to take reasonable care for the safety and welfare of students while students are involved in school activities or are present for the purposes of a school activity. The duty is to take such measures as are reasonable... to protect students from risks of harm that reasonably ought to be foreseen...and against which preventative measures can be taken.

(See Duty of Care for Students policy)

Students need to be protected from exposure to inappropriate material and need to know how to adopt protective online behaviours. They should be taught explicitly how to minimise the risks.

You can access online education resources through the Cybersmart Schools Gateway at cybersmart.gov.au.

Online education for students carries various risks including:

- access to inappropriate or restricted materials
- cyber predators and cyber bullying
- inappropriate behaviour by a student arising from the imagined anonymity when seated in front of a computer
- commercial exploitation of students while on the internet through advertising
- breach of copyright law through the unlicensed downloading and use of material from the internet.



What you can do

- 1 Have clear guidelines for managing and using email communication for your school based on the Department's Telecommunications policy.
- 2 Teach students **explicitly** how to minimise the risks associated with inappropriate material.
- 3 Ensure students know how to adopt protective online behaviour such as guarding passwords, protecting personal identity information and being cautious about uploading photos.
- 4 Have appropriate policies in place for web applications and devices such as mobile phones.
- 5 Be mindful of the guidelines for school websites about the publication of images and copyright. In particular ensure prior parent/guardian consent before photos of students are placed on any internet or Department intranet site.
- 6 Refer to the Students Online policy which has sample templates for the acceptable use of Department online services including the use of photos.



Useful websites

Cyber(smart)

Resources and practical advice allowing children and parents to enjoy the online world.

W: cybersmart.gov.au

Think u know – Australia

Risk factors associated with online computer use for children from an Australian perspective.

W: thinkuknow.org.au

Australian Communications and Media Authority

Responsible for the regulation of broadcasting, internet, radio communications and telecommunications.

W: acma.gov.au

Kids Helpline

Counselling service for young children.

W: kidshelp.com.au

Bullying No Way

Working to make every learning environment free from bullying.

W: bullyingnoway.com.au

Reach Out

Helping young people through tough times.

W: reachout.com.au

Think u know – UK

Risk factors associated with online computer use for children.

W: thinkuknow.co.uk

Childnet Resources

Helping to make the internet a great and safe place for children.

W: childnet.com



The prevention and education team

The prevention and education team offers a presentation which highlights the risks for staff associated with social media.

Team members can present at your school, face-to-face or by videoconference. For bookings contact:

T: 1800 655 985

E: complaints@det.wa.edu.au

To explore the issues outlined in this guide in more detail and/or book any training or presentations:

T: 9264 8189 or 9264 4934

For assistance in developing safe use policies and practices for online applications as part of your teaching program, please contact the Department's online curriculum service team:

T: 9264 4332

E: socsinfo@det.wa.edu.au