



ICT Advice: The Appropriate Relationship between Staff and Pupils in Cyberspace

Traditional, established and agreed boundaries between staff and pupils are being blurred by the way in which Social Networking Sites operate.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

- Social Networking Sites [e.g. www.Facebook.com] facilitate the sharing of up-to-date personal information including photographs and videos with 'Friends'.
- These sites are not totally open to the public. The user can determine with whom they choose to share their information by accepting them as a 'Friend'.
 - Users can request that they and other users become 'Friends'
 - Users can either accept or refuse requests to become a 'Friend'.
 - Once a Friend the other user will be able to see and download any pictures or information on the site.
 - Some sites [e.g. Facebook] allow for different levels of information to be available to Friends
- Thus, Staff and pupils who are 'Friends' on a social networking site are likely to have access to each other's personal information, including any pictures and videos that have been posted there.
- Established principles that staff do not socialise with pupils in their private lives are challenged by the use of these sites.

WHAT YOU MIGHT LIKE TO DISCUSS:

- Under what circumstances, if any, should staff and pupils be 'Friends' on a Social Networking Site?
- What advice should Schools give to staff about their use of Social Networking Sites so that staff can protect themselves from an accusation of behaving unprofessionally?
- How will the school management police your decisions?
- How will the school respond when it becomes apparent that a member of staff has known through a social networking site that pupils are at risk [e.g. having under age sex, taking drugs] but did not inform the school?

- How will the school respond when a video of one of the staff drunk at a party with their friends circulates around the sixth form at school?

WHAT YOU MIGHT CONSIDER DOING NEXT

- Drafting a policy for the Staff Handbook.

THE DEBATE

All contact between staff and pupils in this forum is inappropriate

- Teachers are expected to keep a professional distance from the pupils whom they teach.
- There should be a clear separation of the private social lives of teachers and that of pupils. It would be inappropriate for a teacher to go clubbing with a sixth former, or to share details of their private life with them.
- There is no need for social networking to go on between staff and pupils. There is no clear educational benefit.
- Schools need to protect both staff and pupils and the easiest way to do this is to have a policy that deems this inappropriate.

Having contact with pupils on a Social Networking site should be permitted

- Teachers should be allowed to exercise their professional judgment as to what personal information they choose to share with pupils.
- It may be prudent and appropriate for schools to advise staff not to post any information which would compromise their position and authority as a teacher in the school. The use of allowing pupils to see limited profiles may be the best way to achieve this.
- It is impossible to police any regulation that is made by a school as the use of social networking sites is a major part of the leisure time of many users.