



USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

2026- 2027

DRAFT SUBJECT TO COMMITTEE APPROVAL

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Wrotham School Use of Social Media Policy

Introduction

The school's view is that misuse of social media poses one of the biggest threats to the wellbeing of young people that we have ever experienced. Despite the common view, it is not a necessity of modern life – no one HAS to use social media, and there is a good chance that it has moved from being a convenience or social opportunity to being a dangerous distraction from the real world or, worse, an addiction.

We know that parenting a teenager or young adult in the modern world can be quite a daunting challenge. The world is fast-moving and can be hard to keep up with. The school's intention is never to tell someone how to parent, but to share information and advice that may be of help. By working together, children can and will be kept safe.

Current Issues We Are Experiencing

Below are some of the issues that we are currently experiencing on a regular basis due to the use/misuse of social media:

Bullying

95%+ of bullying involving young people now takes place online, outside of school. This often takes place on messaging apps or social media platforms such as Snapchat, Instagram and WhatsApp. It is often more extreme than traditional "playground" bullying.

Exposure to Pornography, Inappropriate Images and Harmful Influencers

This is increasingly taking place on TikTok, YouTube, Instagram and other platforms where students are exposed to sexual, violent images and videos in a constant stream. This includes exposure to:

- Violent behaviours and criminal culture
- The baiting or undermining of authority figures such as the police, teachers and healthcare professionals
- Hateful language towards women and minority groups
- Misogynistic and misandrist influencers who promote harmful attitudes about gender, relationships and violence

Lack of Sleep

Students are often part of large chat groups (sometimes with over 200-300 members) and these groups are known to be highly active through the night, with notifications preventing or disrupting sleep.

Influence of Culture and Values

Values are increasingly being defined and led by online "influencers" and content providers with questionable morals, views or motives.

Exposure to Extreme Views and Harmful Ideologies

Including the influence of terror groups, hate groups, Incel groups, and exposure to misogyny and misandry. Students may be exposed to content that promotes hatred towards women, men, or specific groups. This content is most often set up by off-shore "Trolls" or "bot" accounts and can be particularly harmful through algorithmic amplification on platforms like TikTok, YouTube and Instagram.

Misinformation

Again, often from "Trolls" or "bot" accounts (short for robot) designed to spread misinformation to destabilise society and cause confusion. Recent examples include anti-vax propaganda and conspiracy theories.

Money Scams and Money Laundering

Students are now frequently being targeted by organised criminals online with tempting promises of financial rewards to undertake transfers of money or goods. Most, if not all, drug dealing now takes place online. This can include the use of crypto currencies.

Grooming of Children

We all too frequently investigate the grooming of young children to make or share nudes or semi-nudes online, including images that have been digitally altered or wholly generated by artificial intelligence (deepfakes). This includes requests from accounts posing as other young people, model scouts often with offers of financial rewards, threats or bribery. This often takes place in the message sections of social media apps such as Instagram, Snapchat and WhatsApp.

Generative AI Risks

Students may use or be exposed to generative AI tools (like ChatGPT, image generators, deepfake creators) which pose safeguarding, data protection and ethical risks. This includes:

- Creating fake images of peers for bullying or harassment
- Generating harmful or inappropriate content
- Sharing personal data with AI systems without understanding the risks
- Being exposed to inappropriate AI-generated content
- Using AI to create convincing fake profiles or manipulate images

Unrealistic Goals, Body Image and Unhealthy Obsessions

This relates to the increasing exposure to "lifestyles" or "looks" on trending/viral social media – placing a huge amount of pressure on young people to look or aspire to unachievable lifestyles in an unhealthy way that destroys self-confidence and distorts values.

The Impact on Children

The key issue is that much of this online activity is unmoderated. If a child is left to use social media without control or monitoring, they are exposed to all of these risks and potential dangers. As innocent as social media might seem, we have seen a huge increase in the issues it causes in our children, including:

- Self-harm
- Anxiety and depression
- Low self-esteem
- Online abuse
- Risk-taking behaviours

As a school, we have also seen a decrease in real-world social skills, including:

- Being polite and kind
- Respecting authority figures
- Resilience
- An inflated sense of either entitlement or lack of confidence/self-belief

It is also the case that the "influence" of social media "influencers" increasingly has more impact than both parents and teachers. Social media, in many cases, still remains the wild west of entertainment and communication.

As a school, we are having to manage the disturbance and disruption that social media causes to young people's lives, and this in turn stretches our resources that could be better used elsewhere. It is also increasingly apparent that adults are no less at risk when it comes to social media and can be subject to the same influences, but as adults are more able to navigate these.

Mobile Phone Policy at School

Wrotham School operates a mobile phone-free environment during the school day. This means students do not have access to their mobile phones during lessons, breaktimes and lunchtimes. This policy helps to:

- Reduce exposure to harmful online content during the school day
- Minimise opportunities for cyberbullying
- Improve concentration and learning
- Reduce social media-related anxiety and distraction
- Protect students from online grooming and exploitation during school hours

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Parents/carers should be aware that:

- Restricting phone access at school does not eliminate risks outside school hours
- Home monitoring and parental controls remain essential
- The strategies outlined in this document apply to phone use at home and outside school

For full details, please see our separate Mobile Phone Policy on the school website.

Information for Parents/Carers: Strategies to Keep Your Child Safe

In order to keep your child safe, we recommend the following strategies:

1. Consider Whether Social Media Is Necessary

Think carefully about whether your child should have access to social media at all. Ask yourself as a family:

- Is it healthy?
- Is it safe?
- Is it useful?
- Does it make my child happy in the long term?

If the answer is no, then discuss this and take steps to strictly limit or remove it.

2. Remember You Are in Charge

As parents/carers, you are both responsible and in charge. Children should be listened to but should not call the shots. Your decisions, made in the best interests of your child, are important. There is no law that says children (or anyone) must have social media access – it is a choice, and one that has consequences that may have to be lived with.

3. Know What Your Child Is Doing Online

Make sure that you know what your child is doing online at all times. This includes being able to have open and honest conversations about their online activity and knowing what they are saying and who they are talking to. Nothing should be hidden or unknown.

4. Don't Simply Prohibit – Communicate

Do not simply prohibit use – this leads to children finding other ways to access these banned apps or items which you will not know about and which carry high risk. Always encourage clear conversations where you can be open and honest whilst ensuring boundaries.

5. Find Alternatives to Social Media

Find alternatives to social media such as more opportunities to engage in sport, music, entertainment as a family or with friends.

6. Explain the Consequences and Dangers

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Explain to your children the consequences and dangers of social media and how to manage them. Make them aware that if they are a member of large groups on social media, there is a high chance that at some point they will be bullied and will have to deal with it, be resilient and cope with this. It is a sad and unfortunate part of most online communities.

7. Take a "No Blame" Approach

Explain how they should tell you if they are worried or scared and take a "no blame" approach. This will ensure they always let you know if they are in trouble. If they are scared of blame or sanctions, they may not be honest when they need to be, and this can be dangerous in itself.

8. Set a Good Example

Be aware that students will copy parental behaviours, including online behaviour.

9. Have Clear Boundaries

If there is something you don't want your child to be exposed to, make this clear, be firm with these expectations and then monitor compliance. Children will be persistent and upset when you limit their online access – this is what children do, they push boundaries. Just remember, it is in their best interests and in the interests of their physical and mental safety.

10. Don't Accept "Everyone Does It"

Do not accept the argument that "everyone does it" or "it's just what young people do these days". These are never good reasons to surrender the safety of a child. While many young people use social media, this doesn't make it safe. The fact that harmful content, bullying, and exploitation are widespread online is precisely why parental oversight is essential, not a reason to allow unrestricted access.

11. Reward Positive Choices

Reward and praise children for making the right choices.

12. Restrict Access Strategically

Restrict access to certain apps or restrict the times when children can access social media/messaging apps. This allows some building of trust whilst preventing addiction and unmoderated access.

13. Use Filtering and Monitoring Tools

Install parental control software on all devices your child uses. Regularly review what sites and apps they're accessing. Remember that many harmful interactions now involve AI-generated content that may bypass traditional filters.

14. Be Aware of Private Messaging

Most harmful content and grooming happens in private messages on platforms like Instagram, Snapchat and WhatsApp, not in public posts. Ensure you can access and review private messages if needed.

15. Educate About Deepfakes and AI Manipulation

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Make sure your child understands that images and videos can be convincingly faked using AI, and that they should never share personal photos that could be manipulated. Teach them to question whether content is real.

16. Report Concerning Content Immediately

If your child encounters grooming, explicit content, violent content, or is asked to make or share nudes or semi-nudes (including AI-generated images), report this to the school immediately and to CEOP (Child Exploitation and Online Protection Command) at www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre/

17. Monitor for Signs of Online Harm

Be alert to changes in behaviour, mood, sleep patterns, or reluctance to discuss online activity. These may indicate exposure to harmful content, cyberbullying, or grooming.

18. Seek Help When Needed

Seek help from the school or other professionals if you need to know more about social media and these dangers. Ignorance is no longer an excuse.

19. Remember They Are Children

Remember that we are talking about children – they do not have the knowledge of the world that we do and are far less likely to be able to process what they see in the same way as an adult. Ensure that extreme content is blocked, restricted and moderated by clear parental controls that are a basic condition of use.

20. Talk Openly as a Family

Talk openly as a family, include your children in this, hear their views, listen to them and provide alternatives.

Useful Information and Support

For Parents/Carers:

- **NSPCC Online Safety** – www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/
- **Internet Matters** – www.internetmatters.org (age-specific advice)
- **UK Safer Internet Centre** – www.saferinternet.org.uk
- **CEOP (Report online abuse)** – www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre/
- **Childnet International** – www.childnet.com
- **Net Aware (NSPCC)** – www.net-aware.org.uk (reviews of apps and platforms)
- **Parent Info** – www.parentinfo.org (monthly updates on online trends)

Understanding Specific Risks:

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- **AI and Deepfakes** – www.internetmatters.org/hub/guidance/deepfakes/
- **Online Grooming** – www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/grooming/
- **Making and Sharing Nudes and Semi-Nudes** – www.gov.uk/government/publications/sharing-nudes-and-semi-nudes-advice-for-education-settings-working-with-children-and-young-people

School Policies:

- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Online Safety Policy
- Mobile Phone Policy

All policies are available on the school website.

If You Need Support, Please Contact:

- **Designated Safeguarding Lead:**

Mrs L Abbott: labbott@wrotham.kent.sch.uk

Miss V Ross: vross@wrotham.kent.sch.uk

Mrs A Sanders: asanders@wrotham.kent.sch.uk

Mr B McCracken: bmccracken@wrotham.kent.sch.uk

- **Mental Health Lead:** Mrs S Hann: shann@wrotham.kent.sch.uk
- **School Office:** office@wrotham.kent.sch.uk

Understanding Online Threats – Key Terms

"Trolls"

Trolls are individuals who deliberately harass or post offensive content online with the intention of stirring up a reaction from others. You will often see them in comments sections when a deliberately offensive or divisive comment is made to provoke angry responses. These are often fake accounts designed to spread misinformation or cause distress.

"Bots"

Bots are automated accounts using Artificial Intelligence that appear to be real people. They post misinformation, deliberately antagonising content, or promotional material to cause upset, generate followers, spread propaganda, or sell products. Modern AI-powered bots can be extremely convincing and difficult to distinguish from real accounts.

"Deepfakes"

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Deepfakes are realistic but fake videos, images or audio created using AI technology. These can show people doing or saying things they never did. Deepfakes are increasingly used for:

- Creating fake nudes or semi-nudes of real people (including children)
- Spreading misinformation
- Bullying and harassment
- Impersonation and fraud
- Creating convincing fake profiles

It's crucial that young people understand that not everything they see online is real, and that AI technology can now create highly convincing fake content.