

Overview

Social Networking Sites (SNS), Blogs (Web Logs) and World Wide Web (WWW) Personal Web Sites (PWS) must be considered as documents that are published within the public domain. Such sites allow the free sharing of information and opinions. While they have their place in private life, they may cause problems within a school community on several levels.

Information placed on these sites may be useful, entertaining, and providing a medium for friends to share experiences, photographs, messages and generally to stay in touch. On the other hand entries may breach privacy conventions or regulations, may be considered to be 'cyber bullying'; they may be defamatory, obscene, libellous or just inappropriate.

It is important to understand that information published in Blogs, on SNS and the WWW, are permanent. It is almost impossible to remove information once it has appeared – even when it seems to have been taken down.

Students

While at school, students are only to use SNS under the direction of Teachers. (The School's ICT resources are provided for teaching and learning and the use of frivolous sites is discouraged.)

Student use of SNS outside school must be considerate of the ramifications of SNS postings within the extended school community.

Information and opinion that refer directly or indirectly to the School, its administration, its students *as students* or its members of staff *as members of staff* must not be posted unless officially sanctioned by the Principal or Deputy Principal and the individual(s) concerned.

Cyber Bullying, Peer Pressure, Spam

Students must not engage in bullying, spamming, illegal behaviour, malicious blogging or similar antisocial behaviours. Students who engage in antisocial behaviours in a social networking or blogging site that have ramifications within the School community (such as bullying a fellow student) *will be subject to School regulations regarding such behaviour even though the infringements occurred outside the school.*

Advice to Students

Students are advised never to offer any personal information including last name, contact information, home address, phone numbers, school's name, e-mail address, last names of friends or relatives, instant messaging names, age, or birth date.

Students are advised never to post provocative pictures of themselves or anyone else, and be sure any images you provide do not reveal any of the previously mentioned information. Remember to check the background of a picture also.

Students are advised to use blogging provider sites with clearly stated terms of use, and make sure they can protect the actual blogs, not just the user accounts, with password protection. However, it is prudent to presume that anyone can see it.

Employees of TAS – Teaching Staff

Teaching staff should never give out personal details such as home or mobile phone numbers or private email addresses. (see: Advice to Students above).

Employees need to be aware that the public nature of blogs and social networking sites means that anyone can read your comments, including your employer, a prospective employer or a person seeking information about your personality, political or religious views.

Teacher/Student Relations

Teachers hold a particular and special position in society and are expected to uphold moral and ethical codes of behaviour, often to a greater degree than any other profession or vocation.

Teachers should, as a rule, not have external friendships (i.e. personal relationships) with current students beyond that which is normal for the teacher/student relationship. A personal relationship on a SNS would exceed the accepted bounds of a teacher/student relationship and might leave the teacher open to allegations of improper conduct.

Teachers need also to be aware of interaction with the parents of current students in that comments or opinions may be construed in ways not envisaged that may lead to unforeseen social or legal complications (see Legal Liability below).

Friendships (personal relationships) with *ex-students* are a matter for the individual teacher but it is prudent to consider the ramifications of personal relationships with ex-students who have younger siblings or friends still at the school, where private or personal information could be passed on to third parties.

Be Aware of Your Colleagues and Your Position

Be thoughtful and accurate in your posts, and be respectful of how other members of the school community may be affected. All TAS employees can be viewed as representatives of the School, which can add significance to your public reflections on a wide variety of topics.

Legal Liability

When individuals choose to go public with opinions via a blog, SNS or a personal web site, they are legally responsible for their commentary. Individuals can be held personally liable for any commentary deemed to be defamatory, obscene, proprietary, or libellous. Employees of TAS should exercise caution with regards to exaggeration, colourful language, guesswork, obscenity, copyrighted materials, legal conclusions, and derogatory remarks or characterizations. The summary position is that you blog (or post on the blogs of others) at your own risk. Outside parties can pursue legal action against you for postings.

Privileged Information

It is forbidden for employees to divulge, post or publish any confidential, proprietary, or privileged information pertaining to the School, its staff, its students, its policies, finance or procedures. This information may not appear in a blog, a personal web site or a social networking site.

Personal Web Sites

If you have a personal web site and the students or members of the wider School community are aware of it, care should be taken to ensure it is suitable for general viewing by students and parents. Ensure that there is no inappropriate content or links to sites that are inappropriate.

If you have a personal web site that does not conform to the expectations above, you must ensure that it is not publicised within the School community. It might be prudent to ensure no personal identification is available at such a site that might lead back to you and hence the School.