

Personal Use of Internet Procedure

RIDGEWAY EDUCATION TRUST

Approved by the Executive Headteacher: 01 November 2018

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Introduction

This procedure sets out the principles which Ridgeway Education Trust (which for the purpose of this policy means the Trust and its associated schools) staff and students are expected to follow when using the Internet and social networking sites. The Internet is a fast-moving technology and it is impossible to cover all circumstances, however, the principles set out below should always be followed.

This document should be read in conjunction with the IT Acceptable Use guidelines that can be found on each school's website.

The Internet provides a number of social networking opportunities that Ridgeway Education Trust staff and students may wish to use, including Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Pinterest, Bebo, MySpace, blogs etc. All students and employees of Ridgeway Education Trust are expected to behave appropriately when on the Internet, and in ways that are consistent with the schools' values and policies. It is important that the outside activities of staff and students do not undermine the schools' reputations.

The intention of this policy is not to stop Ridgeway Education Trust staff and students from conducting legitimate activities on the Internet and social networking sites but serves to flag-up those areas where conflicts may arise.

Principles

Staff who are employed by and students who are members of Ridgeway Education Trust:

- Must not engage in activities on the Internet which might bring the school into disrepute;
- Must not use the Internet in any way to attack or abuse students, colleagues, teachers or support staff;
- Must not post derogatory or offensive comments on the Internet;
- Should be mindful of online safety and the need to protect sensitive personal information.

Social Networking sites

All Ridgeway Education Trust staff and students should be mindful of the information they disclose on social networking sites. Through the open nature of such sites, it is also possible for third parties to collate vast amounts of information. They are advised not to disclose personal information, such as address, phone number or email address that could be used by others to make unwanted contact. They should consider carefully the nature of photographs of themselves that they post to such sites and how they would feel should these images became public. Staff who are employed by, and students who are members of, the Trust should always act in a manner which does not bring Ridgeway Education Trust into disrepute.

Staff are advised not to have students as 'friends' on Facebook or similar sites unless the profile, page or group has been set up for purely educational purposes. In these cases staff should read the advice at http://www.heppell.net/facebook_in_school/

Staff should check their settings and ensure that only Friends can access the information they submit to such sites. Many staff have colleagues as friends on Facebook. They should be aware that these colleagues may have children at the school or at other schools and they in turn will have other students as friends. Having ex-students as friends poses similar difficulties – check your privacy settings.

When a staff member or student is contacted by the press about posts on their social networking site that relate to a specific school within Ridgeway Education Trust, the Headteacher of that school must be consulted before any response is given.

Consideration towards other staff and students

Social networking sites allow photographs, videos and comments to be shared with thousands of other users. However, it may not be appropriate to share work-related information in this way.

For example, there may be an expectation that photographs taken at a private school event will not appear publicly on the Internet, both from those present and perhaps those not at the event.

Staff and students should be considerate to their colleagues and should not post information when they have been asked not to. They should also remove information about a colleague/peer if that colleague/peer asks them to do so.

Other users could post a photo on their profile in which you are named, so think about any photos you appear in. On Facebook, you can ‘untag’ yourself from a photo. If you do find inappropriate references to you and/or images of you posted by a ‘friend’ online you should contact them and the site to have the material removed.

Under no circumstances should offensive comments be made about Ridgeway Education Trust colleagues on the Internet. This may amount to cyber-bullying and could be deemed a disciplinary offence.

Staff should be aware of their obligations under the Data Protection Act 1988 and not share personal information about staff or students that is stored on school systems with anyone outside the school.

Blogging

When staff use their personal blogs to discuss their Ridgeway Education Trust work, they must ensure that confidential information is not revealed. This might include aspects of school policy or details of internal school discussions. If in doubt about what might be confidential, staff members should consult their line manager. If a blog makes it clear that the author works for Ridgeway Education Trust, it should include a simple and visible disclaimer such as “these are my personal views and not those of Ridgeway Education Trust”.

Staff members who already have a personal blog or website which indicates in any way that they work for a school within Ridgeway Education Trust should discuss any potential conflicts of interest with their line manager.

Staff members who want to start blogging and wish to say that they work for a school within Ridgeway Education Trust should discuss any potential conflicts of interest with their line manager.

Staff members are free to talk about their work at their school in the interest of sharing good practice and promoting the work of the school but should be mindful of the principles stated at the start of this document. If in doubt, staff members should consult their line manager.

Personal Blogs and websites

Blogs or websites which are purely about personal matters and do not identify the blogger as a Ridgeway Education Trust employee, or do not discuss the individual school within Ridgeway Education Trust, will normally fall outside this guidance provided that they do not bring the Trust into disrepute. However, personal blogs and websites should not be used to attack or abuse colleagues or students. Staff members should respect the privacy and the feelings of others. Remember also that if you break the law on a blog (for example by posting something defamatory), you will be personally responsible.

If a staff member thinks something on their blog or website gives rise to concerns about a conflict of interest, and in particular concerns about impartiality or confidentiality, this must be discussed with their line manager. If a staff member is offered payment to produce a blog for a third party this could constitute a conflict of interest and must be discussed with their line manager.

When a staff member is contacted by the press about posts on their blog that relate to the school, the head teacher must be consulted before any response is made.

Hybrid sites

It should always be clear to users whether the site they are interacting with is a school page run by the individual school within Ridgeway Education Trust for that school's purposes or whether this is a personal page run by an individual for their own private purposes.

We should avoid creating or endorsing "hybrid" sites which contain elements of both as this is likely to cause confusion, editorial problems and brand damage. For example, a staff member's personal profile should not have a URL which contains a school brand.

If a department or an individual member of staff would like to set up their own blog they should speak with their line manager in the first instance.

Guidance for Managers

Under this policy, line managers should not adopt an unnecessarily restrictive approach. Line managers should ensure that any special instructions on blogging are reasonable and explained clearly to staff.

Line managers should bear in mind concerns about impartiality, confidentiality, conflicts of interest or commercial sensitivity. In some cases individuals may be

dealing with matters which are so sensitive that rules may have to be set on what they can and cannot talk about on their personal blog.

Disciplinary action

If a member of staff or student is found to be engaging in any form of online activity that is deemed as cyber bullying, bringing the Trust's and its schools' reputations into disrepute and/or uses the Internet in any way to attack or abuse students or colleagues they will face disciplinary action.

Please reference the Disciplinary Procedure for all Employees in Schools, available on each school website's policies page.

For students, the Head of Year will be contacted to discuss the matter with the student(s) directly. Parents/guardians should also be informed of any misconduct. Disciplinary action could lead to exclusion depending on the nature of the misconduct.