Nowra Christian School

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

PREAMBLE

As a communications medium, social media can offer many benefits to the school, school families, employees and other stakeholders. However, without clear guidelines there is also the risk of harm being caused to the school's operation and reputation as well as the school community.

Social media such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and blogging represent a growing form of communication for organisations and the wider community, including staff, students and parents/carers, allowing them to communicate with the wider public more easily than ever before.

However, social media is also an area where rules and boundaries are constantly being tested. All communication in the public arena about the school, its staff and students should support the overall values and purpose of Nowra Christian School (NCS).

NCS expects that all members of the school community will be mindful of the 'fruits of the spirit' as seen in Galatians 5 when interacting with others on social media.

> *'But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.'* **Galatians 5:22-23**

PURPOSE

NCS accepts that the use of social media is commonly used by members of the NCS community to express their views, comments, ideas and criticism on a whole range of issues.

This policy applies to Board members and staff, as well as to volunteers. It also applies to students and parents/carers.

This policy has been developed to protect the school's students, staff, assets and reputation through clear protocols for the use of social media in official and personal capacities. It outlines the actions the school will take should these protocols be violated.

In addition, the policy is in place to set standards for social media use which are consistent with the broader values, purpose and expectations of the school.

Due to the fast-moving nature of social media and the constant development of new social media programs, it is important that this policy and its procedures be reviewed and updated where needed at regular intervals.

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GUIDING PRINCIPLES

When members of the school community use social media, they must recognise:

- online behaviour should at all times reflect NCS values and demonstrate respect for each person and the school

- the need to behave in an ethical manner when using social media (even for personal communication) as those communications can reflect on their role at the school and must be consistent with the school's expectations and standards

- their responsibility to serve as a positive role model for others (be it students/parents/carers or staff)

- social media activities may be visible to current, past or prospective staff, students and parents/carers.

COVERAGE

The policy covers two key aspects of social media use:

a. The official use of social media tools by the school to communicate and interact with the school and wider community about news and events at the school; and

b. The use of social media by staff, students and parents/carers in relation to school matters.

DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this policy, social media refers to all social networking sites, services and tools used for creating, publishing, sharing and discussing information online. It includes, but is not limited to:

- social networking sites: Facebook, Instagram, Tik Tok, MySpace, Google+, Foursquare and LinkedIn

- video and image sharing websites: Content communities such as Flickr, Vimeo and YouTube

- micro-blogging sites: Twitter

- instant Messaging: Skype, SMS, Snapchat

- blogs: including corporate blogs and personal blogs or blogs hosted by traditional media publications

- podcasts: including corporate podcasts and personal podcasts

- forums and discussion boards: e.g. local discussion boards, Whirlpool, Yahoo! Groups or Google Groups

- virtual Game Worlds: e.g. Fortnite

- any other websites that gives users access to simple publishing tools, (together called 'Social Media').

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RELEVANT LEGISLATION

The laws that apply in the 'real world' also apply in cyberspace. While the law has not entirely caught up with technology and there is no one specific piece of legislation that regulates social media sites and the use of social media, it is important to keep in mind that what people do with social media, can have real world legal consequences.

Examples of Acts that may be associated with the use of social media:

- *Fair Work Act 2009*

- *Privacy Act 1988*

- *Telecommunications (Interception and Access) Act 1979*

- *Telecommunications Act 1997*

- *Cybercrime Legislation Amendment Bill 2011*

- *Copyright Act, 1968*

- *Copyright Amendment (Digital Agenda) Act 2000*

- *Copyright Amendment (Moral Rights) Act 2000*

- *Education Act 1990*

Decisions by Fair Work Australia have confirmed that proof of excessive use or the inappropriate use of social media during, or outside of work hours, may constitute a valid reason for termination of employment.

SOCIAL MEDIA RISKS

The following are some of the major risks associated with the use of social media:

- Reputational damage to organisations and people

- Disclosure of confidential information and breach of privacy laws

- Posting of offensive, bullying, harassing and discriminatory material

- Misuse of intellectual property and breach of copyright laws

- Breaching professional standards.

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Grow up into Christ

OFFICIAL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON BEHALF OF NCS

Only staff members authorised by the Principal (or Principal's delegate) may create social media identities, profiles or accounts that use the school's name, logo or brand, or are designed to represent the school in any way.

Staff members authorised to use the school's official social media platforms must:

- maintain the same high standards of conduct and behaviour online as would be expected in a physical work environment

- behave impartially and professionally

- behave with respect and courtesy, and without harassment

- deal appropriately with information, recognising that some information needs to remain confidential

- be sensitive to the diversity of colleagues, peers, students and the community

- take reasonable steps to avoid conflicts of interest or perceptions thereof

- uphold the values of NCS

- protect the integrity and reputation of NCS, its students, parents/carers and staff

- comply with applicable laws and legislation, including copyright, intellectual property, privacy, financial disclosure, defamation and other such applicable laws

- protect the privacy and security of NCS, its employees, students, parents/carers, partners and suppliers

- assist and support the achievement of the school's strategic objectives

- not knowingly provide incorrect, defamatory or misleading information about the school's own work, the work of other organisations, or individuals.

Staff and students posting comments on official school communications should observe the standards of conduct and behaviour above.

NCS reserves the right to delete official posts or comments that are deemed to be defamatory or offensive.

Authorised staff members using social media in an official capacity are given autonomy to represent NCS's views in an ongoing conversation with the public, parents/carers and students. However, there are

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occasions when content must be reviewed by Senior Executive. This includes, but is not limited to, content that is:

- politically sensitive
- associated with a project or activity deemed to be high risk
- a response to an individual or group that is deemed to be high risk
- directly quoting another staff member (e.g., a response attributed to the Principal).

Information published via social media is a public record and a corporate record for recordkeeping purposes.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF STAFF, STUDENTS, PARENTS/CARERS AND CARERS

Staff, students, parents/carers and carers using social media in a personal capacity must take due care to ensure that any comments, opinions, images or contributions made online are their own, as private citizens, and cannot be interpreted as an official statement or position of NCS.

Staff, students and parents/carers are expected to maintain the same high standards of conduct and behaviour online as would be expected in a physical/work environment.

The reputation of NCS is to be safeguarded by all those connected to the school (employees, contractors, parents/carers and students). Criminal behaviour online will be reported to the police.

Senior Executive

Senior Executive are to:

- ensure that appropriate educational programs are developed and implemented for students and, where appropriate, parents/carers to cultivate ethical digital citizenship
- investigate any reports of online bullying or inappropriate postings and to implement sanctions commensurate with the scale of the incident
- ensure that filtering systems are maintained for websites and emails viewed on school computers to protect students
- report all breaches of this policy to the Principal (or delegate)
- ensure this policy is understood by staff/students and parents/carers
- monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of this policy on a regular basis.

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Staff

How staff conduct themselves online is very important. Personal social media posts made by staff should be professional, honest, open, mindful of others, and positive at all times.

Staff should not discuss colleagues, students or the private matters of parents/carers or express an opinion that could negatively impact on their reputation, the reputation of others and/or the school, or organisations associated with the school (including other local schools and churches). They should avoid escalating heated discussions, be respectful to others and only quote factual information.

Should the school's reputation be brought into disrepute, or another member of the school community be defamed by a comment or post staff have made, the school may be forced to take action that could potentially result in the staff members' employment being terminated. Staff could also be the subject of civil lawsuits or criminal charges, depending on the nature and the severity of their posts.

- Staff are responsible for using online media in accordance with criminal law, copyright law, the Privacy Policy, Child Protection Policy and Staff Code of Conduct

- Staff and student online interaction must only occur for the purposes of learning. Staff must not accept students as 'friends' on Facebook or similar social media sites (except when that student was a close contact of the staff member prior to the school relationship. Refer to the 'relationship context' section of this policy for further advice). Staff are advised to use professional discretion and prudence before accepting alumni or parents/carers of current students as friends.

- The use of online learning communities by staff for educational purposes must be in accordance with other relevant school policies and procedures relating to online learning

- Staff, students and parents/carers must behave ethically when interacting online and will be held accountable for their actions inside and outside of school hours where their actions have a negative impact on the well-being of students and staff and the reputation of the school

- Online activities should not interfere with the job performance of any staff member

- Staff members must not post images or information via their personal social media accounts that have been obtained because of the privilege of their position at the school without permission from the Principal (or the Principal's delegate)

- Staff are not permitted to use the school's logo or create school-branded accounts which could be interpreted as representing the school, unless permission has been granted by the Principal (or the Principal's delegate)

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- Staff must regularly review profile and privacy settings of their own personal social media sites to prevent inadvertent disclosure of their personal information to members of the school community. Staff are encouraged to use the highest privacy settings available on all social media sites. At a minimum, staff should have full privacy settings set to 'only friends'

- Staff are required to report to their supervisors instances of current students trying to befriend them through social media sites as a measure of disclosing contact. This step is to protect staff against allegations of grooming of minors

- Staff should consider the impact of any social media content on their own career or that of their colleagues (e.g. 'liking' a questionable page)

- School email addresses are not to be shown on social media sites and confidential information about any member of the school community must not be disclosed online

- Students' privacy when posting online must be respected. Express permission must be obtained from the parents/carers and the school before any postings are made that include faces or images of students. This is usually obtained from parents/carers during enrolment or through Consent 2 Go profile updates.

Students

Students are:

- responsible for using online media in accordance with criminal law, copyright law, ICT, Mobile Devices and BYOD Policies and the Student Code of Conduct

- strongly encouraged not to share their personal information with those who have not earned their trust or who they have not met face-to-face

- to respect the dignity and privacy of other members of the school community and are not to use social media for:
  - posting, viewing or distributing pornography, including sexting
  - online harassment or bullying
  - outing
  - exclusion
  - slander/defamation
  - cyber stalking, or
  - masquerading

- to report any incident involving the points listed above to their classroom teacher or AM Teacher

- consider the impact of any social media content on their own reputation or future careers or that of their peers

- not to use their school email address for social media sites

- not to use the school name or logo to setup social media accounts, pages or groups

- not to use images of other students on their social media without their permission

- not to record personal details on public sites used for educational purposes

- not to share their school username or passwords with anyone

- to comply with copyright regulations. Students are advised to read the copyright agreements of online providers

- not post material that would cause disrepute or embarrassment for staff of NCS, other students or their families

Parents/Carers

All parents/carers are invited to join staff in setting a good example for our students by:

- demonstrating courtesy and respect for staff, other parents/carers and students when comments are placed on social networking sites

- using appropriate language when discussing school

- addressing any issues or concerns regarding school, directly with the Principal or member of staff and not online.

Parents/carers are urged not to set up independent social media pages/groups that use the school's name, logo or brand, or are designed to represent the school in any way. Instead, parents/carers may join and volunteer to moderate official pages/groups such as individual Year Parent Facebook Groups.

Parents/carers are asked to:

- use online communications with other members of the NCS community lawfully and respectfully

- not, under any circumstances, make disrespectful or offensive comments about the school, staff, students, parents/carers or organisations associated with the school (including other local schools and churches)

- not comment on nor forward unsupported information e.g. rumours concerning the school or comment or post material that might otherwise cause damage to the school's or a staff member's reputation or bring it into disrepute

- be mindful that, by posting your comments and having online conversations etc. on social media sites, you are broadcasting to the world. Even with the strictest privacy settings, be aware that comments expressed via social networking pages under the impression of a 'private conversation' may still end up being shared into a more public domain, even with privacy settings on 'maximum'

- never discuss sensitive school matters with other parents/carers using Facebook, blogs and other social media outlets.

- **only** post images of their own child at school events

- gain the express permission of involved parties if posting information or images via your personal social media accounts about/of other students or staff members

When posting, even on the strictest privacy settings, parents should act on the assumption that all postings are in the public domain and understand that publishing defamatory comments about NCS staff is illegal.

Parents/carers are also asked to:

- monitor the online activities of their children when they are not at school

- be familiar with this policy and ensure that their children understand and comply with this policy.

RELATIONSHIP CONTEXT

Given the nature of the NCS community, there will be staff members who have close relationships with other school community members that started before one or both parties joined the school community. Staff members need to reflect on the nature of their social relationship and interactions with these people. If the nature of the relationship has remained fundamentally unchanged since the school-based relationship develped, then some of the guidelines of this policy may not apply. If this is the case, the school still requires all relationships between staff and school community members to give consideration to the following:

- be aware that in all contexts, other school community members will find it difficult to separate the professional and the personal - they will see the staff member, at least in part, in a professional role. For this reason, at all times, the staff member should act appropriately

- remember that staff members hold a unique position of influence and trust that should not be violated or compromised. They are to exercise their responsiblities in ways that recognise there are limits or boundaries to their relationship with students.

Whilst the above principles are specific to staff, there is an expectation that all members of the NCS community also act accordingly where such a close relationship potentially exists.

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BREACH OF POLICY

NCS employees, students and parents/carers who use social media in their own time using their own resources should note that their private comments posted publicly could potentially have repercussions at work/school.

Such instances will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis with consideration to the possible damage to the reputation of NCS.

Unacceptable use of social media may be a breach of enrolment, employment or contractual obligations, misconduct, sexual harassment, discrimination or some other contravention of law.

Parents/carers who breach this policy will be considered to be out of partnership with the school and may be asked to withdraw their child/ren from the school.

Non-compliance with this policy by an **employee** may be grounds for disciplinary action, that could lead to termination of employment, depending on the severity of the breach. Such instances will be investigated in line with fair process.

Non-compliance with this policy by a **student** may be grounds for disciplinary action or expulsion, depending on the severity of the breach. Such instances will be investigated in line with fair process.

For any criminal breach of this policy, the Police will be called to investigate.

CONSEQUENCES

NCS reserves the right to delete or hide any comments on the school's social media sites it deems to be inappropriate, offensive, illegal or damaging to the school's reputation.

If there are serious breaches, non-compliance of or, with this policy, or unacceptable use of social media, the following actions may occur as determined by the Principal (or Principal's delegate):

- Removal of staff from NCS
- Removal of student/s from NCS
- Suspension of volunteer involvement

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RELATED DOCUMENTS

- *Student Code of Conduct Policy*

- *Staff Code of Conduct Policy*

- *NCS Enrolment Conditions*

- *BYOD Policy*

- *BYOD Cyber Safety Policy*

- *Excellent Digital Citizenship Information*

- *Excellent Digital Citizenship Contract*

- *Acceptable communication (online) Policy (Students)*

- *Mobile Phone and Smart Watch Policy*

- *Privacy Policy*

- *Child Protection Policy*

- *Facebook Group Guideline (to be finalised)*