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To: Deputy Directors-General, Chief Directors, Directors, Deputy Directors, Circuit Managers, Heads: Curriculum Coordination and Advice, Heads: IMG Coordination and Advice, and Principals and Chairpersons of governing bodies of all public schools

Brief summary: *This circular introduces the "Guidelines on Social Media and Social Networking in Public Schools, 2017" in the Western Cape.*

Subject: The Guidelines on Social Media and Social Networking in Public Schools, 2017 in the Western Cape

1. The growth in digital technology and the rise of social media platforms over the past few years have revolutionised the way in which people communicate and share information.
2. When used in a school environment countless benefits accrue to learners, however, the blurring of social and professional lines should be avoided, as it can result in embarrassing or otherwise inappropriate revelations.
3. Guidelines have therefore been developed in order to create awareness of the potential benefits and risks associated with social media and social networking and to provide guidance on the use of social media between learners, learners and educators, and between a parent of a learner and an educator at a public school.
4. The attached guidelines cover the following aspects:
 - (a) Use of social media and social networking
 - (b) Social media and education
 - (c) Roles and responsibilities
 - (d) Disadvantages of social media
 - (e) Template for drafting a school policy on social media and social networking

- (f) Safety risks relating to the use of social media and social networking by learners
5. Kindly note that advertisements of a political or sexual nature, or the promoting of the use of liquor, tobacco or any related products on any of the school's social media platforms are not allowed.
 6. Principals are kindly requested to bring the attached guidelines to the attention of members of staff and governing bodies.

SIGNED: L. ELY

ACTING HEAD: EDUCATION

DATE: 2017-03-17



**Western Cape
Government**

Education

Directorate: Policy Coordination

GUIDELINES ON SOCIAL MEDIA AND SOCIAL NETWORKING IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS, 2017

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1. Definitions

In these guidelines, any word or expression to which a meaning has been assigned bears the same meaning assigned to it and, unless the context indicates otherwise:

“**access**” means the right, opportunity or means of funding, or retrieving information;

“**child**” means a person under the age of 18 years;

“**cyberbullying**” refers to wilful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones and other digital devices;

“**social media**” means a collection of interactive online platforms and tools that individuals, groups and organisations use to share content, profiles, opinions, insights, experiences, perspectives and media. It allows for the creation and exchange of user-generated content; and

“**social networking site**” means a web-based service that allows individuals to:

- (a) build a public or semi-public profile;
- (b) share contacts or friends with other users; and
- (c) view their lists of contacts or friends and those made by others within the system; the nature and nomenclature of these contacts or friends may vary from site to site.

2. Legislative framework

Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989

South African Schools Act, 1996 (Act 84 of 1996)

Employment of Educators Act, 1998 (Act 76 of 1998)

Western Cape Provincial School Education Act, 1997 (Act 12 of 1997)

Western Cape Government Social Media Policy, 2014

Electronic Communications Act, 2005 (Act 36 of 2005)

Films and Publications Act, 1996 (Act 65 of 1996)

Protection from Harassment Act, 2011 (Act 17 of 2011)

Criminal Procedure Act, 1977 (Act 51 of 1977)

Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act, 2007 (Act 32 of 2007)

Copyright Act, 1978 (Act 98 of 1978)

Children's Act, 2005 (Act 38 of 2005)

Regulation of Interception of Communications and Provision of Communication-Related Information Act, 2002 (Act 70 of 2002) (RICA)

Guidelines on e-Safety in Schools, Department of Basic Education, 2010

3. Purpose

3.1 These guidelines are designed to:

- (a) create awareness about some of the opportunities presented by social media for learners, educators, parents and schools within the learning environment, including–
 - (i) the potential benefits and risks associated with these tools;
 - (ii) guidance on the use of social media between learners, learners and educators, as well as between a parent of a learner and an educator at a public school; and
- (b) assist public schools to develop their own policies in order to regulate the use of social media and social networking at these schools.

4. Scope

These guidelines apply to all learners and employees at public schools in the Western Cape.

5. Introduction

5.1 The growth in digital technology and the rise of social media platforms over the past few years have revolutionised the way in which people communicate and share information.

6. Use of social media and social networking

6.1 Social media incorporates features such as:

- (a) *participation*, by encouraging contributions and feedback from others;
- (b) *transparency*, by encouraging voting, comments and sharing of information;
- (c) *conversation*, encouraging a two-way conversation;
- (d) *community*, created by people with shared interests; and
- (e) *connectedness*, linking individuals with other people and different resources.

6.2 Employees and learners at public schools must give due consideration to the following when using social media and social networking sites:

- (a) As with all online communication tools, the social media environment has to be managed in such a manner that it does not become all-consuming.
- (b) Cognisance must be taken of copyright law.
- (c) Where sources are used in any way whatsoever, credit must be given to all such sources.

- (d) Modifying any work, comment or posting without the permission of the author may not only affect the reputation of the author, but may affect other parties as well.
- (e) Privacy and circumspection must be responsibly applied, as any communication may be forwarded to other users and/or placed in the public domain.
- (f) The blurring of social and professional lines is to be avoided, as it can result in embarrassing or otherwise inappropriate revelations, for instance when activities such as to invite, to connect or to follow are instigated between educators and learners on social media, educators must be aware that aspects of their profile can be available and visible to other users.
- (g) All users should familiarise themselves with privacy settings and avoid sharing information they may not wish to have in the public domain.
- (h) All users should take care not to share compromising images or inappropriate messages that may damage their reputation later on in life.

7. Social media and education

7.1 When used in a school environment, countless benefits accrue to learners. These include, among others, opportunities for academic and social support, in particular:

- (a) the use of new social and recreational media as sites of learning when learners interact online and accumulate social and technological skills that are necessary to participate in contemporary society;
- (b) diversity in forms of social media literacy as online interactions range from purely friendship-driven to interest-driven and each may benefit learners in terms of socialising and education for participation in future social or work environments; and

- (c) the changing nature of education in which participation in social media presents important new learning opportunities that can be harnessed by educational practices via the new social tools.

8. Roles and responsibilities

8.1 Public schools must:

- (a) draw up and publish a policy on the use of social media;
- (b) inform users that defamatory, derogatory, false or offensive comments made and such information shared on the school's Facebook page or similar platforms will be deleted by its administrator;
- (c) sensitise learners and employees to the appropriate etiquette for online activities;
- (d) specify when and for what purpose the use of social media platforms is acceptable within the school environment;
- (e) ensure that online activities planned by educators only include age-appropriate sites;
- (f) educate learners and employees on critical thinking skills, digital literacy and online safety measures, to enable them to navigate safely through the online world;
- (g) encourage learners and employees to act responsibly and be aware of the consequences associated with the use of social media;
- (h) ensure that learners are aware of the potential negative effects of Internet use;
- (i) teach learners in an age-appropriate manner about the risks and dangers involved in the use of social media, particularly when some of the risks and dangers occur both in the home and school context (i.e. cyberbullying), as referred to, among others in Annexure B; and

- (j) advise learners and employees at a public school of behaviour that may be inconsistent with the Code of Conduct for learners or the Code of Conduct for employees, as well as sanctions that may be imposed in the case of transgressions of these codes of conduct where the transgressor is found guilty of misconduct or serious misconduct in terms of these codes.

8.2 The Safe School Committee

- (a) All public schools may establish a team within the Safe School Committee to manage e-Safety.
- (b) This team may comprise:
 - (i) a member of the school management team;
 - (ii) the network administrator;
 - (iii) an IT educator;
 - (iv) an educator – librarian/counsellor/life skills educator;
 - (v) a representative from the governing body;
 - (vi) a member of the representative council of learners; and
 - (vii) other appropriate specialists, where practicable.
- (c) The main purpose of the team will be to develop, implement and enforce an acceptable social media policy, underpinned by the Code of Conduct for learners and employees at the public school, and to ensure that:
 - (i) all role players at the school are made aware of the content of the policy and consequences likely to flow from non-compliance;
 - (ii) parents are encouraged to take reasonable steps to ensure that learners comply with the policy within and outside school premises; and

- (iii) all stakeholders are informed of the types of incidents which may potentially attract sanctions and possible criminal accountability.

8.3 The employee

(a) When using social media outside of the classroom for educational purposes, such online media must be considered as an extension of the classroom and therefore the following must be kept in mind:

- (i) What is permissible in a classroom is acceptable online and anything that is impermissible in a classroom will also be unacceptable online.
- (ii) Employees should not befriend learners on social media, as indicated in paragraph 6.2, except on those sites which have been designed specifically for professional purposes.
- (iii) Employees should never have online communication on a one-on-one basis with a learner, but always in a group context, for education purposes and for information sharing.

(b) The educator must:

- (i) be aware that online activities may impact on their personal reputation, image and ability to interact with colleagues and learners;
- (ii) be professional and courteous at all times;
- (iii) respect the needs for discretion and confidentiality with regard to personal information, and other sensitive information that may not be appropriate for public discussion;
- (iv) endeavour, within the bounds of reason, to remain neutral, objective and professional on issues presented and discussed on educational platforms or sites intended for educational purposes;

- (v) judiciously remove any material deemed offensive, inappropriate, off-topic, discourteous or otherwise annoying to other users.

8.4 Learners

- (a) When using social media, learners should be cordial, honest and fair.
- (b) Learners should be aware that even though social media may be easy to use, informal, fast and inexpensive, it does not mean that they can disregard the rules that apply.
- (c) Learners should read very carefully and ensure that they understand the context of the online conversation before they join in, especially in order to:
 - (i) determine who the potential audience is;
 - (ii) establish whether a good reason exists to place a comment or to respond;
 - (iii) write factual information that is not misleading or untrue; and
 - (iv) acknowledge if a mistake has been made through their comments or responses, and respond to it immediately.
- (d) Learners should only share worthwhile, factual and non-confidential information or perspectives on social media sites.
- (e) Learners must learn to accept responsibility for their own actions and involvement on social media, and particularly that they are responsible for:
 - (i) obtaining permission for the use of third-party, school or employee intellectual property rights, including copyright, patents, trademarks and videos; and
 - (ii) understanding that it is against the law to harm someone's reputation or dignity, and that it is regarded as harassment to place, share or "like" something on social media that may cause

harm (whether mental, psychological, or physical) to another person.

- (f) Learners should be guided to:
 - (i) understand the need to select the most suitable communication tools for their educational and social experiences; and
 - (ii) take responsibility and report inappropriate behaviour, or acts that may negatively affect the school and their fellow learners.

- (g) Learners should avoid becoming involved in risky or unlawful acts or behaviour, especially the following:
 - (i) involvement in identity theft;
 - (ii) participation in hate or cult websites;
 - (iii) buying and selling of stolen goods;
 - (iv) divulging personal information or disclosing confidential financial information regarding bank and credit cards by using unsecured bogus sites; and
 - (v) publishing compromising information which may harm another individual's reputation.

9. Disadvantages of social media

- 9.1 Learners should be made aware that electronic messages posted on social media are permanent transferable records of communication and can affect an individual's reputation, or that of the school or that of the Western Cape Education Department.

- 9.2 They should be made aware that there cannot be any expectation of privacy with respect to postings made on online social media sites, and that each individual user is responsible and may be held accountable for his or her words and actions.

- 9.3 Learners should keep the global scope of social media in mind, and when they participate on social media sites they must qualify or limit their posts

appropriately to ensure that, even to a limited audience, their posts are not misunderstood, misinterpreted or illegal.

10. Review of the guidelines

These guidelines must be reviewed when the need arises or in the case of changed circumstances, including changes to legislation and/or regulations and budgetary circumstances.

TEMPLATE FOR DRAFTING A SCHOOL POLICY ON SOCIAL MEDIA AND SOCIAL NETWORKING

[Name of School
Address and telephone number
School logo]

POLICY ON SOCIAL MEDIA AND SOCIAL NETWORKING, 2017

1. Definitions

The following words and terms bear the same meaning assigned to them in the Guidelines for Social Media and Social Networking:

“access” means the right, opportunity or means of funding, or retrieving information;

“child” means a person under the age of 18 years;

“cyberbullying” means wilful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones and other digital devices;

“social media” means a collection of interactive online platforms and tools that individuals, groups and organisations use to share content, profiles, opinions, insights, experiences, perspectives and media. It allows for the creation and exchange of user-generated content; and

“social networking site” means a web-based service that allows individuals to:

- (a) build a public or semi-public profile;
- (b) share contacts or friends with other users; and
- (c) view their lists of contacts or friends and those made by others within the system; the nature and nomenclature of these contacts or friends may vary from site to site.

2. Legal framework

This policy is, among others, underpinned by:

Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989

South African Schools Act, 1996 (Act 84 of 1996)

Employment of Educators Act, 1998 (Act 76 of 1998)

Western Cape Provincial School Education Act, 1997 (Act 12 of 1997)

Western Cape Government Social Media Policy, 2014

Electronic Communications Act, 2005 (Act 36 of 2005)

Films and Publications Act, 1996 (Act 65 of 1996)

Protection from Harassment Act, 2011 (Act 17 of 2011)

Criminal Procedure Act, 1977 (Act 51 of 1977)
Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act, 2007 (Act 32 of 2007)
Copyright Act, 1978 (Act 98 of 1978)
Children's Act, 2005 (Act 38 of 2005)
Regulation of Interception of Communications and Provision of Communication-Related Information Act, 2002 (Act 70 of 2002)
Guidelines on e-Safety in Schools, Department of Basic Education, 2010

3. Purpose

This policy seeks to:

- (a) Regulate the use of social media and social networking at [\[name of the school\]](#).
- (b) Offer learners the opportunities that multimedia learning can provide in a responsible and respectful manner in order to enrich the teaching and learning environment in our school.
- (c) Outline the responsibilities and behaviour expected of employees, learners and their parents, as users of social media and social networking, in particular, that:
 - (i) all members of [\[name of the school\]](#) community and representatives of the school should take responsibility for the content written, recorded, displayed, posted or communicated online;
 - (ii) they should exercise good judgment and common sense at all times when contemplating any of the listed activities in subparagraph (i);
 - (iii) participation on social media and social networking sites may result in the violation of school rules and the learners' Code of Conduct, or be in contravention of existing laws; and
 - (iv) the use or participation in these sites should not negatively affect the name or impact on the reputation of the school.

4. Scope

This policy applies to all employees, learners and their parents at [\[name of the school\]](#).

5. Social media and social networking

Social media and social networking are used to:

- (a) participate in online communication in order to share an interest and gain or share knowledge;
- (b) share music, art videos, opinions, collaborate on work or discussions and learn from one another;
- (c) socialise by keeping in touch with existing friends and finding new ones, and to channel the promotion of a cause or product;

- (d) allow users to link up with each other quickly and effectively, especially in a professional environment;
- (e) further professional or personal goals through users communicating their opinions, values and experiences, or by creating impressive online CVs; and
- (f) assist in lifelong learning and create communities of practice.

6. Aspects for consideration in our school environment

Employees, learners and their parents at [name of the school] must give due consideration to the following when using social media and social networking sites:

- (a) As with all online communication tools, the social media environment has to be managed so that it does not become all consuming.
- (b) Cognisance must be taken of copyright law when sharing these media and that modifying any work, comment or posting without permission of the author can affect the reputation of the author and other parties. Permission should be obtained at all times.
- (c) Privacy and circumspection apply as any communication forwarded to others and/or placed in the public domain must give credit to the source.
- (d) Social media networks are often visible to people from the user's professional as well as personal life. This blurring of social and professional lines can result in embarrassing or otherwise inappropriate revelations, for instance when educators and learners, invite or connect on social media, they must be aware that aspects of their profile are visible to other learners and employees.
- (e) Users should familiarise themselves with privacy settings and avoid sharing information they may not wish to be in the public domain.
- (f) Users should avoid or take care not to share compromising images or inappropriate messages that may damage their reputation later on in life.

7. Responsibilities with regard to social media and social networking

7.1 The school

The school must draw up and formally put in place a policy on the use of social media in order to:

- (a) sensitise learners and employees to the appropriate etiquette for each online environment; educate learners on critical thinking skills and digital literacy to enable them to navigate safely through the online world;
- (b) guide learners to understand the need to select the most suitable communication tools for their educational and social experiences;
- (c) ensure that learners are aware of the potential negative effects of Internet use;

- (d) teach learners in an age-appropriate manner about the risks and dangers involved in the use of social media, particularly when some of the risks and dangers occur both in the home and school context (i.e. cyberbullying);
- (e) encourage learners to act responsibly and be aware of the consequences associated with the use of social media;
- (f) specify when and for what purpose the use of social media platforms are acceptable;
- (g) ensure that online activities planned by educators only include age-appropriate sites;
- (h) guide learners to take responsibility and report inappropriate behaviour, or acts that may negatively affect the school and their fellow learners;
- (i) advise learners and employees of behaviour that may be inconsistent with the Code of Conduct for learners and sanctions that may be imposed if found guilty of misconduct or serious misconduct in terms of the code and of transgressions of applicable legislation in the case of employees;
- (j) outline a procedure for incidents which may have a potential for criminal accountability;
- (k) accommodate incidents with child protection dimensions;
- (l) inform learners and employees about the policy and ensure that the policy is made visible throughout the school; and
- (m) insert an addendum for signature by each parent, educator and learner.

7.2 The Safe School Committee

- (a) A team within the Safe School Committee of [\[name of the school\]](#) must manage e-Safety.
- (b) The team may comprise:
 - [\[\(i\) a member of the school management team;](#)
 - [\(ii\) the network administrator;](#)
 - [\(iii\) an IT educator;](#)
 - [\(iv\) an educator – librarian/counsellor/life skills educator;](#)
 - [\(v\) a representative from the governing body;](#)
 - [\(vi\) a member of the representative council of learners; and](#)
 - [\(vii\) other appropriate specialists, where practicable.\]](#)
- (c) The main responsibility of the team will be to develop, implement and enforce an acceptable social media policy, underpinned by the Code of Conduct for learners and employees at [\[name of school\]](#), and to ensure that:
 - (i) all role players at [\[name of school\]](#) are made aware of the content, the policy and consequences likely to flow from non-compliance;

- (ii) parents are encouraged to take reasonable steps to ensure that learners comply with the policy within and outside school premises; and
- (iii) all stakeholders are informed of the types of incidents which may potentially attract sanctions and possible criminal accountability.

7.3 Responsibility of a learner

Learners must be taught to:

- (a) keep in mind the global scope of social media and qualify or limit their posts appropriately;
- (b) be cordial, honest, fair, thorough and transparent when using social media;
- (c) remember that although the use of social media may be easy, informal, fast and inexpensive, these electronic messages are permanent, transferable records that can affect the reputation of the school;
- (d) obtain permission for the use of third-party or employee intellectual property rights, including copyright, patents, trademarks and videos;
- (e) know that it is against the law to:
 - (i) become involved in identity theft;
 - (ii) participate in hate or cult websites;
 - (iii) buy or sell stolen goods on websites;
 - (iv) divulge personal information or disclose confidential financial information regarding bank and credit cards by using unsecured bogus sites; and
 - (v) publish compromising information which may harm another individual's reputation or dignity; it is also regarded as harassment to do something that they know could cause harm to another person, whether mental, psychological, or physical harm.

7.4 Responsibility of the employee

- (a) The employee must never have online communication on a one-on-one basis with a learner, but always in a group context, for education purposes and for information sharing.
- (b) The employee must never invite or follow learners on social media, except on those sites which have been designed specifically for professional purposes in a group setting.

7.5 Responsibility of the educator

The educator must:

- (a) guide learners to understand that what is permissible in a classroom, is acceptable online; and anything that is impermissible in a classroom, is also unacceptable online;

- (b) be aware that online activities may impact on their personal reputation, image and ability to interact with colleagues and learners;
- (c) be professional and courteous when interacting with others online;
- (d) respect the needs for discretion and confidentiality with regard to personal information, and other sensitive information that may not be appropriate for public discussion;
- (e) endeavour, within the bounds of reason, to remain neutral, objective and professional on issues presented and discussed by educational platforms or sites intended for educational purposes; and
- (f) judiciously remove any material deemed offensive, inappropriate, off-topic, discourteous or otherwise annoying to other users.

8. Non-compliance

Non-compliance by learners and employees must be dealt with through the school's Code of Conduct for learners, the Employment of Educators Act, 1998 (Act 76 of 1998) and the Public Service Act, 1994 (Proclamation 103 of 1994).

9. Implementation of the policy

Indicate [who, what, when and how,] and include [communication with learners and parents].

10. Implementation date

[.....]

.....
Chairperson: Governing Body

.....
Principal

.....
Secretary of the Governing Body

SAFETY RISKS RELATING TO THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND SOCIAL NETWORKING BY LEARNERS, 2017

1. Introduction

1.1 The rapid development of electronic access, social networking sites and widespread access to mobile telephony has provided powerful avenues for sharing digital information and content in South Africa.

1.2 However, these digital mediums have also created an online arena for risks.

1.3 While there are countless benefits to the use of social technology, including:

- (a) rewarding social connections;
- (b) creating opportunities for academic and social support; and
- (c) identity exploration and cross-cultural interactions,

social media has the potential to expose learners to high-risk content and individuals they may not otherwise have had contact with.

2. Risks associated with social media and social networking

The often uncensored and unmonitored nature of the cyber environment can expose learners to a number of dangers, some of which are briefly defined below.

2.1 Cyberbullying

- (a) The traditional notion of face-to-face bullying has expanded into the digital realm where offline bullying is extended to acquaintances and strangers online.

- (b) Even though bullying is a phenomenon that existed well before the creation of mobile phones and the Internet, the two mediums have magnified the problem by creating a new avenue through which bullying can take place.
- (c) When perpetrated *via* telephone mediums or online, cyberbullying is eased by the apparent anonymity and distance from the victim.
- (d) This has become a safety risk in South Africa among boys and girls who are victims of online stalking, harassment and cyberbullying, with resulting emotional stress; mostly perpetrated by voice calls, text messages and instant messaging.

2.2 Violence

The term “violence” must be interpreted to include the impact of, and the need to address non-physical and/or non-intentional forms of harm such as, among others, neglect and psychological maltreatment and in particular, mental violence. This includes psychological bullying and hazing by adults or other children; including *via* information and communication technologies such as cell phones and the Internet (also known as cyberbullying).

2.3 Sexting

- (a) Sexting is the act of sending nude or semi-naked photos or videos, and sexually suggestive messages by mobile phone texting or instant messaging.
- (b) It is considered a punishable crime under South African law as a form of communication to children under the age of 16 years.

2.4 Sexually explicit and child abuse images and videos

- (a) Access to and the use of social media presents opportunities for children to be exposed to disturbing, harmful and age-inappropriate content online.
- (b) However, there have been recent attempts by government to protect children from harmful online content through cell phone pornography legislation which makes it illegal for Internet and cell phone service providers to distribute pornography, or permit it to be distributed, so as to ensure protection for children and women.

2.5 Talking to and meeting with strangers

- (a) The digital world presents an opportunity for individuals to exchange ideas and content without meeting in person.
- (b) Information sharing and chatting online can often prompt individuals to meet in person.
- (c) This practice has had incredible repercussions for children who choose to meet with online friends face-to-face.
- (d) This allows for certain online risks to emerge, such as learners who may be granted access to digital platforms by falsifying their age online, and adults who may falsify their information and age to pose as teenagers and in doing so establish harmful online relationships with unsuspecting children.

2.6 Plagiarism and personal responsibility

- (a) Young people who download and swap music files, “cut and paste” homework assignments from other individuals’ work, or purchase whole assignments from online “cheating sites”, ignore copyright law that applies to the Internet and contribute to crimes such as the pirating of music, images, videos or software in an illegal and dishonest manner.

- (b) Documented permission is required for the use of third-party or intellectual property rights belonging to another person, including copyright, patents, trademarks, photos or videos, and other intangible property.

- (c) It is essential that a user obtains permission before photos or videos of other users are posted on the Internet.