



RAND PARK HIGH SCHOOL SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY: LEARNERS

1. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

Rand Park High School (**the School**) recognises that social media is a valuable tool for both communication and education purposes. We want all our learners to benefit from the opportunities it offers. However, if not used responsibly, social media poses certain risks.

The School respects the rights of all learners to freedom of expression but, at the same time, has an obligation to protect its staff, parents, learners, its image and its confidential information from any potential risks.

With this in mind, this Policy regulates your participation on social media by providing guidelines as to what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable use of these platforms. The purpose of this Policy is to ensure that your use of social media does not compromise the reputation of the School and its stakeholders.

2. SCOPE

This policy applies to all learners at the School and to social media used in both a personal capacity as well as in relation to or association with the School.

3. DEFINITIONS

“School” refers to Rand Park High School

“Social media” refers to any facility that enables conversations over the internet including blogs, forums, platforms such as Facebook, Google, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, Tik Tok, WhatsApp, YouTube, Gaming platforms (including games on X-box and PlayStation etc.) and any other forms of communication now and in the future classified or generally regarded as social media.

“Adult” refers to a parent, teacher, intern and/or guardian.

“Online” means on the Internet, on social media applications.

4. IMPORTANT SOCIAL MEDIA PRINCIPLES

The following are important principles that learners must keep in mind when using social media:

- 4.1 **Most learners at the School can be linked to the School, even if they do not list the School as their own school anywhere online.** For example, a learner's friends on social media could be mainly learners of the School or a learner could be tagged in photos of a School event. **This means that this social media policy and other applicable policies, apply 24 hours a day, 7 days a week (including school holidays), as all individuals associated with the School serve as representatives of the School at all times.**
- 4.2 **“Digital content is dangerous content”** – as soon as content exists in a digital format (i.e. as a photo, or typed note), it is at risk of being distributed and seen by many other people. Even if content is not posted online, phones can be stolen, images are backed up to the Cloud (which may get hacked) and screenshots can be taken. As a result of this, all digital content is vulnerable. Content that is sent to someone or posted is especially vulnerable as it is out of the creator's control.
- 4.3 **Content on social media is “published” content** – as soon as one other person has seen your content on social media (and WhatsApp is a form of social media), in the eyes of the law, that content is regarded as “published” content. This means that you are as responsible for it as the journalist who puts the headline on the front page of the newspaper.
- 4.4 **It is a permanent record** - everything you put online is there to stay. Even if the content is deleted shortly after it is posted online, screenshots mean that your content can be distributed to people who you would not want to receive it.
- 4.5 **You are never anonymous online** - even if you use social media under a fake account it is easy to trace the identity and location of an account holder using an IP address.
- 4.6 **It is not private** - there really is no such thing as “private” on social media. Be very careful with posting any personal information that you would not want the public to see. Be particularly mindful of sharing information such as full dates of birth and current locations.
- 4.7 **Chain of publication** - remember that even if you did not create the content, in terms of South African law, **you could be held responsible for any content that you retweet, share, like or are tagged in on social media, once you become aware of it and if you have the ability to dissociate yourself from that content, for example, by untagging yourself. Any comments appearing on your posts are also your responsibility.** If you are in a WhatsApp Group, you could potentially also be responsible for content on that group posted by other people (not just the content you posted yourself) if you do not dissociate yourself from that content by either leaving the group or voicing your objection.
- 4.8 **Don't complain about the School on social media** – if you are unhappy at any time about any matter related to the School, it is your responsibility to raise your concerns **through the appropriate channels.** Turning to social media to air your concerns around the School is not appropriate and is in breach of this policy.
- 4.9 **If you post something bad about someone or about the School but don't mention the name, it doesn't mean you will not get in trouble for that post** – If you are saying

something bad about someone or about the School, you do not have to mention a person or organisation by name for the purposes of the offence of defamation or crimen injuria (infringement of dignity). If it is possible to “guess” who you are referring to, you are as guilty/liable as if you had mentioned the name.

4.10 Context and tone – Be aware of the tone of your online communication and remember that what means one thing to you, could have a totally different meaning to someone else. Context is often unclear online. Emoticons can sometimes clarify context and tone but can sometimes cause offence or confusion, so use them wisely.

4.11 You have the right to freedom of expression but you cannot infringe on other people’s rights unfairly – for example, someone else’s right to a good reputation, dignity or privacy. Before you post something on social media, think about the impact that it could have on the School, its parents, your fellow learners and the general public. If in doubt, either give it some time and reconsider it at a later stage, or simply don’t post it.

5. APPROPRIATE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

To ensure you use social media well, you are expected to adhere to the following practises of good digital citizenship:

- 5.1** You must abide by all of the terms and conditions for the social media platforms and facilities that you are using.
- 5.2** Do not give or post your name, date of birth, address, telephone number, or the name, address or telephone number of the School or your parents/guardians, to anyone online.
- 5.3** Be sure to deactivate location tags for all social media applications so that your location is not made available to anyone.
- 5.4** Do not take or send embarrassing photos of your family, friends or classmates to others, unless you have their consent.
- 5.5** Do not say unkind or untrue things about people or use inappropriate language online.
- 5.6** If you have posted a photo of someone else or content which concerns someone else, and that person asks you to remove it, you need to do so immediately.
- 5.7** Do not distribute chain mail and/or fake news. Use available resources to find out if something is true or not.
- 5.8** Do not message, phone, “add” or meet anyone that you have not met face-to-face in real life unless an adult says it is okay.
- 5.9** Often, people online pretend to be someone they are not. Even if you have an overlap in friends, or your friends introduce you to someone online, always be careful in establishing that they are who they say they are.

5.10 Immediately tell an adult if:

- 5.10.1 You receive suspicious phone calls or messages from people you don't know;
 - 5.10.2 You receive harassing, threatening, disturbing, offensive, illegal or inappropriate content;
 - 5.10.3 You receive any content or if you are part of any conversation (even if you started it) which makes you feel uncomfortable, unsafe, nervous or unsettled.
 - 5.10.4 If someone asks you to send them any pornographic material (like sexy or naked pictures). In such an instance **you must always refuse to send the photographs**, as this could be a criminal offence.
 - 5.10.5 If someone sends you any inappropriate or pornographic material. In such an instance you must not show it or send it to your friends, as this could be a criminal offence.
 - 5.10.6 If you see people doing things or saying things to other people online that you know they are not supposed to do or say.
- 5.11 Never get into arguments or fights online. If someone tries to start an argument or fight with you, do not answer him or her. Tell an adult immediately.
- 5.12 Do not bully, shame, harass anyone or send threatening or hurtful messages to others online.
- 5.13 Never pretend to be someone else online or create a fake account.
- 5.14 Never give your passwords to anyone but your parents/guardian;
- 5.15 Never use somebody else's phone or log into somebody else's account unless you have their permission.
- 5.16 Do not use something that you found online and pretend that it is yours.
- 5.17 Do not download, buy or order anything online without asking an adult first.
- 5.18 Do not open any suspicious links or attachments.
- 5.19 You may not use the School logo for any social media/digital content unless you have **written permission** from the Principal or a member of the School's Senior Executive to do so.
- 5.20 You may not create accounts that appear to belong to the School, without written permission from the Principal or a member of the School's Senior Executive.
- 5.21 You may not take photographs of the School's learners and staff members without their consent. Phones/mobile devices may only be used in the classroom with the teacher's consent.
- 5.22 You may not publish photographs of the School's learners and staff members on social media channels without their consent.

6. GUIDELINES FOR SCHOOL WHATSAPP GROUPS

The School recognises that many learners are part of WhatsApp groups which have been established by the School and or School learners for the purpose of providing a communication channel to discuss School-related matters (the “**Official School WhatsApp groups**”) and also WhatsApp groups comprised of learners of the School for social purposes (collectively, “the **Group/s**”). The following guidelines are to be followed when engaging in any communication on the Groups.

- 6.1 School business only** – All content on the **Official School WhatsApp groups** must relate to School-related issues only. There must be no unrelated memes, jokes or social issues discussed on the Official School WhatsApp Groups.
- 6.2 Deliberately excluding or removing learners from the Groups** – The Groups may not be used to deliberately exclude or alienate anyone that you may not like, either for fun or to hurt them. Continuing to participate in Groups that do this can make you accomplice to that behaviour.
- 6.3 Distance yourself from inappropriate content** – If you are in a Group where other people are doing or saying bad things, you should take a stand against the inappropriate content by either leaving the group, or letting others know that what they are doing is not right.
- 6.4 Only reply if necessary** – If a message does not require a response, please do not respond. The volume of messages on these groups can be overwhelming. You do not need to acknowledge receipt unless specifically asked to do so.
- 6.5 Long conversations, especially if only involving a few members of the Group, are to be taken off the Group.**
- 6.6 Respect staff boundaries** – Our staff are willing to help but may not be contacted on the Groups between 7pm and 7am unless they have given you consent to do so.

When you are unsure whether you should post content online, or have it on your phone, remember the following:

- **The Billboard Test:** If you wouldn't want the photo/video/messages to be published on a huge billboard on the side of a highway with your name and the name of the School, don't post it online and don't let it exist in digital format in your phone/device or somebody else's phone/device (as these can get stolen/hacked).
- **The 6 P's:** If you wouldn't want any of the following people to see your photos/videos or messages, do post them on social media or let them exist in your phone/device:
 - *The Police*
 - *Your Parents*
 - *A Paedophile*
 - *A Prospective university admissions officer/ employer*
 - *Your Principal*
 - *A Phisher (someone who is interested in getting your personal information)*

7. RESPONSIBILITIES & DISCIPLINARY ACTION

- 7.1** If you become aware of a discussion thread, posting, comment, statement or misrepresentation that needs to be brought to the attention of the School and/or has the potential to impact on the reputation of an individual or the School as a whole, please notify your Grade Tutor as soon as possible. If you cannot contact a Grade Tutor, you may also report it to an educator who you trust, the Dean of the Grade or to the Principal. This notification should, where possible, be accompanied by a screenshot of (and link to) the relevant content.
- 7.2** Learners may not respond on behalf of the School (publicly or privately) to the person who is responsible for posting offensive or inappropriate content.
- 7.3** If a learner's digital or social media activity is found to have breached this policy and/or is considered to be offensive or inappropriate, s/he may be subject to the School's disciplinary procedures as specified in Rand Park High School's Learner Code of Conduct. If a criminal offence is considered to have been committed, further action may be taken to assist with the prosecution of the offender/s.

8. POLICY AMENDMENTS

The School Governing Body may from time to time amend, supplement, modify or alter this policy.

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